

King Breeder 81

Chapter 81 I Saw Her

“Alpha, Richard has succeeded in locating the target. We are on track with the mission. They should be back in two hours with the detailed report.”

Samuel was going through the planned route to Papeno with us and concluding his report with the latest update from Group B.

“Good. Samuel, take your team to chart out the route to their base as well. Then go back to Mirage directly to update Talon.”

“Yes, Alpha,” Samuel replied.

“Group C, prepare for action. Rendezvous with Group B in two hours at 14:00.”

“Yes, Alpha!” The rest of my men replied.

“Dismissed.”

After they dispersed in small groups, I checked in with Talon over the phone and confirmed that everything back in the Capital was under control.

I looked at my watch—I had a couple hours to spare.

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I knew what I wanted to do.

The piece of paper Talon had given me with the address of the jewelry store was burning a hole in my pocket. I had memorized how to get there from our rental before I even arrived in Avondale.

It wasn't far, and I got there within thirty minutes. However, now that I was already in the jewelry shop, I was hesitant

A middle-aged woman was working behind the counter, talking to another customer. I hung back, waiting for her to finish.

I looked around. It wasn't a high-end jewelry store, though they had some nice pieces. This was good news Rosalie's necklace should be memorable to these people.

The woman had finally finished with the other customer. “Can I help you, sir?” she asked, peering over the top of her spectacles at me.

“Yes..” I began, my breath catching in my throat as I imagined how she might answer my question. All of a sudden, I wondered whether it might have been better not to come here, that way, at least, I could still keep that faint hope in my heart.

“Sir?” she asked again,

I cleared my throat and took a deep breath. “Have you seen this necklace before?”

I pulled it out of my pocket and set it on the counter, but didn’t let go of it.

I couldn’t let go of it.

Oh, yes!” she exclaimed right away. “I remember that piece. Isn’t it gorgeous? When I first saw it, I thought the gemstones had to be fake, they’re so beautiful. But they’re real. Every single one of them.”

I nodded, not really caring about the necklace itself. “Do you remember where it came from?”

“Where it came from?”

Bracing myself, I clarified, “Yes, do you remember who sold this necklace to your shop?”

The woman looked a bit nervous, glancing away from me. I realized that my intense tone might seem out of place for a supposed casual inquiry.

To make her cooperate, I laid down a few paper notes and softened my tone. “The owner of the necklace is very important to me.”

Money talked. The woman probably came to the conclusion that answering my question really wouldn’t cost her anything, so after thinking for a few seconds, she spoke.

“Oh, well, we bought it from one of our regular suppliers—Bernie. He brought it over in one of his weekly runs.”

My heart crumbled in my chest. The necklace hadn’t originally been sold here.

“But I asked Bernie the same question. ‘Who in the world sold you that?’ I asked him. Who would want to part with something so beautiful?”

She was clearly trying to give me as many details as she could, and I was grateful for it.

She continued, “He told me some young lady brought it into his pawnshop. She seemed eager to get rid of it, he said. He couldn’t figure out the situation because she was quite young, but she had bodyguards and a maid of some sort with her. At first, he thought maybe she’d stolen it, but then, what kind of a thief has bodyguards?”

My heart was beating again. “Where is Bernie’s pawnshop?” I urged.

“He has several of them,” she said. “But this one was on Papeno, I believe. The big island, East Papeno.”

“Thank you,” I said. I couldn’t help the grin on my face.

“Of course,” she replied with a bigger smile, and put the money away. “Can I ask you, though. I sold that to another merchant. How did you happen to come by it?”

I looked her in the eye and said, “Fate.”

A young lady who seemed eager to get rid of it. I could not ask for better news than this!

I could hear my heart pounding as I walked out of the shop.

My wolf was growling in anticipation. The thought that we were getting so close had both of us anxious to get to East Papeno and see for ourselves.

What if Rosalie was on that island?

I told my inner wolf to stay patient. *We* weren’t there yet.

Still, hope sparked to life inside of me, and I could feel my wolf as if he were pacing inside of me, a caged animal ready to be let loose to chase her down and bring her home.

“Alpha!” One of my men mindlinked me. “Group B’s preliminary report is here. They’re back with news.”

“In person?”

“Yes. Our telecommunications are under surveillance, and thus not safe to use on the target island. Richard suggested we rely on the mindlink there.”

My eyes narrowed as I walked back to our meeting spot. “Good, that probably means we are on the right track. In which Papeno island is the target located?”

“East Papeno.”

I stilled.

Yes, it must have been fate.

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Sneaking onto the island wasn't easy, and it took time. The sun was going down by the time we got settled. We quickly made our way to a small rental house obtained by Richard's group during their reconnaissance mission.

"Alpha, you're here!" Richard closed the front gate of our temporary headquarters behind us.

"You have the actual location?"

"Yes, here." Richard pointed out a large property on the map on the east end of Papeno. It looked like nothing more than a private residence—a large private residence. It had a private dock, and was large enough for aerial transportation.

"The property is strictly guarded. We tried a few times, but as soon as we approached, we caught sight of their patrols. We didn't want to draw their attention, so we retreated and decided to wait for you."

"How much more time do you need?" I asked.

"By tomorrow night, we should be able to figure out a way to get onto the property. However, we don't know what to expect until we get inside. Once we're able to get in, we'll be able to set a plan of action."

Richard was the best there was when it came to reconnaissance. At this point, I needed to be patient and trust him to get his job done.

T nodded, granting him permission to execute his plan. "I'll go with you tomorrow night."

"Yes, Alpha!" Richard replied, and turned to exit the room.

"Richard," I said, stopping him in his tracks. "Is there a pawn shop in town?"

His eyebrows raised, but he didn't question why I wanted to know, as I had known he wouldn't.

"Yes, Alpha," he said. "There's a pawnshop by the dress shop on the strip downtown where the stores are located. Honestly, there are several of them around, all from the same chain."

"I'll keep that in mind." I nodded my thanks, and he joined the rest of the men in their preparations.

Telling my men I was going out to gather some intel, I headed to downtown, hoping to get a chance to speak to the pawnshop owner. I had a disguise on, but still needed to be cautious. Unlike Avondale, there weren't a lot of tourists here.

By the time I got to the pawnshop, though, I was too late. They'd closed about ten minutes earlier.

My wolf was not happy, but there wasn't much I could do. We had limited time here. Maybe I could try my luck again *tomorrow* before Richard's return.

Suddenly, I felt that strange sensation deep in the pit of my stomach again. That pulling sensation that made me feel like I was being drawn out of my *own* body and connected to another soul, a connection unlike anything I'd ever experienced before.

It had happened a few times now and it was no doubt getting stronger. I was sure, by now, that it wasn't my imagination.

I couldn't think of any explanation for what it could mean, except...

