

King Breeder 181

Chapter 181 The Letter Says It All

Ethan...

This was a name that carved into my bones. Someone I'd never forget, regardless whether I was in this world or not.

I took a deep breath and considered what she was asking me. I'd had a chance to say goodbye to my son. I would tell Vicky and Georgia how much I loved them and appreciated their friendship.

What, if anything, did I wish to say to Ethan?

I managed to shake my head a bit. "No," I said,

Georgia's eyes were wide open, as if she was heartbroken for her brother. However, seeing me fading, she didn't press.

I whispered, "I've already told him everything I needed to say

"You have?" she asked, kneeling down next to me now.

"Yes, I told her. Tell him... tell him if he's not sure what to think... how to interpret my feelings for him.. tell him to read the letter again."

The letter?' Vicky asked, clarifying She knew which one I meant.

The last time I thought I'd never see Ethan again, I'd told him everything. At the time, he'd thought I was already dead. Now that I was dying... there was nothing I'd want to say differently.

Closing my eyes, I finally admitted to myself that till this day, I still loved him. In fact, I had always loved him.

I came to understand that all of the fear, the anger, and the disappointment were because of the love I had for him.

Therefore, every lie he told, regardless whether he meant it or not, hurt. Every wrong he had done to me, regardless of how small it was, I couldn't bear.

However, now I was at the end of my life, all I could see closing my eyes was his gentle blue eyes on me. I could almost smell his scent I longed for his arms around me

Yes. The letter says it all."

**Ethon's POV

"Alpha, our defense had been pushed back."

"Alpha, the enemy's reinforcements have arrived, Led by King Kal, and they are approaching."

"Alpha, it's urgent! They are starting to surround us!"

A large map was stretched out across the table in front of us, and as the different messengers came in to report the information about troop movements out on the battlefield, I placed markers wherever the enemy troops were located. "How many are there?" I asked one of the messengers, a tall, slender man with a pale face who looked terrified. No wonder he wasn't a warrior.

"On the right side, they have moved up at least twelve thousand warriors, sir," he said, swallowing hard.

I nodded. "And the left?"

"Our reports show that there are at least ten thousand on the left, sir." He blinked a few times, like he was trying to get

the courage up to tell me the total number. "And... another ten thousand in the center."

"King Kal is out there. And King James's troops are moving here as well."

I looked up to see that the voice was commander Landon's. He would know what Kal looked like

He would also know why it was important to note the man's arrival.

Slowly, I nodded in understanding

"How long?" I asked the messengers.

"Sir?" the tall one who had been reporting asked, clearly not understanding.

I didn't have time to explain myself. "How long, dammit!" I shouted at him

Three days, I think," he stammered. "Maybe_ five? They are coming fast, but the forest is dense there. It depends on how long it takes them to get through the underbrush.'

I did some quick calculations, including the numbers I already knew to be positioned in the three different sectors, and the number of troops amassed against us was staggering

We are outnumbered at least five to one'i mumbled. I looked at the maps again, continuing to check the math in my head, but I was sure I was right.

And they were coming toward us quickly. At this rate, with these numbers, they could easily surround us, cut the palace off from the outside world, and lay siege to our city until we all starved to death or surrendered

We would have to think of something major that we could do to stop them. Otherwise, all was lost.

All of sudden, my heart started to pound in fear.ro

I couldn't think, I couldn't feel, and I couldn't breathe. It was as if part of me was dying.

'Alpha,' Talon looked at me worriedly. He asked through mindlink, 'You all right?

Talon, I need a moment. Take over the meeting.'

I stabilized myself and announced, "Commander Landon, my Beta will continue going through the detailed reports with everyone. I need some quiet time to sort through my thoughts."

With that, I turned and walked out of the room.

Without any reason, I just knew I needed to see Rosalie, right then. Something was wrong but I was afraid to think of the possibility

As i was rushing through the palace, I told myself that she would be fine. She said she'd be fine a couple of days ago She said she just needed to rest and asked me to help her to lead her people while she was recovering.

However, deep in my soul, a terrifying feeling called out, urging me to move faster and faster. With every step that I took, the twisting motion within me became worse. No matter how much I tried to be positive, I felt like everything was hopeless

As I stepped through the threshold of her room, I saw both Georgia and Vicky standing around her bed, tears filling their eyes. My arrival shocked them.

I tried to get my head around the situation. My gaze fell upon Rosalie, who laid very still on the bed she was resting in.

For a moment, my heart stopped.

The room was quiet, so I lowered my voice. I didn't want to starlle Rosalle... she still needed her rest to recover.

Yes, she must be just resting, I told myself.

However, I found myself calling her softly. "Rosalie."

She didn't move. Why didn't she move?

She looked a little pale, but she was still beautiful. I forced myself to look away from her stunning white hair.my instinct told me not to focus on that.

Georgia placed one hand on my shoulder. "Ethan..."

"Shhh!" I hushed her. "She's resting. Can't you see?"

My feet carried me closer to the bed, then I sat on its edge and stared at her

Georgia's face was wet from all the crying, and Vicky was sobbing. I scolded them in low voice. What the f*ck are you doing?! She's fine! Can't you see the movement of her chest?

The fury filled me. Why did they act like this? Rosalie wasn't dying. She couldn't be. right?!

No one said anything in the room. I held Rosalie's hand in mine, but as the temperature of her hands began to fade, my heart started to freeze.

My wolf was whimpering. I looked up, hoping to find someone who could tell me this wasn't real, but they were just crying and sobbing

No.

Why did fate treat me like this?

How could I accept that she was dying?

She didn't even give me a chance to apologize to her for everything I did when I imprisoned her.

I was so ashamed of myself.

I'd thought that it might take me months, years, or even decades to make it up to her, and it was all good because I'd thought I had lots of time to do so now that she'd saved me from my rogue fate

If she didn't want me to be her mate, I'd stay away as if I didn't exist in her life. I'd watch her, protect her, and love her from far away

Whatever she needed, I'd give her.

From the moment I had set eyes on her, I'd wanted her, but through my own foolishness, I did nothing but cause her pain and push her away.

A black void of darkness filled my heart, and as I looked upon her resting body. I wanted to die with her.

My mate – the love of my life – laid dying.

Flashes of moments we spent together running through my mind.

From the moment I first laid eyes on her in the hospital bed, to when I saw her pregnant looking up at the moonlight. Everything led to this moment. I had watched her become the goddess and queen she was always destined to be.

There has to be something we can do...' I murmured with new emotion in my voice

My hand reached up to brush a strand of white hair from her beautiful, delicate face

"Ethan-Georgia sobbed, trying to hold back her tears

"No! I shouted, shaking my head in disbelief 'It can't end this way

I refused to let it end this way!

"Alpha Ethan.. Cerina's voice rang from outside of the room. She walked in slowly, and couldn't hide the sadness on her

face.

She said calmly. There isn't anything we can do.'

'Why the f*ck didn't anyone say anything?! You knew... didn't you? You're the priestess; you'd seen Rosalie's mother die the same way!' I roared.

Cerina's eyes were filled with grief. 'Yes, I knew about the queen's power and its toll all along, and I'd reminded Her Majesty... under the circumstances, however, Her Majesty chose to sacrifice herself to save everyone!'

"Why the f*ck you didn't stop her?!" I yelled. However, I knew I was unreasonable. If there was anyone I should be angry at, it was myself.

Had I not turned rogue, we wouldn't have gone to that temple; had I been strong enough to fight off Madalynn and Behar, Rosalie wouldn't need to die.

'I wish I could die for her... It should be me who should die in the first place...' I said as I looked toward Cerina. 'In all of the history of the White Queen, there was never an exception?'

Cerina's sad eyes moved to Rosalie, and she hesitated.

'Wait,' Georgia jumped up. 'I remember in one of the books read when I first got here, it mentioned one of the queens who reigned many years after her hair turned white...what happened to her?'

Cerina frowned and shook her head. That was just a legend from long ago...'

'Any clue helps! Georgia urged. 'Cerina, tell us about that queen, please. Maybe we can figure something out!'

She still shook her head. It seemed that she was concerned about something.

'Cerina! Please! Even if it's only the slightest hope, we'll try!' |

Cerina pointed out, 'Queen Rosalie had specifically given us orders to let her go in peace. This was her choice and her fate. We should respect her wishes...'

'What's wrong with you?! Just f*cking tell me!!' I roared, but my dead heartbeat had seemed to pick up again. Hope rose inside me.

She stared at me for a moment and sighed. 'Okay, I'll tell you. Just so you know, even if it's true, it won't help in Your Majesty's case.'

She took a deep breath and finally said, 'Our pack was said to be descended from the Moon Goddess herself, and thus our leader had the ability to borrow the power from the Goddess, as you all have witnessed.'

I nodded.

'However, the Goddess herself is just. Such power should never belong to the mortal world, and borrowing it comes with a price. Our queen would have to repay the Goddess with her life as a debt of gratitude to allow us to use her power. In return, the Moon Goddess would grant our queen a place in her eternal heaven. Unless

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We all held our breath, waiting for the slightest chance to save the one whose loss would weigh so heavily in our hearts.

Cerina looked up at me. 'Unless her true fated mate is willing to repay the Goddess on the queen's behalf.'

I froze.

'What... Did you say?'

My heart was about to jump out of my chest.

She didn't answer my question. Instead, she continued her explanation. "However, we all know Queen Rosalie doesn't have a mate," she said, "and even if she does, knowing her, she would never want her mate

to--"

"So her mate can save her life?" I asked, cutting her off mid-sentence. I needed confirmation. I tried to stop my voice from trembling so that others wouldn't sense my emotions,

Cerina's mouth parted slightly as she stuttered over her words, "I don't know that for sure..."

I'd do anything for her... but if her mate could save her... if I was that mate who could save her what would I need to do?

"How?"

A confused gaze fell upon her face as she pondered why I was questioning her.

"Cerina, if... I mean, if we were able to find her mate, and he is willing to do this for her, what would he need to do?"

She shook her head again. "I don't know. It may be up to her true mate to figure out..."

"Her true mate?"

This time, Seraphine answered me. "Only the fated mate who completes the full mate bond can be recognized as the true mate by the Moon Goddess."

Looking down at Rosalie, I couldn't bear the thought of her no longer walking this earth.

She had fought hard over all the time that I had known her to find her proper place in life, and every time she made headway, something pulled her back and stopped her from being able to be free.

She had just found her people. She had just started to live her life with freedom and love. She had just begun to experience that, and I wouldn't let that change.

Her people needed her, and our son needed her. I would not allow her to die!

I brushed over her face and sat there in silence.

"Alpha Ethan," Seraphine said, "I knew that this is hard for you. Her Majesty told me some of her past with you."

I looked toward the older woman, I'd seen her with Rosalie ever since the islands, and it seemed that Rosalie relied on and trusted her. I said, "Thank you for looking after her all along."

She sighed, "You have always been the person who is so special in her life. She might not tell you so, but I know you are one of the most important people in her life. Given the chance again, she would make the exact same choices."

My throat was tight.

"She was so happy that you are the father of her baby," she concluded.

Vicky and Georgia started to cry again. To them, there was no hope because no one knew that Rosalie was my mate!

But to me...

I'd try anything, even if the chances were nearly impossible. As long as there was hope, no matter how little, I'd try.

"How much time does she have?" I asked.

Cerina looked away as if she was not willing to face the reality either, but she answered, "At most, a week."