As a possibility for what might be causing the pull dawned on me, my wolf could not help but howl inside me. I was shocked by the realization, and my whole body started to tremble slightly in excitement.

What if... Moon Goddess, please show me your mercy... What if this was related to her?

With her necklace in my hand, I tried to slow down my breathing. I imagined what it would be like if I was able to find her on this Island. I closed my eyes and concentrated on that feeling.

Was she nearby?

I snapped my eyes open, glanced up— and saw what I thought was a familiar form disappearing around the corner about a block away.

My heart started pounding in my chest as I asked myself, "Was that... Rosalie?"

It looked like her from behind—same color of hair, same height, same build.

I knew I was almost being ridiculous, but before I could even stop myself, I started moving in that direction.

Even if I couldn't speak to her. Even if she didn't see me. Just seeing her face and knowing that it was her, that she was alive and well. that would change everything for me.

I rushed down the street, dodging around people, trying not to draw too much attention to myself. I had on a hat and sunglasses, like most people did since *we* were on a sunny island.

Just when I reached the corner, an old lady came around from the other side, and I almost plowed into her. I barely avoided crashing into her and taking her down.

"Hey, watch where you're going!" she cried out.

I stabilized her, and didn't say a word. There was no time for that. Then I ran around her, heading down the street.

I wished I could call out “Rosalie!” But I didn’t. I was still on a military mission and the last thing I wanted to do was to get my disguises blown.

I could feel that my wolf was over the moon with excitement, and I prayed to the Moon Goddess that it was her.

Then

I saw her.

She was looking in my direction now. Same hair color, same eye color, same everything.

Except she wasn’t pregnant.

And it wasn’t her.

It wasn’t Rosalie.

The *woman* looked at me for a second before she smiled, and I realized she probably wondered why I was looking at her.

I didn’t return the smile, only dropped my head and kept walking, rounding the next corner and going back to where my men were expecting me to be.

Thoped they were having better luck than I was having.

Still... in the back of my mind... I just could not stop being hopeful.

What if Rosalie really was on this island—and I saw her?

Chapter 82 It Was **Ethan’s Voice I Had Heard**

** Rosalie’s POV

A strange sensation ran through me, leaving me a bit unsettled. I looked around, not quite sure why I felt this *way*.

“Is something bothering you?” Seraphine asked, gently placing a hand on my arm to calm me.

“No, it’s nothing,” I told her, managing a smile. “I’m fine. Probably just my messy hormones.”

I turned my focus back to the spice selection at the local market. Soren would be back from his business trip tonight, and as usual, I would prepare dinner for him.

Sighing, I folded my arms and took a step back, thinking maybe I was just missing something.

Seraphine was kind enough to hold the basket for me, and at least I was able to find several of the spices needed for the special cake I was planning to make this evening.

But not all of them. I was still missing one, and until I found it, the cake wouldn't be completed.

"We can go down the street to the other store," Seraphine suggested. "There's that other little market."

I agreed

And then there was the weird feeling I'd gotten a few moments ago when I'd been outside...

I had felt like someone was watching me.

However, when I looked around, I only saw Elliott and Duke not far away from me.

Were they the ones that made me feel this *way*? I inwardly mocked myself for being too sensitive. **There was** nothing to worry about.

Soren had decided it was for the best for me to have bodyguards at all times. The situation with the war was heating up, and while he assured me it had nothing to do with him or the islands, he also said, "One could never be too careful with a baby."

So I **started to get used** to the guards, and even though I had always disliked it, whether I was in the capital or on this island.

On a positive note, at least when Soren asked me to do something, it was with a smile and an explanation. It wasn't just a gruff order. Elliot and Duke gave me space, too, unlike Samuel and the guys that Ethan had follow me around

Although it was almost sunset, the sidewalks were still crowded, and we struggled to walk next to each other. The guards slipped back to walk behind us now, making **sure we were** all right.

Normally, I liked coming to the market, but not when there **were so many** people.

A warm breeze blew by, stirring my hair— and then, in the distance, I thought I **heard someone** shouting my **name**.

It wasn't just anyone's voice I heard, though.

It was Ethan's!

I blinked for a moment, glancing at Seraphine. Strangely, I was quite certain that no one else had actually heard anything, and the sound had felt like it was going off in my head.

I froze for a second, but then, instinctively, I went to turn

to look for him.

However, before I could even get my head around, Elliott had me by the arm and was pulling me into an alleyway.

“Watch out, Miss Ro!” he shouted as a couple of kids went zooming by on their bicycles.

I stood with my back to a wall, my eyes wide. I hadn’t even seen those children coming because of the crowd. Duke went off to stop them, no one was supposed to be riding their bikes on the sidewalk, anyway.

“Are you all right?” Elliott asked me.

My heart was pounding with adrenaline, but I nodded. “I’m fine.”

“I hope I didn’t hurt you,” he said. “I’m sorry.”

“No, no, you’re fine.” I could tell he really was afraid I’d been injured, so I smiled and said, “Thank you.”

“Let me see.” Seraphine handed the basket to Elliott and started checking my wrist and my head. She seemed relieved. “She’s fine. Come on, let’s go get that spice.”

“Actually,” I said – for some reason, I was hesitant to leave the alleyway at the moment – could you get it for me really quickly? Sorry, but I’m a bit tired.”

Seraphine’s eyebrows rose for a second, but then she nodded. “Of course, dear. Just tell me what you need. I’ll be right back.”

I waited with my bodyguard, hoping my heart would stop pounding.

Part of me wished I had looked for Ethan, but the rest of me was glad I hadn’t.

If he was here. I didn’t want to know.

I was very happy to see Soren back again, and I thought he was glad to see me, too. I had gotten used to cooking for him whenever he was on the island. Dinners together were always fun.

“Here’s the surprise,” I said with a smile to Soren as I set the cake down in front of him. “Welcome back, Soren!”

I was a bit nervous. I’d been so distracted when I made it, and I had no idea how it had turned out.

“Well, look at this!” he marveled. “If this isn’t the most beautiful cake I’ve ever seen!”

I chuckled at his comment. “Soren, it doesn’t even have any decorations on it,” | pointed out. “It’s just white.”

“But the beauty is in its simplicity,” he said, raising one eyebrow at me.

I just laughed as I sat down with him.

* You’ve already *served* me a lovely dinner, and now a splendid dessert. I am spoiled, Ro—indeed, I am.”

I shook my head, “Let’s try it before you say that. Maybe it doesn’t taste very good.”

“I doubt that. I’m sure it’s delicious.”

He cut into the cake and put a huge slice on his dessert plate before he gave me one as well. Then, he took a big

bite.. and made sounds like it was the most delicious thing he’d ever eaten.

“If **heaven were** a piece of cake,” he pronounced, “I believe I have just put it in my mouth.”

“You’re so silly!” | giggled.

I put down my silverware. Soren’s eyes followed the movement, but he didn’t look surprised at me not eating the cake—my appetite had become smaller.

“If only I could have some music...” Soren commented as he worked on the dessert.

Smiling at him, I replied to my most generous employer, “Yes, Mr. Soren. What would you like to hear?”

“Anything you’d like,” he said with a smile.

T headed to the piano and then launched into a classic piece.

However, Soren put down the dessert. Before I could ask him what was wrong, he had come to sit beside me.

“Let’s play a duet,” he said.

I looked at him in astonishment. “I didn’t know you played!”

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Soren shrugged. “Not as well as you, but I know a song or two.” He began to play the opening notes of a popular duet, and with a smile on my face, I started to play along with him.

Our hands flew over the keys together, and we worked in harmony to build a beautiful tune. When it was over, I was still amazed by the wonderful music we made together.

I never knew what a pleasure it was to make music together with a peer musician. I tilted my head to look at Soren, a bit speechless in my appreciation.

“Soren, that was just absolutely beautiful!” I exclaimed, “... I don’t know what to say!”

I looked into his eyes, and he held my gaze.

Then he cleared his throat and said, “Yes. indeed! As much fun as this has been, Ro.. unfortunately, I need to

go.”

Quickly, he got up and walked toward the door.

I nodded in understanding. “Try to get some rest, though.”

I also got up to follow him, and we paused at the door.

He looked at me, hesitating for a moment, and said, “I’ll be gone for a few more days. I’ll miss you.”

My eyes widened as I thought about what the expression on his face could mean.

“Who else is going to bake me cake?” he asked, and chuckled for a moment before looking **away**.

I smiled back at his comment, but I knew I looked a bit **uneasy**.

Then he said, “Be careful.”

Something about the **way he was speaking** to me reminded me so much of Ethan, more so than **usual. I nodded**.

“I will,” I promised him.

Perhaps it was just that incident in the market that had Ethan on my mind.

He gave me a quick peck on the cheek, and then he was gone.

I was tired, but I wasn't ready for bed. I sat back down at the piano bench, but my fingers didn't fall on the keys not yet.

Soren had been acting a little differently tonight. I wasn't sure what it was all about. Also, what had happened in the marketplace earlier today kept nagging at me.

Thad heard my name shouted as clear as day, even though I was sure one one else heard it. I had never experienced anything like that before.

What's more. I was sure it was Ethan's voice I had heard.

But how was that possible? I was all the way over here on the islands, and he was back in Mirage.

Wasn't he?

I thought about him more than I ever wanted to admit. I wondered what he was doing, whether he was with Madalynn, how he was handling the war, whether he still thought of me.

Even though I had sold that necklace and decided to move on every once in a while, I wondered whether I should've stayed there and tried to convince him that it was best for my baby if he'd let me live,

None of that mattered now.

My fingers began to move over the keys, and I tried to let the music smooth my mind.

When I pressed the keys down, I realized it was the beginning of Ethan's favorite song—the one that he loved so much, and that I used to sing for him.

I stopped playing immediately, and in that moment, I had that uncanny feeling again that **someone was** watching me.

I got up from the piano and headed to the window, opening it, and leaning out. I peered into the bushes, across the garden, as far as I could see into the night. The feeling was a thousand times more powerful than it had been in the marketplace.

But I didn't see anyone.

I muttered to myself, "You're driving yourself mad, Rosalie. It's time for you to get some sleep."

I went back inside, pulled the window closed, and made sure the doors were locked. I turned off all of the lights and headed to bed.

Falling asleep was another matter entirely. Rest wasn't going to be any easier to find that night than Ethan was.

It might have been due to my strange emotions, but the baby seemed unsettled, too.

I gently touched my belly and talked to the little one inside. “Okay, okay. Don’t worry, everything will be fine. Mommy is here for you. Would a song help you, little peanut?”

My child seemed to understand my question and was still for a moment, as if it was waiting for me to start

singing

I smiled, and decided on a nursery rhyme.

Chapter 83: Will She Ever **Forgive Me?** **Ethan’s POV

After my detour to the marketplace, I met up with my men at headquarters for a full report on the intelligence they had been able to gather.

We needed to execute the mission and get out of here.

However after thinking I saw Rosalie in the **market today, I was not ready to leave** this island until I investigated some more.

Richard reported for his squad. “We saw a group of men near the docks, but we were unable to confirm for certain whether the target was one of them.”

I took that information in and nodded. “And whether they were arriving on the island or leaving may change our

plan.”

“We believe he may have been leaving,” Richard continued.

“We’ll check out the situation tomorrow morning,” I told them. “As per the plan, we are scheduled to move forward and take out the target tomorrow. However, if he’s not on the island, we’ll have to wait for his return.”

I looked around the room, and all of my men nodded in understanding.

“We still haven’t been able to get close to the mansion,” Richard added, “but we believe it is possible, despite the heavy guards. There is a large area in the back of the property which is likely our best bet.”

I nodded, giving my approval for him to move forward with his plan.

The others reported, and I listened, but I was **restless**.

The wolf within me wanted just as badly as I did to seek out our woman and our child.

Finally, evening had arrived, and I released my men to get ready for their tasks tonight. I found myself outside, walking around on the beach.

Suddenly, I felt that pull deep within me again. This time, it was even stronger than before, and I couldn't ignore

I had to follow it.

Before I knew it, I'd already followed it through the town, **between trees and** over hills, along the outskirts of other properties and homes.

I found myself standing near the complex where the target lived.

But I wasn't at the front, near the mansion. I was at the back, and the pull was stronger than it had ever been before. It was like an intense yank on my internal organs, urging me to climb the wall in front of me and find the missing pieces of *my* soul,

I took a deep breath, Richard did say the back of the **property was our** best bet— probably less security.

Since it was just me, I was confident that I could scale the wall without getting caught. Darkness was **always** helpful for a mission like this one.

I listened carefully for the patrol, and when I was **certain the coast was clear**, I made my way over the wall and found myself in a garden near a little cottage.

Whatever that was pulling me to this island was inside of that cottage.

Could it be her?

My fingers traced the necklace in my pocket.

Was it all just wishful thinking?

My heart called out to her: "Rosalie!" It had done the same in the marketplace. It had called out to her so many times since that moment when I'd seen her standing on the cliffs and feared she'd fall, only to see her plummet over the edge a moment later.

But had she really?

And then

I heard it.

The familiar sound of her laughter hit my ear first. It was faint, muffled by the cottage walls, but I would've recognized it anywhere. I was certain it was Rosalie's voice.

I felt like I'd been kicked in the stomach. All of the oxygen left my lungs, and my heart stopped beating as if it were encased in stone.

How could this be?

I stood perfectly still— waiting, listening.