I pushed myself up, nodded to them and walked out of the room.

I mindlinked Talon. 'Talon, get everyone back to the war room!

I had no time to waste.

I had to hurry. I'd promised Rosalie I'd take care of her people and win the war. I couldn't let her down again.

"I'll return to you soon, Rosalie," I said to myself. "Wait for me!"

I headed out to where the others were waiting. I found them congregating nearby, their arms folded, their voices low.

When I walked into the war room, most military leaders had gathered there already, discussing the situation at the front line.

Looking at Talon, I saw the worry in his eyes. He was slowly stroking his chin, thinking deeply about the situation, as he always did, no matter what predicament we found ourselves in.

Talon shook his head. 'There has to be something that we can do here. It's just... escaping me. It's like it's trapped in my head, and I can't get it out.'

I could tell he was frustrated. I understood the feeling. Even though we were greatly outnumbered, I wasn't ready to give up.

After all, I had promised Rosalie that I would take care of her people. I couldn't leave her in a situation where she would be called upon to invoke the power of the Moon Goddess ever again.

Doing so would most certainly kill her the next time she had to do it since she would not have a mate to save her again...

I needed updates from all of the other leaders so I could assess the state of the situation at that moment.

Nothing much had changed except that we were nearly surrounded, and the enemy troops were getting closer to us by the moment.

As the other leaders reported their information, and we made changes to the map, I continued to think about what Talon had said. Something about his words had the wheels in my mind working.

“We can’t slow them,” one of the leaders was saying, “and they’ll be here soon.”

“Wait!” I exclaimed. “That’s it!”

Every eye in the room was fixed on me, every eyebrow arched. “What is it?” Talon finally asked, whispering as if he was afraid he might interrupt my train of thought.

The words Talon had spoken earlier went together with what this man had said. “We need to slow them.” I began, gesturing at the map. “We can use the forest to our advantage, but we’ll have to operate close to the palace walls so that they can’t see what we are doing!” I was so excited about the possibility of my plan working, I wasn’t quite connecting my thoughts.

“What are we doing?” Commander Landon asked me, looking at General Vandough, who also had a puzzled look on his face.

With a brush of my hand, I moved all of our markers that indicated the positions of the enemy soldiers out of the way and gestured at a low spot in the ground between the first marker and the palace.

“This is where we focus,” I told them. “See this ridge? When you’re coming over the higher ground out of the forest, you can’t see the ground below you unless you’re really concentrating. We know that they won’t be. They’ll have their heads up as they are running toward us.”

I could tell that they were still confused, so I continued. “We will build a trench all along this line. Deep at least eight feet-and about five feet across. When they come over the ridge, they’ll fall into the pit-and they won’t be able to get out.”

“Why won’t they be able to get out?” General Vandough asked.

“Because... we’ll feel it with oil, tar, whatever nasty, sticky stuff we can find so that they won’t be able to simply climb out,” I explained to them.

Then I looked him in the eye. “Then we burn them!” My voice was ice cold.

“Won’t they see the hole?” General Vandough asked.

“We will cover it with mesh fabric and then put debris from the forest on top of it,” I explained. “With all of the new construction projects I’ve seen near the palace, I’m certain you must have some sort of equipment that we can use to dig the hole before they get too close to see or hear it?”

My question was answered with nods all around.

“And... you have a textile factory in town, don’t you? And a fuel processing plant?”

More nods greeted me.

“So... We should have all of the resources we need to make this plan work. Now, it’s just a matter of execution.” I made eye contact with every person in the room, and every single one of them gave me a nod of understanding.

“All right then,” I said. “Richard, Paul, I’m putting you in charge of digging the hole. You know where to put it?”

"Yes, Alpha," they both said.

I

"Very good. Commander Landon, can you get the oil for the hole?" "Of course, Alpha," the Commander told me.

"General Vandough," I called.

Before I gave him his assignment, he volunteered, "I'll take care of the coverage."

"Great," I said with a sharp nod.

"We also need to make them think that our people are abandoning the palace," I told them. "We need to make a pretty big show of it Samuel, can you handle that?"

The former guard grinned. "You bet, Alpha." He whistled in excitement, "And you know I'm good at it!"

I gave him a tight-lipped smile.

Thad to make sure that Rosalie didn't fall into Madalynn or Behar's hands. Who knew what kinds of torture they might have in store for her? James wanted her for her blood, which would also mean a short life full of torment. And if she used the Moon Goddess's power again... all was lost.

No, my plan had to work. It just had to.

"I only have one question." A female general drew everyone's attention.

I gestured for her to go ahead.

"How do we know how close they will get to the palace before they put us under siege?" she asked.

"They might stop short of that line since it is so close to the palace."

I stared at her for a moment. "They will come," I told her firmly.

"How do you know?" she questioned.

I narrowed my eyes. "Because I will make them."

That was all I was willing to say.

"All right then. We don't have a lot of time, so let's get to it. Talon, you stay."

I dismissed them to do their appointed tasks. I had my own work to do, and I needed Talon with me.

"I need you to oversee all of this," I told my Beta, seeing that my sister was walking behind us. "Make sure everything gets done, all right, Talon?"

"Yes, you know that I will." He was looking at me with a perplexed expression on his face, but I didn't elaborate. I just kept walking.

I finished listing off all of the thoughts I had regarding the war effort with Talon. However, Georgia followed me out of the war room.

"Ethan? What's going on? You are asking Talon to oversee this. Won't you be there with us to fight the

war?"

"Of course I will." I didn't even blink when I told that lie. "But it's always best for everyone to be on the same page."

I knew it was a little rushed, but Rosalie's clock was ticking, so I didn't have much time. I had one week to lay the groundwork so that when Rosalie was back, she could take over and lead us to victory.

Thad faith in her.

Georgia was still suspicious. "Bullsh*t! Be honest with me."

My sister had an unbelievably accurate instinct. I didn't want to make the situation more complicated, so I sighed, "I needed to take care of some things on my own. I'll let you know when the time is right. Trust me, okay?"

She stared at me, and finally nodded. "What can I do to help?" she asked.

I looked at Georgia for a moment, wishing I could tell her how strong I thought she was, how proud I was to be her brother.

But I knew that if I told her then, that she'd just ask me to shut the f*ck up. That thought made me chuckle.

"Take care of Rowan while I'm away."

"What?" Georgia asked, her face crinkled with concern. "Yes, I mean, yes I will take care of him of course. But you're making me nervous."

I had no time to elaborate to my sister, so rather than commenting on her statement, I said, "Georgia, could you get Soren for me?"

I didn't know where he was, but Georgia could use the mindlink to speak to Soren since he was her brother, too.

Puzzled, she nodded. I knew she was wondering why I didn't just call for him myself, but I didn't feel like getting into all of that. Instead, I made my way into one of the rooms on the side of the palace that had a decent view of the activities out along the tree line of the forest.

I stood there, watching people begin to carry out my orders, praying that this would work.

It just had to "If you want to speak to me, brother, you don't need a messenger to get me."

Soren's voice had me sucking in air and letting it out slowly. I thought I'd be angry when I saw him, but at this moment, all I felt was bitterness.

Fortunately and unfortunately, I knew he would take care of Rosalie for me.

Turning to look at him, I said, "You claim to care a lot about Rosalie. Is that right?"

My brother's heavy brows dipped over his eyes.

I didn't wait for his answer. Instead I asked him again, "Are you willing to do anything you can to make up for the times you failed her in the past?"

"Of course. But I don't know what that has to do with you, Ethan," he sneered.

Taking a deep breath, I held it for a moment before I said, "I need your help."

Chapter 183 Soren's Betrayal

**Madalynn's POV

"Behar, it's late. Why don't we go to bed?" My mate was checking the map at the desk. I wrapped my arms around his neck from behind.

He moved my arms away a bit harshly. "Not now."

His tone wasn't as sweet as a couple days ago. I clenched my fists. It was all Rosalie's fault! That bitch...

"We almost had them," Behar's gaze landed at a spot on the map where we had trapped Rosalie and Ethan a couple of days ago.

I gritted my teeth. "That f*cking b*tch!"

Behar narrowed his eyes and glanced at me. "Your plan failed, and father isn't happy about it."

I was growing tired of hearing him complain about the failure of our previous attack, chasing Rosalie out of the temple.

In fairness, it was just as much his fault as it was mine that it didn't work.

How the f*ck was I supposed to know that Rosalie was going to become a ginormous she-wolf and push us all out of the way?.

If he would've taken care of Ethan before Rosalie ever shifted, maybe we would've gotten through.

However, I bit my tongue. Even though Behar was my mate, I knew better than to irritate him, so || brought up the positive news. "We have reinforcements now," I reminded him.

We were making some progress closing in on their city, and I could almost taste the blood that was sure to fill my mouth the moment I reached our enemy's line.

I couldn't wait to rip into the warm flesh of a rival soldier, to tear at the muscle with my fangs, and feel the life force leaving their broken bodies....

"Yeah, but we lost some of our best men," he said, turning to look at me with clear displeasure. Why couldn't he just let go of such a trivial loss?

I remembered three nights ago when our screaming match about the lost battle had turned into rough sex with lots of spanking and whipping. It was so f*cking good that the tent had come down around us.

However, although that night ended well, I didn't need another reminder from my mate that he held me accountable for what had happened.

"It's just a matter of time before we bring them down," I tried to reason with him. "We have a lot more wolves than they do, and we practically have them surrounded."

"I can't wait to get in there and rip that motherf*cker's head off!" Behar growled and motioned with his massive arms as if he was unscrewing Ethan's head and tossing it from his body.

I was glad that he redirected his anger toward our enemy, but I had to remind him, "We need to be patient. You know that."

I touched him on the arm tentatively. Seeing no rejection from him, I continued, "We have to give it time. Ethan won't be able to resist coming out to confront us, especially when he sees his lovely Rosalie starving to death or hears his child crying in the middle of night because they are out of food reserves."

His head rocked back and forth and I knew I had lightened his mood. I leaned over to his ear and whispered, "Trust me."

Behar looked down at my hand. He grunted, an animalistic sound that made my core tighten up.

He grabbed my wrist suddenly and threw me on the bed. His body crushed down and I could feel his desire. I was already wet.

"Excuse me," a voice from outside said. "The two of you have a visitor, sir, miss."

My forehead crinkled as I wasn't pleased to be interrupted.

"Who the h*ll is here to see us now?" Behar asked, clearly as confused and irritated as I was. "Come in."

The messenger entered our tent, and a familiar form stepped from behind him.

My eyes bulged from my head. I was staring at a face that was so much like Ethan's, but it wasn't the man I had been meant to marry.

Timmediately knew who he was. I'd heard about him. It was his half-brother.

And Behar's cousin.

I couldn't figure out what in the world he was doing here. Did he not value his life at all?

“Soren?” Behar folded his arms across his massive chest and looked the smaller man up and down. ‘What the f*ck are you doing here?’”

Soren looked at the ground for a moment and let out a sigh, as if to say that he was expecting as much from Behar.

“You son of b*tch!” Behar roared. “You really have the guts to come to me! I’ll chop you to pieces for Father!”

Soren was confident. ‘You won’t.’”

en was

“Are you challenging me?”

He shrugged. “Nope. It’s just that I only work with winners – or at least potential winners. I have no interest in wasting time with soon-to-be losers.”

It was a very clever flattery, and Behar obviously took it. He said, “I’m shocked you’re not still hiding behind your b*tch girlfriend’s walls!”