A few minutes later, I heard footsteps at the cottage door and realized **someone else was in Rosalie's cottage**, and that person was leaving.

Could it be the target?!

No wonder it had been difficult for Richard and the team to find him. He wasn't in the mansion!

I strained with every single cell in my being to listen to their conversation. He was telling her goodnight—he **was** kissing her cheek.

My heart froze.

Why would Rosalie be with our enemy?

I couldn't see her from where I was standing, but I could hear them.

When he stepped down off of the porch stairs, my mind was racing at a thousand miles an hour, computing the odds that I could strike, kill the target, and get Rosalie out of there with me safely.

I was about to mindlink Richard for reinforcements and prepare my attack

But my feet were not moving.

And it had nothing to do with Rosalie.

My eyes were fixed firmly on the face of the target.

It was almost like I was staring back at my own reflection. Even in the dim light from the porch of the cottage, I could see who it was.

Soren?

My half-brother?

But What was he doing here?

It didn't make any sense.

I stood there, my mind trying to comprehend how I could be seeing him on this island.

We had confirmed intelligence that Soren was the one working with the rogue forces attacking us in the north. So how the f*ck was he also here?

My hands flew to my head as I tried to connect all the dots. He couldn't be leading the rogue forces and also be in charge of supplies for the West King, could he? That was what our intel told us was happening on these islands.

I took a deep breath and ran my hand along my jaw, thinking through the situation.

Yes, he could be doing both. Overseeing the weapons and supplies for the West King while simultaneously giving those supplies to the rogues.

He would clearly stop at nothing to defeat the East.

As I watched him walk away, one thing was certain—my half-brother Soren was definitely the target.

Anger seethed through every pore of my being. I wanted to lunge at him, to rip him limb from limb without even shifting into my wolf form. The idea that he could do this to my people, that he was the one responsible for so many senseless deaths, so many innocent lives cut short—and for what? Because he hated me?

I was so full of rage that I saw red.

What the f*ck was he doing? The East continent was also his homeland. How could he do this?

That was to say nothing of the fact that he had also stolen \my woman and child from me—my own flesh and blood.

I would most definitely kill Soren. There was no doubt in my mind this mission would be completed, one way or another.

But I realized that, if I acted at that moment, I would be doing so when I was out of control— and my attack most likely wouldn't be successful.

I needed to wait until the time was right, when I could think things through instead of acting out of anger. Otherwise, things could go badly. I owed it to my squad to stay rational.

Through the window, I saw her sit back down at the piano and play a few keys. Then she seemed to sigh and got up from the piano, walking towards the window.

My heart was beating faster with every step she took towards my direction.

She opened the window.

Thankfully, I hadn't been taking a breath at that moment, because the wind would've been knocked out of me. I saw her face clearly.

She looked so stunning, standing there with the starlight catching her hair. I had to wonder what she was looking for, gazing out the window in the middle of the night.

Could she have been looking for me?

Or maybe she was looking for him.

Once again, anger boiled up inside of me as I thought about Rosalie together with Soren. The two of them together, sheets between them, twisted and tangled, their bodies glistening as she called out his name

I almost shouted, "No!" as I stared at her from my hiding place in the rose bushes. But I said nothing.

I needed to think, and at the moment, my head wasn't clear enough to know what I needed to do.

I was simply glad to see her— to know that she was alive.

How many times had I died, knowing that she was gone? How many times had I watched her die in my mind and died right along with her, only to be revived just to do it all again? Over and over...

And here she was— alive and well..

And living on an island with the last person I would have ever imagined.

She had no idea what she'd gotten herself into, either. Soren might have appeared handsome and charming, but he was dangerous.

And as painful as the thought was, it seemed quite clear to me that Rosalie had fallen for him.

Rosalie closed the window and disappeared.

I found myself stunned and couldn't move at all. My brain was a mess at that moment, and I took a few breaths as I tried to sort through everything that had happened that night.

Then, from inside the house, I heard the familiar voice of hers, the voice I had thought I'd never hear again.

It soothed my tense nerves immediately.

I closed my eyes, letting myself indulge in the angelic melody.

It was a nursery rhyme. The melody carried to me on the island breeze like a haunting dirge, despite the sweet lyrics, and from deep within my soul, I felt a pull, a longing to enter that house and to be with those people – both of them – Rosalie and our baby.

It was as if my very core was charged with a magnetism that sought out the other piece of its whole.

The only way I'd ever feel like a complete being again was to reconnect what had been taken from me, my child.

It all made sense now.

It had been my baby, our child, pulling me closer, beckoning me to come near.

The closer I got to the baby, the larger and stronger the child grew, the stronger the pull became.

A calming sensation spread throughout my body, and I felt a wave of happiness settle over me.

As much as I wanted to burst through the door and confront her– and to save her from this awful mistake–| knew I had to be shrewd about this. I would have to take my time and make careful choices.

For *now*, I just stood there still, looking at the dark window, imagining how she was singing in the room. Knowing she was alive was a blessing already.

It would be too greedy to ask for any more at this moment. Impatience would lead to my destruction.

And then there was how badly I had treated her.

Was there any *way* that she could ever forgive me? And if not... What should I do?

Chapter 84 I'm Sorry, But **You've Got the Wrong Person**

I couldn't put the operation or my men's lives in danger. We were in enemy territory, after all. I decided to end the mission and go back to our base to plan out our next move.

But as I retreated, I knew one thing was for certain. I would get Rosalie back.

I had to wonder, though: how would she react when she saw me again–knowing what I had intended to do to **her**?

Was there any way that she could ever forgive me?

And if not... What would I do?

Night after night, I ventured back to Rosalie's garden, lurking within the shadows of the thick canopy, hoping for something— anything to let me know again what I **saw was real**.

Even though Soren was on the island at the moment, he had proven more than capable of protecting himself so far. We had to adjust our schedule. My men would continue to infiltrate the property and perfect our operation plan, and I just had to find a way to get him to slip up. Every man had his **weakness**.

Richard's report said that they expected Soren to leave again for a few more days. We would have to wait at least until the next time he returned.

So we wouldn't move forward with the plan tonight.

'You're not coming with us?' Richard asked through the mindlink.

'No. Take the others and do another perimeter sweep.' Soren wasn't here, and the patrol wasn't being as thorough as usual. I had no doubt that Richard could handle it by himself.

I stayed in the shadows outside of her garden. My eyes automatically searched for her, longing to see her once **more**.

Thad spent most nights around Rosalie's house ever since I found out she was still alive. The desire to be close to her was strong, and I would continue to return every night, if I had to, until I was able to have her within my arms once more.

And tonight, I was prepared to do it again.

The warmth of her laughter filling the air spurred a desire in me to erase all distance between us.

Standing at the tree line, I watched as Soren exited the cottage, and climbed into his car. His presence alone caused my jaw to clench. I wanted him gone, but now was not the time.

Especially not when Rosalie was present.

"Good night!" her *sweet* voice called out, and I wished bitterly that I was the one she was talking to.

My eyes chased her figure. She wore a white dress, with her hair cascading down upon her shoulder. Even from that far *away*, I found myself amazed by her natural beauty.

The desire to run to her now and take her away from the place grew, but I knew I could not afford to scare her

away again. I couldn't allow myself to cause her pain anymore.

She didn't deserve that after everything she had been through.,

I hid in the shadows. Just seeing her from far away, knowing that she was still in this world, meant more than anything to me.

However, if Soren had her here, it wasn't without reason. Innocent as she was, she couldn't recognize the danger she was really in.

From deep within the forest, I moved forward slowly. Even being just a step closer to her made me and my wolf unbelievably joyful.

Disappointment filled me as I watched her step back into her room. I was aware she would probably head to bed soon, and it meant I would not be able to lay my eyes on her gorgeous face again. At least, not for the rest of this evening.

As the light in the house turned off, a sigh of exhaustion left my lips.

Talso needed to head back to get some sleep. I was here on a mission, and I could not allow myself any room for mistakes due to tiredness.

Once again, I prepared to depart from Rosalie's Cottage. But my wolf seemed to sense something different in the air. The salty kiss of the sea blew in our favor, bringing us the protection of darkness.

Would tonight be any different from previous nights?

I gave the house another glance.

And then, as if the Moon Goddess had heard my wishes, Rosalie opened the back door.

Having seen her many times only through the windows for a few days, I found myself in utter disbelief at how much my child had grown within her. The round swell of her belly taunted me.

"You give me no rest, little one," she softly murmured as her delicate fingers ran circles over her stomach. "Perhaps, a song will soothe you?"

T held my breath. She spoke to our unborn child in such a soft, motherly tone. It mesmerized me, and I found *myself* captivated by the angelic moment.

I wanted to scream at myself for the mistakes I'd made due to my poor judgment. How could I ever **have been** afraid that she wouldn't be a good mother? How could I have conceived of that horrendous plan, wanting her out of my life after her service to me?

My throat tightened as I thought of my past.

She was perfect, and I had been a complete fool.

It wasn't long before a *sweet* song filled the air, its lyrics pulling me back to the first time I heard her voice. I had found myself in shock back then, and I was hypnotized by her again now.

I watched her gracefully glide toward the garden swing. The shimmering light of the moon cast an angelic glow around her. One could swear that, the more she sang, the brighter the moon's aura around her grew.

It felt as if she was actually gifted with powers from the Goddess herself.

Then, I heard her sing one of the songs that I heard when we were back at Drogomor. My favorite song. She used to sing that for me.

Did she still think of me? Was that why she sang this song?

Closing my eyes, I pictured her petite figure sitting on the white marbled piano stool, her soft hair hanging loosely over her shoulders as the long delicate touch of her fingers danced along the keys.

Time stopped the moment her sweet voice rose through the air.

It was as if the goddess herself was singing, and the world rejoiced in her presence.

As much as I wished to stay in that moment, I was always brought back to reality by the downward spiral of guilt boring down on me.

That failed Rosalie before, and that understanding swarmed in my chest.

To think Rosalie swam in pain and anguish, barely able to keep her head above water, all because of what I had done to her.

My betrayal almost killed her, and our child.

The past few days, I had studied and gathered information. It was all to prepare me— for her.

I would do everything in my power to fix the pain I had caused her. I would do everything in my might to make amends with Rosalie, and prove to her I wasn't the man she thought I was.

As if I had lost all my senses, I glanced around the area in which she rested.

My eyes widened as I realized that she was alone, alone, and unprotected.

'Where are her guards?' My question rang loud and clear through the mindlink.

‘One stands at the front gate to the north, and the other two circle the far side of the perimeter every forty minutes. They should be rotating again in fifteen.’

Standing stiffly, I glanced at the watch on my wrist.

Fifteen minutes. I had fifteen minutes of waiting, and then I could move.

I told myself I shouldn’t approach her. I should wait and make sure that my presence wouldn’t scare her.

But seeing her now. I couldn’t hold myself back.

The urge to wrap her in my arms and never let her go overpowered every one of my logical thoughts. The memories of the day I thought I lost her had haunted me for so long, and now that she was within my grasp once more, I had to take a chance.

All I wanted was five minutes of her time.

Five minutes to ask her why she did it. To tell her that I was sorry.

A lot of things could happen in five minutes, and even though I doubted I would be able to get her to leave with me tonight, the hope still lingered.

As the figure of one of those guards circled around towards the back of the cottage. I let my feet guide me further back into the shadows to blend in with my surroundings.

I never imagined that I would ever be stalking the shadows to meet a woman– and yet here I was, waiting for the opportune moment I could approach Rosalie without alerting her security detail.

The guard cleared the corner of the building and disappeared from sight. A sigh left my lips. I had not been discovered... and that meant that my next destination was her.

My eyes fell to Rosalie once more. Never in my life had I wanted more desperately to correct a mistake as I did in that moment.

She constantly changed the way I saw things, and now I knew that my own ignorance had clouded my view of how special she really was.

Refusing to waste another second, I breached my secure location and eased my way towards the garden area where Rosalie was sitting. I could see the smile stretched across her lips as she relaxed on the swing.

Never once did her gaze meet mine.

I couldn’t believe how easily someone could attack her right now. She would be completely oblivious to their approach.

As much as I wanted to lash out at the thought of how easily she could be hurt, I knew that I couldn't approach Rosalie in such a manner. This wasn't about me, after all.

It was about her, and how much pain I had caused her.

There was no telling the lies Soren had planted in Rosalie's head. But I would work everyday if I had to, to **reassure** her of how sorry I was. To show her she could trust me again.

No longer did my thoughts dwell on her death. Now, they swirled with questions about how she was alive and why she had left me.

"Rosalie..." the feeling of her name on my lips was foreign, and yet the simplicity of it brought comfort to me in some way.

Rosalie spun to face me— her eyes wide in shock and tinged with fear.

In a natural defensive instinct, her delicate fingers wrapped around the swell of her belly, shielding it from my eyes. She seemed terrified, taking hesitant steps back.

I tried to reach for her, but I pulled myself back from doing so. I needed to give her some space—at least for now.

"I'm not here to hurt you," I whispered softly.

In my attempt to show her I was sincere, I held my hands up slowly and kept my distance from her.

The last thing I wanted was to spook her, but the closer I got to her, the more overwhelmed I felt.

With my child growing inside her, their scents had mixed over time, and that intoxicating aroma was something my wolf and I never wanted to let go of.

She took a few deep breaths. Her expression changed from shocking to sorrow

—And then to indifference.

My heart sank.