Soren narrowed his eyes, but he didn’t say anything. He had to know that fighting with Behar in the midst of our troops would be akin to committing suicide.

Behar scoffed. “Why is that? Did your b*tch decide she didn’t want you anymore? Did she choose your brother over you?”

Thad to bite back a laugh. Did Soren really think that Rosalie was his girlfriend?

I knew Behar was being facetious, but I couldn’t help but giggle because there had to be some truth to the statement. To think that the brother Ethan hated was after his woman was highly amusing to me.

With Behar’s biting words, Soren’s shoulders went back, and he lifted his head. “I’m back in my rightful place, Behar. Back with King Kal. I have decided not to give up my position so easily.”

“Your position? Ha, ha, ha!” Behar burst into laughter. “You really think quite highly of yourself!”

Soren shrugged again. “I guess I was wrong about you wanting to win then. Well then, so long.”

Behar studied him for a moment, then he smirked. “Why the h*ll would we want you back?”

“Because... I can help you put an end to this war once and for all. With King Kal... and you... as the vic

tors." Soren folded his arms now, too, looking fully confident in the words that he was saying.

My mate wasn't buying it, though. A rich chuckle escaped his throat, and I couldn't help but put my hand on him. I wanted to feel his smooth, rippling muscles beneath my palms.

Shaking his head, Behar said, "We don't f*cking need you, little son of b*tch." He took a few steps closer to Soren, letting his height tower over the smaller man.

A crooked smile pulled up the side of Soren's mouth, and he didn't back down. "Then... why haven't you won the war already?"

Another growl emitted from Behar's lips. "Because I'm patient," he explained, though I had evidence to the contrary. "I am not a fool who rushes in without thinking first."

Soren was shaking his head. "No, I don't think so." He took a step forward, too, and they were almost eye to eye, though Soren was slightly shorter. "I think you're afraid... cousin."

"Afraid?" Behar's eyes enlarged in offense. "What the f*ck are you talking about? I'm not afraid of anything, little b*tch."

"Yes, yes you are," Soren said. "You're afraid of Ethan Gray."

"F*ck you!" Behar growled, pushing Soren in the chest with his hand. To my surprise, Soren blocked Behar's push and kept his stance.

"If you weren't afraid of him, you would've attacked by now," Soren argued.

I could see the anger in Behar's face. He was about to lose his cool and pound Soren into the ground.

I couldn't wait to watch.

"Look," Soren smirked, "I'm not here to argue with you tonight. Let's face the reality. You might be able to win by staying here and fighting countless battles in the next two months. But what if I tell you I can help you win the war sooner?"

Watching Behar's expression shift again, I could tell he was intrigued. He arched his brow.

"I have a proposal to help you win the war sooner. You wouldn't need to wait, or even need to fight. You will be the returning victor, worthy of claiming your throne as soon as your father steps down."

Behar chuckled. "Yeah, you just go ahead to make that sh*t up."

"I can. And I will," Soren replied.

“Bullsh*t,” Behar said, shaking his head.

“Oh well,” Soren turned around to leave the tent. “Too bad. I guess I’ll just go talk to Uncle by myself.”

Soren took a few steps, but my mate called him back before he could leave the tent.

“Hold on now, Soren Black,” Behar said. “Don’t you go infiltrating my lines without my permission.”

I knew that Behar wasn’t worried about Soren walking through our lines. He would be happy to see Soren slaughtered.

But if Soren went to King Kal and his proposal worked, Soren would get the credit with the king, who was the one person Behar had always tried to impress.

“If you so much as step into my father’s field of vision, he will squash you like the little roach you are,” Behar continued

“Your elderly, one-armed father is going to squish me?” Soren asked, laughing, but stopping in his tracks.

Behar was obviously offended as he growled at Soren, “Do not insult the king!”

Soren held up both hands. Clearly, he knew that Behar meant that King Kal’s guards would carry out the king’s order, though the king himself was surprisingly agile for someone of his age who had recently gone through an unexpected, painful amputation.

“Okay, okay. I’m just saying.” Soren’s smile was sinister. “No matter how great a king is, he will still grow old—”

Behar was able to lose it again until Soren finished his sentence, “—and it’s time for the young and powerful one to shine, cousin.”

Behar stared at Soren for a moment, he didn’t comment on Soren’s bold statement, but I knew he took in Soren’s words. I could even sense my mate’s excitement.

I looped my arm around Behar’s and I asked the question for him, ‘What’s your proposal, then?’

Soren waggled his finger left and right. “I need your words first.”

I knew I couldn’t make any promise on behalf of Behar, so I looked at him. He took a moment to consider. Finally, he said, “If you help me win this war, I’ll persuade Father to grant you two territories on the East Continent at your choice.”

“Honey, that’s so generous of you!” I leaned my head on my mate’s arm.

A

Soren's eyes narrowed and he looked at me in an unfriendly way. "Sh*t the f*ck up. That's none of your business!"

I was furious, and I could have struck that son of b*tch down right there, but Behar held me in place. He gave me a warning look.

"You lucky b*stard!" I murmured

!

Soren ignored me and rubbed his chin as he was thinking through the offer. Then he pulled out a smile. "Deal!"

"Now, what's your proposal?" Behar warned him.

Soren laughed. "It's time for me to show you my hand then, Behar."

"Show me?" My mate stepped closer to him and tipped his head down, sizing his cousin up.

"Yes, show you... Actions say so much more than words, right?" Soren said, leaning up so that they were nearly the same height again.

"Oh?" Behar asked, snarling at him. "'Soren, you'd better not disappoint me."

A wicked grin spread across Soren's face as he said, "You won't when you see him."

Chapter 184 Poor Ethan

**Soren's POV

Why the hell did I agree to do this?

Thad no idea how I'd gotten myself mixed up in a situation where my jack*ss brother was likely to get himself killed.

As I led Madalynn and Behar to a remote cave near their current position, I found it ironic that after all of these years of wanting to kill Ethan myself, I was finally leading two people who wanted him dead more than I ever had right to him-and yet, my job here was to make sure he stayed alive!

But I had agreed to this plan not because of Ethan, but because of Rosalie. He swore it would help her, so that's what I was doing....

As we approached the cave, Thomas stepped out.

And... behind him, sitting on the ground near the mouth of the cave, with his hands bound, was my older brother.

His eyes narrowed as he stared at Madalynn, Behar, and the few guards they'd brought along. Behar of course wanted to make sure I didn't try anything "funny."

When Behar and Madalynn saw Ethan, they both started laughing. Behar's laughter was a deep, rich rumble that vibrated the rocks above the cave and sent a few smaller ones down on Ethan's head.

Madalynn's cackle reminded me of a witch. It sounded like she was about to drop Ethan into her cauldron and boil him alive.

"Well, well, well, if it isn't the Rogue King, all wrapped up with a nice little bow!" Madalynn and Behar stopped a few feet short of Ethan, their hands on their hips as they tried to determine what they were going to do to him first.

Ethan ignored them and screamed at me, "How can you do this, you pathetic *sshole!" The hate in his voice was evident. "I know you despise me, but think of Rosalie! Think of your nephew!"

My eyes widened.

Ha, I never knew my half-brother had the potential to be a good actor. I so wanted to yell back at him that he was the one who came up with this crazy idea. *sshole!

But I knew I needed to cooperate.

Laughing, I shook my head and folded my arms across my chest. "You know I only do what's in my own best interest, brother. The Winter Forest pack has nothing to offer me. That pack is doomed to failure, and it's clear Rosalie is nothing but a tramp who will sleep with anyone just to give her power."

Those words were hard to choke out, but I had to show Madalynn and Behar I was on their side. I continued, "If going back to King Kal will pay off for me, then why would I be anywhere else?"

Ethan spit at me. "You f*cking b*stard!"

Let another menacing laugh slip from my lips. "Have at him, guys," I told the other two. "Just try not to kill him, okay? He's worth more alive than dead-for the moment."

"I make no promises," Behar said as he stepped forward.

Thomas and I exchanged a glance. We had to make sure that Ethan didn't die- that crazy punk owed

me big!!

I wondered how Talon, Vicky, and Georgia dealt with him for so long?!

Behar pulled back his fist and swung it around, hitting Ethan so hard in the side of his head, my brother's eye nearly popped out of its socket.

I stood back and watched them coldly. Behar may be strong, but he was nothing compared to Ethan. A few punches like this would not kill my brother, I knew that for sure.

Behar stepped back and laughed as Ethan looked like he might fall over from the very first blow, but he didn't. Instead, he only said, "Easy to beat the shit out of someone who is tied up."

That only made Behar angrier. He laid into Ethan then, pummeling him with his fists, hitting him again and again until Madalynn literally shoved him aside so she could get in her own blows.

“Have you ever thought about a day like this, you f*cking b*stard?” she screamed.

Not only did she punch Ethan several times, but she also kicked him and used her claw-like finger nails to scratch his skin.

As I stood by and watched my brother take the punishment he had asked for, I was a bit confused on how I felt about the situation.

My jack*ss brother was being beaten up-something I wanted to do myself for years-1 should be glad to see it. After all, he killed my father.”

I guessed I felt some satisfaction like I got some revenge, especially since this was something Ethan brought upon himself. Yet, for some reason, I didn’t feel as happy as I thought I would.

I took a few long breaths and pressed down my displeasure towards Behar and Madalynn. They seemed to have forgotten my warning not to kill him.

When Ethan got to the point where he had lost consciousness, I couldn’t even recognize his face. It was so covered with blood and swollen.

I approached my cousin. “All right, that’s enough,” I said.

Behar and Madalynn ignored me and landed a few more punches.

“Seriously!” I inserted myself between them. “Listen, no one wants Ethan Gray dead more than I do, but he is worth more alive than dead.”

They didn’t seem to want to stop yet. I explained, “If you can put him on display before your attacking forces, it will fire up your soldiers and demoralize Winter Forest pack. They will fold in front of you, like a stack of dominos falling over in a row!”

I did my best to sound convincing, but the stupid couple didn’t seem to have finished lashing out their resentment, so I added, “Do you guys really want to face the vengeance of the entire Drogomor pack?”

That did it. Trying to reason with them would never work. Only threatening did.

They stopped their pummeling. I spent a moment glancing down at my brother's bruised and battered body. I didn't particularly feel bad for him as this was what he knew he was getting into,

"How will we put him on display?" Behar asked, shaking out his hand. Tiny cuts adorned his knuckles from all the punching,

"Well, I suppose you could use the same cage I used to wheel him over here," I said with a shrug.

At my words, Thomas rushed off to get the cage that we'd procured before we started our plan.

A cage I had the key to...

"Okay, that works," Madalynn said with a nod.

Behar gestured for his guards to step forward, and they grabbed hold of Ethan and hauled him up.

He wasn't capable of supporting himself at the moment, so they had to drag him.

It was clear by their methods that they were happy to finally get a chance to get a few jabs in as they took him to the cage Thomas was standing next to.

The two burly men threw Ethan inside. He landed hard on the wooden floor of the cage, and he didn't get up, even after they closed the barred door and Thomas locked the paddle lock, giving Madalynn a spare key

She grinned and said, "I can't wait to get him out later so we can play again!"

I stepped in once more. "Hey hey, it's really late right now. I don't know what you have in mind, but I'd

prefer a good night of sleep before the big show tomorrow.

I emphasized the word tomorrow intentionally. As expected, that wasn't something Behar wanted to hear.

"Soren," Behar retorted immediately, "Don't you tell me what to do! My troops listen to me, and I'm the one to decide when to attack. Understand?"

Good, the ideal timing would be three days later.

I shrugged, "How about the day after tomorrow?" I knew whatever I said, Behar wouldn't do.

"Our troops are probably tired from running so far. We could attack later. That will let us enjoy our new toy a bit longer." Madalynn grinned at him wickedly.

Behar grinned back, and then he gave the signal for Ethan to be rolled back to their camp.

When they arrived, Madalynn shouted, "Honey, where is that barrel of salt we confiscated the other day?"

Salt?

My eyes narrowed as I realized what they had in mind. I looked at Ethan to see if he had heard, but he did not. He was still barely conscious.

"Boil some water!" Madalynn shouted to someone else.

They ripped the cage open and hauled Ethan out, ripping his shirt off of him and tying him to a tree. Behar disappeared into a tent and came back with a long black whip with several leather straps at the end.

I didn't know why he had that... but I knew what he was going to do with it.

Ethan was barely able to stand. He was leaning against the tree, supported by the ropes.

At the first blow of the whip, however, Ethan jerked back to life. A sliver of scarlet appeared on his back where the skin was removed.

“This’s for my father’s arm! You f*cking b*stard!”

Behar wasn’t satisfied with just one blow, of course. No, he kept the whip flying, hitting Ethan again and again until my older brother’s back was a road map of red. His skin hung in shreds, and the blood flowed all the way to the ground, coating his pants in dark liquid.

“Let me have a go!” Madalynn insisted. Her strikes were not quite as strong, but every time she hit him, Ethan’s muscles contracted, as they had when Behar had been the one whipping him.

“Wait a moment!” I wanted to punch that stupid Madalynn b*tch. “He’s going to bleed to death!”

“What? Are you worried about him?” Behar asked in the middle of a chuckle.

Nel

Did we really have to go over this again?

“I’m worried about my investment. Had I known how shortsighted you are, I would’ve gone to the king directly.”

Behar growled and grabbed the whip from Madalynn’s hands. “All right. That’s enough. We can’t kill him.”

Madalynn’s eyebrows knit together. “But-“.

“But we can still cause him pain. Where’s the salt?”

A roar went up from the group watching as Behar and Madalynn took both hands and reached into the barrel, pulling out hands full of salt and rubbing it into Ethan's wounds.

For the first time, Ethan roared in pain. However, as soon as he was awake, he bit his lips and stopped making any more sounds.

I watched Ethan and didn't know what to think. I wanted to tell myself that jack*ss deserved this, because he willingly put himself in this position.

He claimed it was for Rosalie, but knowing Rosalie, she would never ever want anyone to suffer for her. So this whole plan was just Ethan's self-fulfillment of his own heroism.

I told myself there was no need to feel bad for him. This was his own plan, however, I found myself wanting to step away from the scene.

Only, I didn't. Because I needed to keep an eye on him and make sure he didn't die.

This torture with the salt went on well past nightfall. Then came the water torture.

First, it was the boiling water. When they threw it at him, the remaining skin on Ethan's back blistered immediately as he screamed again. Then, they doused him with cold water.

Before he was untied from the tree, another round of steaming hot water was thrown at the front of him. Even the skin on his face blistered.

After that, Madalynn and Behar began to kiss passionately, as if they had forgotten anyone was watching at all. I stood with my mouth open, unsure as to how anyone could be sexually aroused by such inhumane treatment of another person.

I knew they would torture him, but I had no idea they would do all of this.

As Behar began to grope his mate, I went over to Ethan and began to untie him.

“What are you doing?” one of the brutes standing nearby asked.

“Putting him away,” I said, glaring at him.

He didn’t bother to argue with me, probably remembering who I was by birth, even if my sentiments had recently changed.

However, before I put Ethan back in the cage, one of the b*stards slathered some more salt on his back. I cursed under my breaths, “F*cking morons!”

I thought about doing something to get it off before I put him inside, but I couldn’t without making them question my loyalty.

Behar and Madalynn finally went inside of their tent, and Thomas and I found a place to sleep for the night. In the back of my mind, I wondered what would happen to Ethan in the few days...

What if he didn’t make it through the torture? Then what would happen to his plan?

I gritted my teeth again before I forced myself to close my eyes.

That b*stard better not die!

Chapter 185 Soren’s Sacrifice

For the next two days, Madalynn and Behar pulled Ethan out several times, every few hours, beat, whipped, or otherwise tortured him, and then put him back in the cage and went off to have their fun.

In that time, Ethan didn’t get a single bite to eat or a drop of water to drink, though his flesh was burned time and time again with the boiling water, and he was doused with freezing water as well, but never allowed to drink it.

By the end of the second night, most of Behar and Madalynn’s wolves were practically passed out with happiness-and maybe some liquor I had snuck in.

Once I felt the coast was clear, I went over to the cage with a small cup of water. "Hey, here," I said. "Drink this."

I managed to pour a few drops of water into his mouth before he gestured for me to go away.

"Jack*ss, you're going to die," I whispered through my gritted teeth. I was somewhat angry at him.

If he wanted to do something for Rosalie, he should stay by her bed in case she woke up. At least that way he could spend some time with her knowing how much he weighed in her heart!

Instead, he was here.

No one asked him to do all of this! He came up with this insane plan and made it seem that he was doing some huge sacrifice for everyone.

But who the heck really needed him as a sacrifice?

Was he really that arrogant to think he was the only one capable of winning the war? Or did he have to act like a hero so that everyone could admire him?

I just didn't get it.

Nodding his head slightly and smearing a streak of blood across the bottom of the cage, he said, "No, I'm not going to die. I've got more important things to do than dying."

"Listen, I can get you out of here right now...." However, even I knew that wouldn't be a good idea.

"No... just... get them to attack as soon as possible, okay?" Ethan asked me.

I nodded. It was time. By now, Talon could've built a trench the size of the ocean....

I realized, though, in order to get Behar to attack the next day, I needed to make him think it was his idea,

Early the next morning, Behar and Madalynn came out of their tent, still kissing and groping one another.

Now was the time to make my move. "Behar," I said, "do what you want, but I just wanted to let you know that Ethan won't last long."

He scowled at me. "Go away, little b*tch."

"All right." | shrugged and walked away.

A moment later, Behar's voice rang behind me. "Get back here! Where are you going?"

I grunted. "I was just about to tell King Kal what's going on. No offense, you have fun playing with Ethan's dead body all you want now, but I'll need to figure something else out that could actually help win the war."

His mate growled at me, but I ignored her. Behar was staring at me, either contemplating my words or completely ignoring me.

So... I tried some reverse psychology on him. "Also, if your troops aren't ready to face the Winter Forest pack and need some more time, maybe you should rest up and try it some time later."

"Tomorrow?" Behar burst out laughing, "That's why you are a little bitch! My warriors will be ready in just under an hour and we can get this all over with!"

"Really?" | subtly challenged him.

"Little b*tch, you just watch!"

I almost rolled my eyes.

Behar now finally remembered that he needed to attack before word got to Kal. He knew if he really killed Ethan like this, Kal would not be pleased with him wasting such a good pawn.

Timing was working well for us, so I didn't argue.

"Get ready! We will attack in an hour!" Behar sent an order to his men and glared at me. "Are you planning on moving in with us?"

"Hey, I brought you this prize! I'm going to stay with him to see the results of my hard work!"

He and his mate both shook their heads at me but gave a signal for the guards to move the cage out of the camp.

Within an hour, Behar's troops were gathered, and Madalynn and Behar had shifted into their wolf forms. They put Ethan's cage at the front of the line.

As their forces moved out, I stayed in my human form, as did Thomas, so that we could better manage the situation with Ethan.

Wolves do not have thumbs, after all.

With Ethan captured, Behar and Madalynn rushed all of their troops in with boosted confidence.

Howls, growls, grunts, and barks erupted all around as thousands and thousands of wolves, from rogues

to professional soldiers, took off running at full speed towards the palace.

On the other side, however, Winter Forest pack's wolves were standing there, motionless, their eyes wide.

Ethan's cage was pushed ahead of the running wolves, and I did my best to keep up in my human form. When the cage reached the top of the ridge, I yelled to Behar's men, "Leave him there, on the high ground, for all to see!"

They exchanged glances but did as I suggested, keeping the cage poised on the top of the ridge just on the outside of the forest,

Thank the Moon Goddess they didn't keep pushing the cage or else, Ethan might've fallen into his own trap.

I braced myself, waiting, watching.

Behar's vanguard moved around the left of Commander Landon's line, skirting over the trap we had set as they poured in from the east. Landon's wolves ran out to meet them, none of them hesitating to follow the orders given by their leader.

The clash was loud as growls and howls met in an explosion of fury. Fur flew, blood spurted, and howls turned to yelps as the two sides tangled, the line swaying one way and then the other.

No one seemed to be getting the upperhand, and Behar had not sent the rest of his troops in yet. Many of them were still running over the ground behind me because they had always hesitated to get too close to the palace.

Behar gave a howl, gaining the attention of all of his wolves. The howl was so loud, so angry, even most of Rosalie's troops turned to look.

"Ethan Gray is here! There's no way for you to win!" Behar roared in his human form.

When they saw Ethan in the cage, the morale shifted, and within seconds, Behar's warriors were surging ahead while ours stood there, shocked in disbelief.

Landon and Vandough's wolves finally snapped out of their shock at the capture of Ethan and started to fight again, but this time, they were no longer an equal match to Behar's.

"Tell your queen, if she wants Ethan back, ask her to come out to kneel and beg my mate!"

With Ethan taken hostage, Rosalie's troops were visibly demoralized. From where I was standing, it was easy to see and hear the reaction from Madalynn and Behar as they howled and cackled with delight as their warriors claimed the upperhand.

As Winter Forest pack obviously started to lose their ground, another howl from Behar's side went up and the wolves that had yet to crest the hill came flying over the ridge where I was standing next to Ethan in the cage.

If that many wolves were to come into contact with our meager forces in front of the palace, we would be destroyed in a matter of seconds.

And then, I saw the signal given by Talon and Commander Landon on the other side of the line, a sign that would let our men on either side of the trench know it was time to move the weights holding the tarp in place that covered the trap.

The first half of the attacking wolves stepped on top of the fabric covering the gaping hole in the land and immediately disappeared out of my line of sight. I ran to the edge of the ridge to watch.

Below me, I saw thousands of wolves buried up to their necks in black goo. Their eyes were wide with panic as they fought to get out of the trap, but there was no way that they could. Even those who could manage to shift into their human forms couldn't reach the sides to pull their ways out. Howls turned to screams as the warriors began to sink below the surface.

The second half of the wave suffered the same fate. The wolves running downhill were going so fast, they had no way of pulling up, even when they saw what lay ahead of them. They fell in on top of their comrades, pushing them further into the oily mess.

I couldn't help but smile, but I didn't have time to enjoy it.

My job wasn't over yet.

Quickly, I ran over to the cage where Ethan was now standing, holding onto the bars. He was still a mess, but at least his shifter genes had allowed him to pull himself up off of the ground.

Two of the wolves were still there, guarding the cage.

I pulled a knife from my waistband.

One of the wolves came at me. I swung my knife at him, slicing into his neck, but his front claws caught me, tearing the flesh of my shoulder. I yelled in agony, but adrenaline kept me going, and I managed to stab the wolf in the neck.