Then I heard her say, "I'm sorry, but you've got the wrong person."

Chapter 85 Rosalie, Please Come Back To Me

****Rosalie's POV**

This had to be a dream.

That was what I told myself as I looked into his eyes, which shone with a depth of emotion I had never before **seen**.

There was no way in the world that I was awake and this was real. He couldn't really be standing here, in the shadows in the garden outside of my cottage near Soren's house. There were simply too many guards for even someone of his skill to have managed to have gotten in here.

And what had he said?

"I'm not here to hurt you."

It could not be Ethan, I told myself. I needed to shut off my crazy emotions and wake up.

"I'm sorry, but you've got the wrong person." Please, just go away, I prayed.

I couldn't allow myself to be hurt by him, even if it was just a dream.

"I know it's you, Rosalie. Come with me!" His voice was trembling.

When had I ever heard him speak like this?

I remained silent. but I knew I wanted to go to him.

"Rosalie..." he murmured, and I could almost hear pleading in his tone.

I shook my head. Pleading was the last thing I could ever imagine Ethan doing. So this had to be a dream.

"Rosalie...please, come back to me." he said again, and it was like someone had cast a spell on me— I couldn't help but move toward him, especially now that I had accepted that I must've gone to sleep after dinner.

"Is that really you, Ethan?" I asked, moving closer to the person in my dream. Maybe, just this once, I would let myself imagine that he wasn't cold and cruel.

"It's me, Rosalie..."

He said my name again, and the way that it rolled off of his tongue sounded so real, I couldn't help but bury my head in his neck as he pulled me tight.

He even smelled real. The scent of pine and the forest filled my lungs with each breath as I ran my hands along his muscular back.

His hands grazed my shoulders, stroking my hair, and I felt tears in my eyes. I longed for him to hold me. What was the harm when this was only a dream?

“Rosalie, I’ve missed you so much,” Ethan said into my ear. “We have so much to talk about.”

That doesn’t sound like something a person would say if this was simply a romantic dream.

While he continued to caress me, I reached around him and pinched myself on the arm.

It hurt.

This **wasn’t a dream! I was awake!**

I snapped my eyes open.

Ethan! He was here.

I felt fear rushing through me.

What in the world did he want from me?

Immediately, I pushed him away and, leaped back away from him, my arms wrapping around my baby.

“Ethan!” I said, my tone accusatory. “Why *are* you here?”

“Shhh...” He pulled me into his arms again, and caressed my hair. He looked around to see if anyone **had heard me**.

But he was making me angry.

He’d been back in my life all of two minutes, and he was already ordering me around.

“Why did you come?” I asked him. “Are you here to take my baby?”

“No!” he said, and I could see by the hurt in his eyes that he meant it. “Rosalie, no... I would never...”

He stopped talking, which didn’t surprise me. He was never one for expressing himself. Still, I had to ask him...

“Are you here to kill me, then?”

I knew how he treated people who went against him.

Ethan’s eyes nearly bulged from his head. He took a step back, and it looked as if I had physically injured him.

Shaking his head, he said, “No, Rosalie. I came all of this way to see you. I knew there was no way that you would ever harm our baby. I had to find you. I had to—”

Before he could finish, I heard footsteps coming in our direction. Ethan clearly did, too.

Regardless of why he was here, my instinct told me that no one should see him. Even though a part of me *wanted* to sell him out, to alert Soren’s guards that a strange man was standing in my garden, I couldn’t do that. Not until I had gotten the opportunity to hear him out anyway.

“*You* have to go!” I urged him, not even knowing why I was doing it.

It was clear that he understood that, but his feet weren’t moving.

“I *have* to see you again, Rosalie,” he said. It was the closest thing to a request that I’d ever heard come out of his mouth,

The footsteps *were* growing closer, and I distinctly heard the sound of Soren laughing. Ethan’s face wrinkled into a grimace. It *made me wonder* if he knew Soren, if they had some bad blood, but now wasn’t the time for me to find out

“Go!” I said again

“Rosalie,” he insisted. “I *have* to see you again,”

“Fine!” I said, my eyes wide.

“And you won’t tell him anything?”

“No. Now, go!”

I could plainly see the pure joy in his eyes.

“Are you still awake, Ro?”

I spun around to see Soren coming around the side of the cottage. I rushed over to meet him, hoping I could cut him off before he saw Ethan. Since Ethan was wearing all black and had been standing in the shadows, there was a chance he’d get away before Soren could see him.

“Yes, Soren.”

I was used to Soren stopping by late at night. However, it hadn’t happened often lately.

“Were you talking to someone?” he asked with a smile.

“Oh, you know me,” I said, smiling back and trying to keep calm. “Just talking to the baby.” I patted my stomach.

“You sounded... upset,” he told me, looking around. I noticed he had a beautiful pink chrysanthemum in his hand.

“Upset? Huh? Oh, no. Just the little booger kicked me right in the ribs. I was sitting in the swing talking about how excited I was to meet my baby, and bam, right in the ribcage. You probably heard me say, ‘Oooh!’” I tried to make it sound the same as when I’d told Ethan to go.

Perhaps changing the subject would help?

“Is that for me?” I reached for the flower.

“Oh, yeah.” Soren was definitely distracted. He was spinning around, looking at every shadow, sniffing the air. “I saw it on my way home from your house. It’s so beautiful. The pink reminded me of the shade your cheeks turn when you blush.”

“That’s so sweet of you!” I gushed.

He wasn’t standing still long enough for me to actually take the flower from him. I moved a few times to step in front of him. We probably looked ridiculous to his bodyguards, who were hanging back a few steps, as we did a strange waltz around the flower garden.

“Soren?”

“I’m sorry!” he said, extending the flower to me. “I’m so distracted. Here you go, gorgeous. In fact, let me put it in your hair.”

He broke the stem off and slipped the flower behind my ear, taking a moment to situate it just so. His fingertips grazed *my* cheek, and I felt a tingle go down my spine.

It might’ve been exciting, and I might have even wondered whether I wanted more from Soren than just our friendship, if I hadn’t just seen Ethan...

Now, I couldn’t even let myself think about any of that, with anyone.

Not right now

“Thank you,” I said, smiling at him. “That really was very kind of you, to come all the way back over here. But you mentioned at dinner that you had a lot of meetings tomorrow. Shouldn’t you be getting home? You need your rest if you’re going to be on top of your negotiations tomorrow.

He chuckled. “Yes, you’re right, I do. But... was there a skunk out here or something earlier?”

“A skunk?” I asked, staring at him. “What are you talking about?”

“It doesn’t smell like a skunk exactly, but more like a skunky wolf. A stinky... horrific. awful wolf with mange or something.”

I could only look at him and try not to give anything away.

Had he figured out that Ethan was here earlier?