Behind me, I heard Behar's shriek of outrage as he realized what we had done. "Ethan Gray!" he shouted. "I will kill you!"

I needed to hurry.

Behar was headed our direction in his naked human form, but he would shift momentarily, no doubt, and rip Ethan and me both to shreds.

Thomas shifted and took down the wolf that he was fighting. Once he was available to help, he took on the wolf I was fighting while I unlocked the cage to let Ethan out.

Ethan scrambled out in his human form just as Thomas took down the second wolf.

“Come on, Soren!” Ethan shouted as I put him on Thomas’ back. I shifted to my wolf, and we started running back towards the palace.

We had hid a narrow footpath in the center of the giant trench so we could get back to our side.

Behar’s forces wouldn’t be able to use it effectively as our warriors were waiting on the other side. Crossing one at a time would be no different from committing suicide for them.

We would be able to get through, but not our enemy.

Behar had caught up with us. Thomas couldn’t run as fast as Behar with Ethan on his back.

‘Go! Take Ethan back!’ I yelled at Thomas while stopping and turning around to face Behar.

“Soren, get back here!” Ethan’s tone was rushed.

‘Boss

Just f*cking go already!’ I interrupted him in mindlink, I’ll be fine. Have some faith, okay?’

As quickly as I could, I threw myself at Behar who was closing in on Thomas, knocking his back legs out from under him.

Meanwhile, a large wave of heat crashed over me-Talon had lit the fire!

From the pit, I heard screams of agony as the oil that the wolves were trapped in went up in flames so large, they practically licked the sky. The scent of burning flesh and fur filled my lungs as the shrieks and pleas for help filled the air.

They didn’t last long, though. The hotter the fire burned, the less screaming remained.

Our prisoners were all dead in a matter of moments.

Theard a howl in the distance as Madalynn watched the scene from hell. Oh well, it seemed that we had really made someone angry.

The absolutely horrifying scene shook everyone. Most of the wolves were running for their lives, except my cousin and Madalynn.

They were running for me.

I was the only one of our forces on this side now.

I was an easy target.

I was confident in my fighting skills, and I could take down both of them... if I wasn't bleeding profusely.

But if I was going down, so was Behar.

Before he could get up, I ripped into his shoulder, biting down hard and pulling. My mouth filled with blood, but he brought his front paws around and caught me in the head, knocking me sideways as his claws tore away my fur. I went flying through the air, as Behar collapsed onto the ground. He didn't move.

My head slammed into a rock on the ground, a sharp pain spidering throughout my skull, and every thing went blurry. Looking up, I saw Behar's wolves running at me, hatred in their dark eyes.

I was going to die.

This time, Ethan really, really owed me big.

Oh, well. Hopefully, I'd die for a worthy cause and the Moon Goddess would take me under her wing, and maybe... I hoped not, but I'd see Rosalie there soon.

Despite the agonizing pain radiating through my body, a bitter smile came to my wolf lips.

My eyelids fluttered a few times and then... everything went black.

Chapter 186 Ethan's Sacrifice

****Ethan's POV**

The moment Talon saw me, his eyes filled with terror. "Goddess! Ethan, what happened to you?!" I didn't answer him, 'Talon, send some guys over there to bring Soren back, now!'

"Yes, Alpha!"

"Also, Behar's troops are down by half. Ask Landon and Vandough to go after them. Their morale is destroyed, and this is our best chance to eliminate as many of them as we can!"

I was too beaten up to fight, however, I could still lead. Others were obviously worried about my wounds, but we were in the middle of a battle, and there was no time for distraction.

“Yes, Alpha!” Talon ran off.

“Thank you, Thomas,” I said. As soon as he dropped me off, he turned around and joined the team headed across the footpath to retrieve my brother.

The last time I had seen him, he was facing off against Behar, but I couldn’t see him now.

I couldn’t see either one of them.

Commander Landon took charge of half of our forces. He sent them around the edge of the trench to rout the enemy forces that were already on the run. General Vandough, who was on the other side of our line, did the same.

It was clear that we were winning. In a matter of an hour, the enemy was running from the field and trying to keep out of the clutches of our warriors.

We had to have taken out the majority of the men led by Behar, which would be more than half of the enemy’s overall forces. With losses like this, any military leader would have to take a step back to re-evaluate the strategy.

Their morale had to be especially low as many of them were afraid there were more traps. I saw trepidation in their eyes.

I couldn’t help but smile.

I saw one of the troops I’d sent after Soren coming back.

Georgia had arrived, standing next to me. Her eyes were full of concern, I figured both for my horrible wounds and for Soren’s absence.

“Did you find him?” I asked the soldier in wolf form.

He shook his head. Using the mindlink, he said, ‘No, not yet, sir.’

“D*mnit,” I muttered aloud, “Keep looking for him! Get every man available to look for him!”

The wolf turned and ran back the way he’d come.

Georgia helped me to keep my balance. I was too weak to stand up straight for long. “I shouldn’t have ran off and left him behind,” I mumbled.

“They’ll find him,” my sister said, She said that to me and to herself,

I said softly, “I’m sorry.”

Georgia stared at me firmly. “He’ll be fine!! I have faith in him, just like I have faith in you!”

“... Thank you!” That was all I could say.

Looking back from afar, fire, smoke, tens of thousands of dead wolves all reminded me that I’d done everything I could to prepare for her return. I wished I could clear out all our enemies and hand a peaceful northern tier to her, but I didn’t have much time.

Alpha, we’ve got Soren! One the way back!

“They found Soren,” I told Georgia, whose face immediately showed that she was relieved.

I blew out a long exhale. I was finally ready to do what I needed to do.

I looked at Georgia again. “Georgia, keep an eye out for Soren for me, okay?”

“Of course,” she said. When she saw I had started to walk away, she asked, “Hey, where are you going? Are you able to walk?”

“I want to check on Rosalie,” I said, “and yes.”

Georgia wanted to say something else, but she swallowed it back.

I turned around and started walking back to the palace where I saw Seraphine running at me, shouting, “Alpha Ethan!” [heard desperation in her voice.

My heart froze in my chest. There was only one reason why Seraphine would be shouting like that for me.

“Rosalie...” | murmured. Leaving Georgia behind, I sprinted across the ground to Seraphine. “What is it?” I asked her, my eyes wide and my heart hammering.

She shook her head. “She needs you-now.”

I took off. When I reached her room, I saw her pale face, and all of the oxygen was sucked out of my lungs. It was obvious that Rosalie was fading quickly.

We all slowly approached her bed, and I heard Vicky burst into tears. I didn’t know what to do, what to think, what to say.

"I believe... it is her time." Seraphine had tears rolling down her face as she spoke.

With a heaviness inside of me that penetrated to my very soul, I looked at Rosalie.

"May I have a minute alone with her?" I asked, not moving my gaze away from her.

"Alpha Ethan-" Seraphine said softly before I snapped out of my stupor and turned to face her.

"I just want some time with my son's mother!"

Seraphine sighed. Then she turned and slowly made her way out of the room, leaving me alone with Rosalie

I tried to hold myself together, but it was hard to see her like this.

"I won't let you die, Rosalie," I started, looking down at her face. "I can't let you die, not when I have any hope to save you. I'm sorry, I am going to do things against your will again."

She lay so perfectly still on the bed, her white hair framing her lovely face, it almost seemed like she had already passed away, like her beautiful soul had already left us behind and flown off to join the Moon Goddess and her mother.

But I could faintly hear her pulse, the soft thumping of her heart in her chest barely audible even to my wolf ears.

Kneeling down next to her, I gently caressed her silky smooth cheek.

"I know you can't hear me, but that's probably the best for us right now. I don't think I'd ever be able to tell you all this if you were awake."

I chuckled bitterly, and the wounds on my face stung. "I thought I'd never be afraid of anything, until I met you. I wish things could be different, Rosalie. I wish that we could be together here, in this life, that you could be my wife, and I could be the husband you deserve-someone who would love you, treasure you, protect you, and give you the life that you have always wanted. But... I have failed you at every turn, and no matter how badly I want to be that man, I know it won't be me."

I took a deep breath and blew it out slowly.

"When we were at the temple a few days ago, I had so much to tell you. I wanted to apologize to you. I remembered everything I did as a rogue. I wanted to tell you that I'd do everything I could to make it up to you. But I also wanted to tell you that, as ashamed as I was, the time I spent with you, whether I was a rogue or not, would be treasured in my heart forever."

I wasn't afraid of what I was going to do. It would be an honor, but I would miss her so very much.

I would also miss our son. I had longed to see him grow up and become a strong, courageous leader. I had hoped that I would see Rowan be the man I had always wished I could be.

Now, someone else would step in and fill my role. The idea left my heart twisted, but I couldn't allow myself to think about that now.

"When our son is older, please be sure to tell him how much I love him." I thought of the bracelet I'd give him. He would always have that to remember me by.

"I hope that when you see what I'm about to do, you won't be too angry with me, Rosalie. I know that you don't want to be tied to me at all. But don't worry... it won't last long." I almost snickered at the thought of her waking up to find that I'd marked her and going into a rage over my dead body.

She'd have her freedom despite my actions-soon enough.

I leaned down and gently pressed my lips to her forehead before sliding down and kissing her lips. They were only lukewarm, but her scent was as alluring as usual. I would forever remember her sweetness.

She looked even more still and peaceful now than she had when I'd left her.

Kneeling down next to her, I brushed my lips against hers again. Tears glistened in my eyes, not because I was about to leave this world, but because I knew I was going to miss out on so much.

"Whether you believe it or not, I truly do love you, Rosalie. With all my heart."

I pulled her shirt back away from her neck, and then, sinking my teeth into her smooth skin, I bit down, feeling my fangs emerge slightly and pierce her skin.

As soon as my teeth punctured her, I felt a wave of energy flow through my mouth, entering my body and immediately knocking me backward. It was like a great dark wave of blackness, as if all of the evil in the world had been transferred from my sweet Rosalie to me.

The world around me quickly grew blurry as pain consumed me, a burning fire starting in my mouth and traveling throughout every cell, all the way to the tips of my fingers and the pads of my toes.

I had no oxygen in my lungs to cry out, and as the raging inferno intensified, all I could do was look at Rosalie's face, willing her to open her eyes so I could see those beautiful orbs one more time.

But the world was beginning to fade around the edges, and my own eyelids became so heavy, I could barely keep my eyes open,

I used all my strength so that my weight would not hurt Rosalie as I felt my head slumping down on her stomach, and with my eyes focused on her propped-up face, I sucked in a short breath of air and then...

felt myself slip away.

However, strangely, I didn't lose my consciousness like I thought. I was still alert.

What happened?

Chapter 187 Ethan, Have You Ever Loved Me?

I blinked a few times and then opened my eyes. Everything felt strange, but the pain I'd been feeling only a moment ago quickly dissipated.

I was no longer in the bedroom with Rosalie. Instead, I was lying in a meadow full of velvety green grass with bright purple flowers dotting the landscape. Above me, a bright azure sky provided a picturesque backdrop for bright fluffy clouds that lazied by.

Pulling myself up to sitting, I spotted a quaint temple in the distance. It instantly reminded me of the one I'd visited with Rosalie a few days before, though I wasn't certain it was the same one.

Standing, I headed over to the temple, wondering what I might find inside. The building called to me, its stone facade twinkling in the bright sunlight as if it were glowing.

Even before I reached the large wooden doors, adorned with carvings of the Moon Goddess, I felt a yearning in my heart that let me know precisely who I would find inside.

Pushing the door open, I entered

A red runner lined the walkway in front of me, leading up to the altar where the statue of the Moon Goddess, with her white flowing hair and outstretched hands, looked down upon the place of worship.

Beneath her, laid out as if this was a funeral, lay my sweet Rosalie, her eyes closed, her chest still,

As I walked toward her, I noted the beauty of the white dress she wore, how it sparkled in the soft candlelight that surrounded her at the altar. Her hair was curled and framed her face and shoulders, and her long eyelashes and bright red lips made her look as lovely as I'd ever seen her.

But it was clear my Rosalie wasn't just sleeping.

She was gone.

With tears in my eyes, I leaned down and pressed my lips to hers, savoring the feeling of her mouth on mine.

When I lifted my head, Rosalie gasped, sucking in a deep breath. I moved aside and looked down at her as her eyelids fluttered a few times, and then her eyes opened, and she was staring at me.

“Ethan?” she asked.

It took me a few seconds to figure out what I should do. I tried to calm my racing heart, worrying that my loud heartbeat may scare her away again.

I almost wished time could stop here, forever.

But she asked again tentatively, “E-Ethan?”

I felt my throat tighten, but finally, I answered. “I’m here, Rosalie.”

I took her hand as she slowly turned her head to look around. Once she had her bearings, she sat up, and I steadied her so she wouldn’t lose her balance.

“I... I think I must be dreaming,” she mumbled.

Thinking back to the last memory I had from before I awoke in the field of flowers, I concurred. “It’s a beautiful dream,” I told her.

A soft smile lit her face. “I thought I might never get to see you again.”.

“I’m here,” I told her again, and she nodded. I reached up and caressed her porcelain cheek, my thumb lingering on her cheekbone. “I’m here now.”

“It’s so quiet and peaceful here. I’m glad we finally have a chance to talk. Alone.” Her smile widened, and I felt a rush of joy and sadness mingling together in my heart.

I knew precisely what she wanted to talk to me about. It was the same conversation I’d been putting off for days. We had so much to discuss. I had so much to apologize for, so much to explain to her.

Yet, at the same time, I didn’t see the point.

What good would it do me now to pour my heart out to her, to tell her how much I loved her, how I had always loved her?

She was such a kind person. Whether she loved me or not, she would regret my decision. She would condemn herself to a life of sadness because I had sacrificed myself for her, something she didn’t need to do because she had already willingly given up everything for me.

Rather than giving her the time to talk to me, I helped her off of the altar and started walking toward the door, her arm looped through mine.

It was nice, just being alone with her, having a moment where words were not necessary. I could feel

the love deep within me radiating out of my being, and it was fully reciprocated in her.

“Ethan-” she began just before we reached the end of the aisle.

I stopped her. I didn’t want to hear what she had to say. Yes, I was a coward. I was afraid.

“Rosalie.” I spun her to face me and we stopped near the door to the temple. An overwhelming sense of melancholy washed over me as I thought about all of the moments in life we would never get to share to

gether.

Rowan’s first steps, him going to school, graduating, getting married... Us getting married... maybe an other child, a peaceful home in the mountains...

Growing old together. 5

“Rosalie,” I repeated. “I... am sorry. For everything I ever did to fail you. I’m sorry I could never be the man you needed me to be.”

Her forehead crinkled as she stared up at me. “Ethan,”

I shook my head and interrupted her. “From the very beginning, I mistreated you, and of all of the bad decisions I have made in my life... not seeing you for who you were from the first moment I met you was my greatest mistake.”

She was shaking her head, but I couldn’t listen to anything else she wanted to say to me. Tears threatened to fall from my eyes, and now was not the time for me to cry.

“I’m grateful to the Goddess for giving me this opportunity to apologize to you...”

She was fighting tears herself. “Ethan,” she said, struggling to get the words out. “Answer me, just one question.”

My eyes locked on hers.

As if she gathered all of her courage, she asked, “Have you ever loved me?”

I stared at her, and my lips parted. However, I couldn’t make a sound.

What did she mean? What was she trying to say?

I couldn’t even dream about that possibility.

After all of the turmoil I'd created in her life, all of the problems we'd gone through, all of the tears she'd shed over me... how could she possibly love me?

But I couldn't help letting hope rise in my heart. The likelihood that maybe, there was the slightest possibility that she might love me in return, made my entire body tremble.

However, I couldn't answer that question,

Even if, in this moment, she thought she did love me, even if she somehow found it within her heart to forgive me and love me in spite of everything, her love would be a waste.

She would live the rest of her life alone, contemplating what could have been between us.

No, I couldn't sentence the rest of her life to torture. Not when I could release her with a single word. Looking into her tear-filled eyes, I said, "No."

She gasped and covered her mouth.

With all the strength I had left inside of me, I pushed out the word that stabbed my heart. "Never."

As Rosalie burst into tears, I took her by the shoulders, pulled the door open, and gently pushed her out of the temple. "You're free now, Rosalie," I told her.

"Ethan?" She gazed up at me with agony in her eyes. "Ethan-!!"

With one more look at her beautiful face, I closed the door and dropped the bar into place, sealing both of our fates.

She was finally free

My head was fuzzy, and my body felt weak. It felt as if a great weight had been lifted off of my chest, and I was breathing for the first time in a while.

As I drew in a deep breath and opened my eyes, I focused on the white ceiling above me and remembered that I was back at the palace.

My head was swimming, and I could hardly remember everything that had happened. My body felt tingly, like it had been asleep, numb without full blood flow, but now... it was coming back to life.

Within seconds of opening my eyes, I started to feel stronger. I lifted a hand to my forehead, brushing my hair away from my face, and my eyes focused on the white silky strands that threaded through my

gers.

My hair was white.

It all came back to me then the battle, the fight with Madalynn and her mate, and returning to the palace to make sure that we were ready for the next battle.

Then... I'd grown so weak, I couldn't even get out of bed.

I was dying from the same curse that my mother had died from.

So why did I feel better now?

I realized that my face felt wet and warm liquids were pouring out of my eyes...

All of a sudden, my heart hurt so much.

Another memory came back to me, the sound of Ethan's voice.

He had been there with me. He woke me up from the Moon Goddess's sacred altar...

What happened afterwards...? We seemed to have a conversation...

My head hurt a lot, and I couldn't remember. And then...and then...

He sacrificed himself for me! "Oh, Goddess! No!" I yelled.

As soon as those thoughts sank into my brain, I pushed myself up from the mattress, attempting to sit up.

Only I couldn't, not fully anyway. Something was weighing me down, and it wasn't the lack of strength in my own body now. –

Looking down, I saw him immediately.

"Ethan!" He was lying on my stomach, completely immobile.

My heart froze.

Then I was even more terrified when I saw horrendous wounds, cuts and bruises all over his face and his body.

My voice trembled, "Ethan, Ethan... what happened to you...?"

I flipped him onto his back and raised up on my knees, pressing my ear to his face. I could feel a slight

release of warm air on my cheek and hear a faint heartbeat.

But it was clear that he was fading fast.

Blood... my blood. I needed to give him my blood!!

Looking around the room, I saw a pair of scissors on the dresser. I bounded up off of the bed and snatched them up, coming back to Ethan as I opened them wide and used one of the sharp blades to slice through the skin on my arm.

Immediately, a trail of blood beaded up on the surface of my skin. A ripple of pain shot through my arm, but it was nothing compared to the agony I was already feeling in my heart.

I only had one thought-I couldn't lose him!

I couldn't lose the father of my child and the only man I'd ever loved.

Pulling his mouth open, I raised my arm above his mouth and let the drops of blood roll down the back of his tongue and into his mouth.

Squeezing my arm, I did my best to get more blood out of my body and into him.

"Come on, Ethan, dimnit!" I shouted. "Wake up-!"

Chapter 188 He Is Still Alive!

The more blood that came out of me and into him, the stronger I heard his heart begin to beat.

Even his wounds started to heal at a visible speed.

But he still wasn't opening his eyes.

I heard footsteps approaching, and then Georgia's voice. "Ethan, Soren is back and I need to talk to you about a situation. Also, we've just gotten word that Kal is-" Georgia's voice stopped abruptly behind me.

"What the... Rosalie, you are awake?" she asked, and her tone was filled with pleasant surprise.

With tears in my eyes, I turned to look at her. "Go get Cerina!" I implored her.

Her face turned into terror. Without another word, Georgia shot out of the room.

I continued to try to get my blood into Ethan, even digging at my arm with the scissors, trying to make the cut deeper as my wound healed up fast.

"Your Majesty! You're awake?!" Cerina and Seraphine shouted as they ran in the room. "Wh-what...?"

“Help me get him up on the bed!” | told them as I realized several other people were in the room now, too.

Vicky and Talon lifted Ethan onto the bed as my tears dripped down my face and collected with the blood I was still desperately trying to get into his body.

“Wake up, Ethan, please! Wake up!!” I cried.

“Your Majesty, that’s enough blood!” I heard Seraphine say.

“But he’s dying!” I told her as she gently pulled me back away from him. I broke free from her and continued feeding him blood as I screamed out, “My mate is dying!!”

Tears flooded my eyes as everyone gasped, but I couldn’t turn to look at them at the moment.

Cerina raised her voice. “Your Majesty, please stop hurting yourself. You know it’s not going to help! You know that!”

She was finally able to pull me away and handed me a towel to wrap around my arm.

The scissors dropped on the ground. I covered my face with my hands and wept in desperation, “Could someone please help him...”

But she was right, no one could, and I knew it.

No one said anything, and it was just my sobbing echoed in the room. After a while, Cerina asked, “Alpha Ethan... is your mate?”

Georgia, Vicky, and Talon all held their breath.

I nodded. By now, it was no longer a secret.

My eyes fell on his handsome face. His blue eyes were closed, and he looked like he did when he was sleeping. It had been a long time since I’d seen his peaceful sleeping face.

“Rosalie...” Talon asked me softly, as if he was afraid that I’d lost it again, “Do you mind telling us what happened?”

My hand moved to my neck, and I murmured, “He marked me...”

Cerina mumbled, “No wonder... Your Majesty is awake now.”

Georgia urged, “Cerina, exactly what happened?!”

Cerina sighed and explained gently, "Alpha Ethan marked Her Majesty. When he did, they completed the full matebond and became each other's true mate. He exchanged his life for Her Majesty's...."

Vicky covered her mouth with her hand. Georgia stumbled and could barely keep her balance. Talon reached out and stabilized her.

"Is there... is there a way to..." Georgia asked.

Cerina shook her head. "Alpha Ethan gave his life for our queen. He will forever be with the Moon Goddess now.... That exchange is irreversible."

She looked around the room. "Alpha Ethan saved our queen, and he'll forever have our gratitude. Please allow us to prepare his funeral."

"Cerina!" I interrupted her sharply, "No! Cerina! He is not dead!!"

Seraphine hurried over and checked on Ethan quickly. I urged her, "Seraphine, he is not dead! Tell me he's still alive!":

Seraphine looked at me, and looked at Cerina. She checked Ethan one more time and murmured, "He ... he is still alive. How is it possible...?"

Cerina rushed over and closed her eyes and started chanting something.

I was so nervous that I clenched my hands. My nails were buried into my fists.