Of course, I thought Ethan smelled wonderful, but I wasn't another dominant male.

"I don't smell anything," I told him, but that wasn't quite true. Ethan's scent did linger in the air a bit, and if I inhaled deeply enough, I could still smell him.

I could certainly still feel his touch on my body from where he'd been holding me.

"Well, I think we need to plant some more fragrant flowers around here tomorrow. **There must be some** skunkweed or wild onions growing over here." He flipped his arm around toward the bushes, like any one of them might be the culprit.

"Soren," I said, giggling. "All of these flowers smell wonderful, and there are plenty of them."

He shrugged. "Something out here smells rotten."

"I was the only one here..." I suggested, but that just made him laugh.

"*You?* You smell like a fresh, spring rain, Ro. It's definitely not you. All right. I'll go. But you should go inside in case there's something lurking around here."

"I will," I promised him. "My guards are nearby."

"Maybe it's them!" he joked. He was still laughing when he kissed my cheek for the second time that night and said goodbye.

Soren was so fun-loving and good-natured. He was the exact opposite of Ethan.

Ethan.

I stood outside for a few more minutes, waiting to see if he'd come back out.

But he didn't.

Was it possible I'd dreamt him up? Maybe he was a figment of my imagination, and he hadn't really been there at all. I had been under a lot of stress lately.

No, he was there. I had seen him. I'd pinched myself and confirmed that I was still **awake**.

"Ethan," I whispered— not to summon him, but just to feel his name on my mouth.

He didn't come out, but he didn't have to. I'd told him I'd talk to him again, so I knew he'd come back eventually. Whether I liked it or not.

Chapter 86: Would He Ever Come Back?

I walked through the garden for a few moments, looking around the bigger hedges and bushes, trying to find Ethan, but I didn't see him anywhere.

It was like he had vanished from my life again.

With a hand over my baby, I walked back home and went inside, closing the door behind me.

It seemed so lonely inside now. Not long ago, Soren and I had been sitting at the table eating dinner, laughing, and having a good conversation about our day. Now, the entire house seemed still and quiet.

"What was Ethan even doing here?" | asked myself aloud. I had no idea.

He said he'd come there to see me, but why?

How did he even figure out where I was?

I wanted to talk to Ethan again. I wanted to find him and make him sit down and answer a thousand questions.

But that wasn't going to happen.

I lay backward on my bed and stared up at the ceiling, wondering if I'd ever even see him again. There was a chance he would just go back home. Perhaps all he wanted was to see me, and now that he had, now that he knew that I was alive, he would just turn around and head right back to Madalynn's open arms.

Madalynn... and her ring.

I decided there was nothing more I could do, so I got ready for bed.

However, In my restless dreams, I kept seeing Ethan again but not being able to speak to him.

When I woke up, I couldn't stop thinking about him.

Seraphine was there to check my vitals, and Lola was tidying up the cottage. We were all friends, but I knew | couldn't talk to them about this. I couldn't risk them finding out the truth about my past.

Thad left that all behind.

Or at least, I thought I had.

“Ro?” Seraphine asked as she put her stethoscope back in her midwife bag. “Are you okay? I’m done checking the baby, and you usually ask me a thousand questions. Today you’re just staring off into space.”

“Oh. I’m sorry.” I shook my head, smiling at her. “I guess I’m just distracted this morning.”

“Everything all right?” she asked me, and I knew from the twinkle in her eye that she was prying. “I know you had dinner with Soren last night.”

I made a face at her. “*We’re* just friends,” I reminded her. I ran a hand over my belly. “Everything is okay with the baby?”

“Yes, of course,” she said. “It really won’t be that long now.”

I didn’t know how that made me feel. Was I ready to give birth?

An image of me lying in bed, pushing out my child with Seraphine’s help, came to mind. The fuzzy form of a man next to me came into view, but I wasn’t quite sure who he was—was it Ethan, or Soren?

I imagined that the experience would be very different based on who it was next to me. Soren would be so supportive. He’d probably manage to make it fun. Ethan, on the other hand... would he even be paying attention to me?

“Don’t worry, dear,” Seraphine said, sitting down next to me. “I know giving birth is never easy, but you’ll be just fine. I’ll be there with you every step of the way. Do you have questions about how it will go?”

I blinked a few times, trying to get the images out of my mind. “Oh, no. I think I’ll be alright.”

“Well, if you have questions, let me know. Your baby is healthy, and you’re young and strong. I’m sure this will be a perfectly normal birth where everything will go as planned, and before long, you will have your child with you to cherish and enjoy.”

I smiled at her, and she got up to go finish packing her bag. I knew she had some other patients to see that day. I had other things to do as well.

Soren had business, and I needed to check the house.

I was also working on a baby blanket that I needed to hurry and finish, or it wouldn’t be done in time for the arrival.

When evening fell, I went outside to pick some flowers. At least, that was what I told myself I was doing... but honestly, I was looking for him..

I was looking for Ethan.

I chastised myself for even leaving the comfort of my own home. How had he managed to reduce me to this **state** again? I had come so far, only to be thrust back into this foolishness!

I was like a teenage girl, pining after a boy.

“Ethan?” I called a few times, but he didn’t answer. Sol cut some flowers and went back inside.

Lola was still there. She smiled at me as I came in. “Do you need a vase, Miss Ro?”

“That would be wonderful. Thank you,” I told her, still distracted.

Why had he even bothered to come here if he wasn’t going to talk to me?

“Here you go,” Lola said, and I thanked her as I took the vase full of water from her.

My eyes were focused out the window as I went to set the vase on a table. It slipped from my hands and

shattered all over the floor, spilling water all over my shoes.

“Oh, no!” I said as Lola also cried out. “I’m so sorry.”

“It’s okay, Miss Ro. Let me get a broom and mop. Pregnancy can make your grip weaker than normal.”

She hurried off to get the tools she needed to clean up my mess, and I backed away from the glass and water.

When Lola returned, I reached for the broom. “Let me help.”

“No, no,” she said, waving me off. “You could hurt yourself. I’ll get it, Miss Ro.”

I didn’t want to injure myself, though I felt awful that I’d created such a mess for her to have to clean up.

I just wasn’t thinking straight. I was a danger to myself and others...

as

Another night passed, and I still didn’t see Ethan.

I spent the next day in the garden, looking for any sign of him while I pretended to prune the trees, but I didn’t see any trace. No footprints, no lingering scent, no evidence that he’d come back.

I was beginning to think that perhaps he hadn’t actually come to see me at all.

By the third day after he'd shown up in my garden, I had decided I just needed to get on with my life. **Whatever it** was that had brought Ethan back into my life for those few fleeting moments, he'd gotten it. Now that he had what he wanted, he was gone again.

I sat in the baby's nursery, sewing the blanket, staring at nothing as Seraphine organized the drawers of clothing we'd purchased.