When she opened her eyes, she slowly, slowly pulled up a smile.

Hope ignited in my heart.

"Unbelievable. This... this is a miracle!" She looked at me, and her tone firm, "Your Majesty, you're right, he is still alive!"

I burst out into tears again. This time, even Talon seemed too weak to maintain his standing posture. He sank down on the couch.

We all took a moment to digest everything that happened in the past few minutes. My head was spinning more. The ecstasy of potentially having Ethan back after almost losing him was overwhelming.

I took a deep breath and asked Cerina, "What did you find out just now?"

"Your Majesty," Cerina answered, "I could feel part of Alpha Ethan's life in you."

“What does it mean?”

“Somehow, part of Alpha Ethan’s soul and life force resides in you. Because you are awake now... part of his soul is still in this world, inside of you.”

“It was the ritual...” I murmured.

“That’s very possible,” she said.

Talon asked, “Thank the goddess...do we know how long it will take for him to wake up?”

This time Cerina didn’t answer right away.

Panic swept over me. I stood up to grab her wrist, almost tripping in that few steps of distance. “Cerina... Cerina, please... tell me he’ll wake up!”

“I don’t know,” she shook her head. “It could be days, it could be months...”

She didn’t say it aloud, but I knew what she implied. It could also be never.

I turned my gaze back to Ethan and smiled. Time didn’t matter though. I was already grateful enough that Ethan was still breathing. I’d feed him my blood to sustain his body while we looked for a way to wake up his consciousness.

Cerina assured the rest of the room, “We will do all we can. In the meantime, Your Majesty, please remember to take care of yourself. Only if you live does he have a chance to wake up!”

Seraphine added, “Very true. Your Majesty, your child also needs you....”

Flashes of Rowan’s sweet face came to mind. She was right. I needed to take care of myself because they both would need me.

As long as Ethan was alive, there was hope. It didn’t matter how long it might take, I knew we’d figure something out.

I caressed his face. I had so much to say to him. I wished I could just go back to how things had been in the Drogomor pack when I’d first met Ethan.

Even though I was only a breeder to him at the time, even though I was frightened of him most days, I would rather go back there now and tell him how much I loved him. Maybe if I’d spoken up back then, we wouldn’t be in this situation now.

But here we are. And there’s no going back in time now.

A messenger came running through the door, causing my head to whip around at the sound of his voice, knocking me out of my stupor,

“We’re under attack! It’s King Kal’s army!” he shouted.

I turned and looked at Georgia. When she’d come in, she was saying something about war and King Kal.

“Son of a b*tch!” she shouted, anger coursing through her face. “Why do they always have to have such shitty timing?”

“We need to get out there,” Talon said, looking at Georgia. Then he turned to me, “Stay here.”

“No, I’ll come with you!” But I stood up too fast and felt a bit disoriented.

“We’ve got this. They’ve lost more than half of their men. Don’t worry,” the Beta said, resting a hand on my shoulder. “We’ll push them back.”

My eyes widened. “They lost half of their men? How?”

Georgia gritted her teeth, but there were tears in her eyes again. “That’s another story for later, thanks to my two b*stard brothers!”

Then they all ran off.

Outside, I could hear the bustle of troops as they ran about, getting ready to go to the frontlines and push the enemy’s forces back.

However, all of that seemed like something happening far off in the distance, not a present danger or something I needed to concern myself with.

“Your Majesty-” Seraphine was about to say something, but I raised a hand and stopped her. I knew what I needed to do. “Seraphine, could you get me something to eat and drink?”

She was pleasantly surprised. She nodded and hurried off without a second word.

There were so many things I needed to sort out, but I had to make sure I was in a good physical condition to handle them.

“Cerina could you start looking into a solution for Ethan’s situation? Not only the libraries, but check with the elders, legends. However, we are still in the middle of the war, so Ethan’s situation should be kept secret, especially from our enemies.”

“Understood, I’ll make sure the leaders are aware that Alpha Ethan was exhausted and needed some

rest.”

“Good. And keep me updated at least once a day about any new findings.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

Cerina exited the room to get her assignments started, leaving me alone with Ethan.

I agreed it was best I didn’t go to the battlefield right now, because at the moment, Ethan was the only one I could think about.

I pulled the towel off of my arm to see that it was no longer bleeding. Already, the cut from the scissors was beginning to scab over and heal. It didn’t even hurt anymore.

I wished I could say the same for my heart.

Using the corner of the towel, I wiped a smear of blood off of the side of Ethan’s mouth. It was closed now, and with his eyes also shut, he looked like he was just sleeping soundly.

I sat down beside his still body, staring at his face. He wasn’t frowning like he normally would even in his sleep. The crease between his brow was smooth. This was quite unusual for him.

He just seemed content and peaceful.

Even with all the cuts and bruises, he was still the most handsome man I’d ever seen.

He had made the ultimate sacrifice for me. He had been willing to give up his life so that I could live. He’d been willing to give up everything for me-so that I could be the one to raise our son.

The irony wasn’t missed on me.

All I could do now was pledge to do the same. “I’ll find a way to free you from your eternal darkness, Ethan. I promise.”

I leaned down and wanted to press my lips to his. However, for some reason, I stopped.

I had a feeling that I had forgotten about something.

But I pushed that thought away, for my instinct told me that it was something that would make me afraid; something that would make me hurt.

Chapter 189 Ethan’s Acquaintance

“The battle is nearly over now,” Georgia said behind me, her voice jarring me out of a stupor. I hadn’t heard her come back.

Since it didn't take long at all, I assumed, "It went well?"

She grinned. "It was likely more of a scouting party than an actual battleline this time. There weren't many of them, and once we counterattacked, they dropped back."

"Casualties?"

"Minimum," she said firmly.

I relaxed a bit. "I'm glad it ended, and that you are all unharmed," I noted, and I tried to smile at her.

"Yeah, thanks to Ethan's crazy *ss plan, Behar and Madalynn lost a sh*tload of their warriors." Georgia had a crooked smile on her face, despite the fact that I could see worry in her eyes about her brother.

"What exactly did Ethan do?" I heard bits and pieces of the overall war status, but I would need details. I glanced over to look at Ethan, but I knew I also needed to catch up with everything that occurred since I fell into a coma.

Georgia shook her head and said, "Basically, he used himself as bait. But if you want more details, you'll have to ask Soren."

Ever since I woke up, I had seen quite a few people, but not Soren.

"Where is Soren? Is he okay?" I remembered then that earlier Georgia had said he was back.

Georgia replied, "He's here, back in the palace, but he is wounded." Seeing my concerned face, she added quickly. "But he is okay, still alive. They bandaged him up and gave him some medicines. He will just need to rest for the time being."

I let out my breath in relief. "I'll go check on him then."

But Georgia stopped me. "Wait a moment, Rosalie."

I looked at her, puzzled.

"The reason I came to get you is because there are people outside who want to speak to Ethan."

I was shocked to see how many people were gathered in the courtyard. Most of them were women and children, and all of them were skinny and dirty.

Georgia explained to me, "They escaped from Behar's compound, and they are the ones who brought Soren back."

My eyes widened. If they were on the enemy's side, why would they save Soren?

Talon, Vicky, and Paul were already there, along with Seraphine and Cerina.

"It's the White Queen!" A murmur went over the crowd, and everyone lowered their heads to show their respect,

I lifted my hand and waved at them.

"Your Majesty." Cerina and Seraphine greeted me as Cerina gestured toward a young man and an older woman. The woman seemed to be sightless based on the way she was looking into the distance.

I stopped in front of them. The young man was nervous, so I smiled at him, hoping to make him relax a little bit.

"Thank you for saving Soren." I started the conversation with a friendly tone. "Your...Your Majesty!" The young man lowered his head.

"No need to stand on ceremony." I led the two of them a little away from the crowd so that it would be easier for me to hear what they had to say. "How may I address you?"

The young man answered nervously, "My name is Otto, and this is Gayla, our pack Seer. We are from a village south of Mirage. It is an honor to meet you, Your Majesty." He dipped his head again, and the woman smiled.

Talon's brow knitted, and he asked, "South of Mirage? I remember we took back that area from Kal before the siege of the capital..."

Otto said, "That's correct! In fact, by the time Alpha Ethan's troops left our village, everything was back in order, and we were able to live our normal lives again."

I exchanged a look with Talon, then asked Otto, "Then why did you... end up fighting for Behar and Madalynn's forces, and now you've come to my pack?"

Otto sighed. "Because of Alpha Ethan!"

The mention of Ethan's name made my heart speed up.

"Please elaborate," I said. Everything about Ethan immediately had my full attention.

"A few months back, Alpha Ethan pushed King Kal's forces back and regained our territory. Gayla helped him and told him of a prophecy. I also had the honor to meet him in person. Everyone was grateful for what he had done for our country."

Ethan was intimidating on battlefields, but for citizens, he was the most powerful protector.

Otto also mentioned that the Seer helped Ethan. I wondered what she did, but I didn't want to interrupt, so I nodded and encouraged him to continue.

"However, later on, without Alpha Ethan, King James lost the war against the West King, and King Kal took control of our village again."

"So you decided to fight for Kal?" Georgia asked. She was obviously displeased.

"We had no choice. They forced us to!" Otto explained hurriedly, as if he was worried that we wouldn't listen. "Our Seer, Gayla, told us to come to the north to seek shelter, but we were captured by Behar's men on the way here. They took our women and children hostage and forced our men to fight for the West King or else their family wouldn't get any food or water...."

"It was a terrible travesty," Vicky commented, her voice grave.

Otto nodded and took the opportunity to continue. "When we saw Alpha Ethan was locked up on display, we were all very worried. Luckily, he was able to get away. Later, when Behar was wounded, and most of his men were killed, we saw our opportunity to escape. We rescued the captives and headed here."

"Including Soren?" Georgia asked.

"You mean the person we picked up from the battlefield? That's right. We saw him helping Alpha Ethan, so we figured he must be a friend," Otto answered. "We thought, if we follow Alpha Ethan, he may be willing to help us."

Otto looked around but didn't see the person they wanted to see. "Your Majesty, could we talk to Alpha Ethan, please?"

My throat tightened, and I wanted to tell him that I wanted to talk to Ethan as much as he did, but I pulled up a smile and assured him, "Alpha Ethan is busy right now... however," I told him as I looked around the crowd and announced loudly, "Everyone, you have my word. You are safe here!"

The crowd was quiet at first, and then I heard a mix of cheers and weeping.

I sighed. It must have been such a heartbreaking journey for them to get here.

Not wanting to disturb me more, Otto bowed again and was about to walk away with Gayla, but I stopped them.

I still had questions for the Seer. I wanted to learn more about Ethan. I didn't want to miss any news or

stories about him.

“One moment, please.” I walked close to Gayla and asked, “Madam, could you tell me how you got to know Ethan... and you gave him a prophecy?”.

Cerina and Seraphine led the citizens to the shelter. A few men stayed around, seemingly offering help.

I led Otto and Gayla to a bench to sit down as she said, “I met him when he was in our village, in pain. However, that pain didn’t originate from things that occurred to him in battle.” As if she could see my puzzled face, she lifted her empty gaze to me. “The pain came from you!”

My eyes widened as I contemplated everything she was saying. “Me?”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” She explained, “He felt your suffering when your child was born, therefore, I created a bridge for you to see each other.”

My mouth was hanging open. I had just assumed it had all been an illusion, the effects of so much blood loss, and that Ethan wasn’t really there at all when Rowan was born.

But it wasn’t my imagination.... Ethan, Ethan was there for me!!

Bittersweet emotions washed over me. “How did you-”

She shook her head. “I cannot speak to the how, dear. Only the Moon Goddess knows that. But I did warn Alpha Ethan not to go north. He did so anyway.”

“Thank you, for everything,” I told her, taking her hand and holding it between both of mine. “I am thankful for that as well.”

Tears fell down my cheeks. Ethan... how I wished I could tell him how much he meant to me.

Gayla frowned as she sensed my emotional shift. “Your Majesty, what’s the matter?”

“Wise one... Madam, could you please help us again?” | croaked. “Please follow me.”

Otto helped Gayla up, and the two of them, along with my most trusted group, followed us back to my room where Ethan lay. Otto stuttered in disbelief, “Al-Alpha Ethan!”

As I gently caressed Ethan’s face, I said to Gayla, “My blood kept him from dying, but... could you see if there’s a way to wake him?”

I could hear the pleading in my own voice as I felt Georgia’s hand come down on my shoulder to comfort me.

“That is a grim prognosis, I’ll try.” The Seer did not provide me with the hope I was looking for. She proceeded to place her hand on top of mine and paused for a moment.

Then, as if she was shocked, she retreated to kneel before me. Her forehead touched the ground.

“Gayla, what happened? Please get up!” I rushed over and pulled her up from the ground.

She took a deep breath. “Your Majesty, you are the descendant of the Moon Goddess, and I am a mere mortal,” she said. “How could I foresee the fate of the child of the Moon Goddess? I’m sorry, my Queen, but the fate of you and your mate is beyond me to foretell.”

I felt my heart drop in my chest.

“There is nothing you can do?” | asked, although I didn’t expect much would change based on her statement.

“Yet, that doesn’t mean all hope is lost,” she continued, all of sudden gripping my hand tightly.

I stopped breathing for a second, feeling a flutter of faith inside of me. “Please, tell me!”

“While it is beyond me to help you with what you seek, I might be able to connect you to one who can provide the answer.’

I squeezed her hand and pleaded, “Please! Tell me who can help. I’ll go anywhere”

She smiled and told me, “Your Majesty, please be patient and wait for the one to come to you.

Chapter 190 Hope Bloomed Eternal

“Well... what did she mean?” Georgia mumbled after Otto and Gayla excused themselves.

I had no answer for her, but I knew I wouldn’t be able to sit idly by and wait. Since there were no further directions from Gayla, I decided it would be best for me to focus on things I could do.

“Georgia, let’s go check on Soren. If he was wounded, you know I can help him heal.”

Georgia fed the water mixed with my blood to Soren, and he woke up not long after that. His first sentence was, “Georgia, go tell our jack*ss brother that he better be prepared to take a hard blow from me for what he put me through!”

Then he saw me, “Oh, hi, Rosalie... What’s wrong?”

I was too heartbroken to tell him that Ethan sacrificed himself for me. Georgia sighed and helped Soren sit up, “Well, I wish that day would come soon.”

After Georgia gave him a quick update, Soren murmured, "I never...."

His voice faded, and when I turned to look at him, I could see he was choked up.

"You never what?" Georgia asked him, but she didn't wait for his reply. Instead, she asked again, "You never thought that he could actually be selfless?"

Soren's silence confirmed Georgia's guess.

"I thought the same thing when I was younger," Georgia admitted. "But as I grew older, I started to see he wasn't a heartless beast like most people thought of him."

Soren retorted, "Isn't heartless? Georgia, he killed our father, and thanks to him, mother didn't live that long either!"

Georgia sighed. "You still call him father? When I was young, I wished I had never been born! He treated you very differently because you were supposed to be the heir, the stepping stone for him to secure power. You have no idea how terrible that monster really was. Even though I was his flesh and blood, he was cruel to me as well."

Georgia lifted a hand to her cheek, as if she was still feeling a slap from long ago.

"He wasn't always that pleasant to me," Soren said. "But... I didn't think he'd done anything that made him deserve to die."

"Ethan claimed his blood on behalf of his own father who was killed unjustly. That monster you called father deserved to die for more reasons than you will ever understand, Soren." Georgie recounted several instances of cruelty brought upon her family members by their father, incidents that Soren didn't seem to know anything about

"I didn't know," Soren shook his head. "Kal spoke of our father as if he was a god in human form."

"You've been so brainwashed by Kal all these years. You're lucky that you're on our side now. Otherwise, I would kick you in the nuts to remind you that Kal is a maniac," Georgia smirked.

"Ouch, Georgia! You're a lady! Come on!" Soren protested as if Georgia had executed her plan already.

Georgia let out an unbridled laugh. Soren just shook his head, seemingly speechless regarding his sister's choice of language.

I listened, but my thoughts went to Ethan's face.

Georgia pointed out, "You would deserve it if you are still so stupid about your resentment toward

Ethan.”

Soren was quiet for a moment before he said, “Maybe I really misunderstood him....”

“I thought you guys had already sorted all this out before you went on the mission. No?” Georgia was quite confused.

He shook his head, “When he first came up with this hairbrained scheme to let himself be captured and beaten so that ne could draw Behar and Madalynn’s forces out, I thought he was just a crazy, heartless jack*ss who had lost his damn mind.”

Georgia commented, “Well, from that perspective, he is still a crazy jack*ss. I’m with you on that.”

I whispered, “He did that for me...”

Soren nodded. “Now, I know. But back then, I thought, how could he bring himself to do that while Rosalie was fading fast? What kind of a selfish b*stard would want to put himself through that kind of danger just to prove that he’s better at war than anyone else? What if he didn’t make it? Then Rowan would become an orphan!”

Soren then turned his gaze to me. He continued, “I thought he was just a ruthless and heartless jack*ss who likes to boss people around, and his entire goal was be a dumb*ss hero. But I was wrong.”

I felt tears stinging my eyes and wiped them away. Soren wasn’t the only one who misunderstood Ethan. So did I.

However, everything I heard ever since I woke up proved how wrong I was. The man that I loved, my child’s father, he had done so much for me, and for my people. If he ever awoke, I’d be the one apologizing to him this time and begging for his forgiveness.

“Rosalie, Rosalie?” Georgia gently pushed me on my arm.

“Ah-yes, sorry, I was thinking about something else.” I apologized to the other two in the room.

“You look exhausted.” Georgia’s hand was firm on my shoulder. “Why don’t you go take a nap? I’ll stay with Soren so you won’t need to worry.”

It was tempting, but I found myself shaking my head: “I need to stay awake to help.”

“You won’t be any help to anyone if you’re exhausted,” Soren pointed out.

Georgia took her brother’s side quickly this time. “He’s right. You lost quite a lot of blood earlier, you know. Resting will help you recover for sure

As she spoke, I was feeling a little dizzy, and I did feel laying down wasn't a bad idea.

"In that case, all right. I'll get some sleep and check back with you both later tonight." I left Soren to be with Georgia, and I went back to my room.

There, I lay down next to Ethan and spread a blanket across the both of us. My hand was on his chest so that even when I fell asleep, I'd be able to feel him breathing.

Exhaustion washed over me. I was so tired, even though I'd been in bed for a few days. The emotional events of the day had completely drained me, not to mention the healing powers I'd used to keep Ethan from dying. I closed my eyes, and within a few minutes, I found myself drifting away on a sea of darkness.

Before too long, I was dreaming. I knew it was a dream when I saw my mother's smiling face. I hadn't seen her anywhere but in dreams for so very long. Now, I finally knew the truth of her death, and I missed her more than ever. She'd sacrificed herself for her people, just as I had done.

"Rosalie, dear," my mother said, her voice melodic.

"Mother!" I rushed over to give her a hug. "I miss you so much!"

"I miss you too, dear. You've grown up." She caressed my hair, which was the same color as hers.

"Mother, growing up is hard...."

"Yes, it is, but you've done well, my dear. I am so proud of you." She held up my face, and her gaze was soft on me as she wiped away my tears. "Don't cry, my dear. Whatever difficulty you're facing, you'll figure it out. I have faith in you."

I sobbed, "Mother, I'm not afraid of my fate, but Ethan.."

She smiled and took my hand. "Let's go for a walk."

"* walk?" I said, my voice sounding high-pitched and childlike. I looked down at myself and realized I was, in fact, a little girl again.

She nodded and moved forward.

My hand slipped into my mother's, and we took off walking through the woods,

"Do you remember?" she asked me

"Remember what?" I gazed up at her, a questioning look in my eyes. Night had fallen, and behind her white hair. I saw a field of stars across an inky sky. The moon caught her locks and made a soft glow

about her head, like a halo.

“The flower, darling. Do you remember the flower I used to speak of? Back when you were truly this age?”

I shook my head.

Her soft smile brightened her face and I returned the gesture. “It’s just up this mountainside,” she told me. “The flower blooms only once every century, its petals opening up to receive the moonlight for only a few seconds. But when it blooms, the power it holds is enough to break even the deepest nightmare.”

She smiled at me again as we walked up a steep incline to the top of a mountain.

Below us, I could see village lights dotting the landscape. We were in our homeland, Winter Forest pack, and in the distance, I could see the turrets of the palace.

“We’re almost there,” she said. “The path is treacherous. But nothing worth having is easy to get.”

We wound our way behind some trees. And then, I saw it, in the distance, glowing in the night.

The light given off by the beautiful flower was a soft blue. It was large, about the size of a lotus flower. I only saw one, and it was so beautiful that I was afraid to pick it.

My mother bent down and plucked the bloom from the plant with one hand while she pulled a knife from the other and slit her arm, similar to the way I’d cut myself with the scissors.

“It is the Moon Goddess’s gift to mortals. Your blood can keep it from withering, and in return, the next day, it will offer its precious nectar, which could wake one from his deepest sleep.”

I looked up at her, and my heart began to race with hope. I murmured, “Ethan... I could save Ethan!”

My mother finished feeding the flower her blood and then rested her palm on my cheek, bending down to look into my face. “I love you, Rosalie.” She leaned forward and pressed her warm lips to my forehead, “You will always be my little

girl.”

My mother pulled back from me, and I saw the blue light reflected on the pale skin of her beautiful face.

I chased after her, and I could see myself growing up into my adult body. “Mother-!”

She continued to pull back and smiled, “You’ll join me again in the future, but not now, my dear.”

Then... she was gone.

Inhaling loudly, I sat up in bed, consciousness rushing back to me again for the second time that day.

My eyes went to Ethan. He hadn't moved

'Cerina!' I mindlinked her.

"Your Majesty, I am with the elders at the library, I'll be right ov-" she responded immediately.

'The Moonlight Lily,' I interrupted her, 'when will it bloom again?' My tone was rushed.

She paused for a moment and replied, 'Please allow me to look it up. The last recorded sighting was almost three hundred years ago....'

The magical flower only blooms once a century. What if, what if it had already bloomed recently? I couldn't even bring myself to think deeper. I started running toward the library.

Every second that Cerina spent researching seemed like an eternity. As I pushed through the library door, she looked up and said, "Here it is. I found it, Your Majesty. The eighth day of Wheat Month this year. That's what it says."

"Wheat Month?" I repeated,

"Yes, we are in the Wheat Month now, according to the astrological calendar."

"What day is it today?" My voice trembled. I couldn't even decide whether I wanted to know the answer or not.