"I just love baby clothes," she said from her spot on the floor. She was humming a lullaby, one I loved to play on the piano.

I didn't say anything in response. Her words barely **registered**.

"You know, I've helped a lot of first-time mothers over the years, and it always turns out just fine."

I looked at her and smiled, but I couldn't bring myself to make even the smallest pleasant remark in response.

"One time, I was tending to a young mother a few years ago, and she was so nervous! She was a couple years younger than you, but not nearly as mature, and... experienced when it comes to the ups and downs of life."

I imagined that was Seraphine's nice way of saying this mother hadn't been through as much as I had. My head rocked back and forth as I acknowledged I understood.

"That mama was so scared to give birth, she was practically ready to push before **she even acknowledged that** she was in labor! Her husband thought she was going to give birth on the living room floor because she wouldn't go to the bedroom!" She laughed at the memory and patted her leg. "But even with all her apprehension, everything went just fine, and she gave birth to a beautiful baby girl."

"That's nice," I said, just trying to be polite.

I wished I could be more in tune with what Seraphine was saying, but I just couldn't focus. I kept thinking about Ethan, wondering why he had come if he didn't even want to speak to me.

With my mind on other things, the needle slipped, and the point went into my finger.

"Ouch!" A few bright spots of blood rolled off. I moved my finger just in time to keep them from falling onto the blanket.

"Let me get you a bandage," Seraphine said, getting up. "Dear, you really are distracted."
"Thank you, Seraphine," I said, setting my sewing aside and wrapping my finger.

With the bandage on, I decided I was done sewing for the time being.

I was also done wondering about Ethan. Even if I spent a thousand years trying to figure out what the man was thinking, I would never succeed, and I was only torturing myself trying to guess what he was up to.

It was like he'd just come back for a little more torture— one more knife to my heart.

“Miss Ro,” Lola came back and asked me, “Mr. Soren is coming back tomorrow night. Do you need me to get any ingredients for meal preparation?”

I sighed and decided to look forward to that. I spent the day thinking about what I would make him for dinner.

However, after everyone had gone home at night, I went about my normal nighttime routine, and just before I got ready to put on my pajamas, I decided to step outside for a breath of fresh air— at least, that was what I told myself.

The air was chilly for the island, and the night sky was overcast. I stood by the porch for a moment, just staring off into nothing, like I had been for most of the last three days.

I was just about to go inside when I heard rustling in the bushes.

I didn't even dare to say his name. Rather, I walked over and took a closer look, peering between the branches. But there was nothing there.

Frustrated, I turned around to walk inside.

And ran headfirst into a wall, which smelled musky.

Chapter 87 Ethan...Apologized?!

“Ouch!” I took a step backward, rubbing my forehead, trying to sort out in my mind what had just happened.

“I'm sorry, Rosalie!” he whispered, and for a moment, I thought I had to be mistaken.

I thought it was Ethan I had run into.

It smelled like him.

It felt like him.

When I glanced up at him through my eyelashes, it looked like him.

But when I heard those *two* words come from between his lips, I thought I had to be mistaken, and Soren must've come back early from his trip.

There was no way in the world that Ethan would've told me he was sorry about anything.

"Are you all right?" he asked me, still keeping his voice quiet.

I pulled my hand away from my forehead and gazed at him. The moonlight fell over him like a lighthouse beacon, calling me home.

I couldn't allow myself to fall for this siren's song.

"Y—yes. I'm okay," I grumbled in a low voice. "Not that you care." I was just glad I'd whipped around head first and hadn't hit my baby bump against his muscular physique. "Why are you here?"

His eyes widened as if he was hurt by my question.

"I came to see you," he said, moving toward me.

"Don't!"

I put up my hand and took a step back, and he didn't move any closer to me. "I don't understand why you're here at all, Ethan."

He sighed. "Rosalie, all that time, everyone was trying to convince me that you and the baby were dead, but I knew in my heart that you weren't. I had to see for myself that you weren't."

I folded my arms under my chest. "Well, you've seen it. Here we are. Not dead."

He pressed his lips together, and I saw his jaw flex, which let me know he was debating how to respond. "You've changed, Rosalie."

"Yes, I have, for the better." I replied. "Now that your mission is accomplished, could you please leave?"

"Rosalie is that truly what you want?"

His voice was deep and low, as if he was unsure of what to do. When was Ethan ever unsure of anything?

His question had an air of finality about it I wasn't sure I was ready for, but I had already spent a great deal of the day deciding that I was ready to move on.

So I went with it.

"Yes," I told him. "As you **can see, I have a new life here. I have a home. I have a job. I have friends.**" I paused and looked him in the eye. "I have people who are kind to me and treat me with respect."

His expression was pained. I saw him wince a little when I said those words.

I continued, though. I wasn't through. I could feel all of the anger I'd been carrying around with me since I'd first found out his plan.

"If you didn't come here to hurt me, and you just **wanted to see** that I am alive, then you've gotten what you came for, and you should go. Consider everything settled between us."

I rarely spoke that much at once, but I had to spit it all out; otherwise, I may not have the courage to say any of these words to him again.

"Or if you have other business here on the islands, go ahead and finish it. But you **have no reason** to come back **here to see me**. Ever again."

Thad tears in my eyes when I finished speaking, but I blinked them away. I didn't want him to see me cry. I didn't want him to know I wasn't one hundred percent sure of my words.

I didn't want him to know a part of me wanted to throw *myself* back into his arms the way I had the night **before** when I'd assumed that I was dreaming.

Ethan stared at me for a long moment, and I expected him to yell at me, ordering me to do something. But to my surprise, when he spoke, his voice was calm and soft.

"Rosalie, I can see on your face that you don't mean what you're saying. You still have feelings for me. If you can truly tell me that you've moved on, and you don't want to be with me, that you'd rather be with that other guy... fine. I'll leave you the h*ll alone. But I don't think you mean a word coming out of your mouth."

"I do," I said. But my words were not spoken with the conviction I meant them to be.

A small, melancholy smile pulled at the corners of his mouth.

"I've heard the songs you sing when you think you're alone. I've seen the way you look out the window and how your eyes traced the bushes. I see the way you're looking at me now."

He took a breath.

"I don't blame you for hating me, Rosalie. I don't blame you for being scared. But if you'll give me another opportunity, I promise you, I'll show you that I am truly sorry for the mistakes I've made, and I'll make it up to

you."

I stared at him for a long moment, dumbfounded, as I contemplated what I'd just heard.

For the second time in one day, I had heard Alpha Ethan say he was sorry. It was a lot to process.

And I clearly wasn't processing it very well.

"You're sorry?" I asked him. "You're sorry?!"

I felt the anger welling up inside of me, and like a dormant volcano that had held onto too much pressure for too long, all of my rage suddenly erupted to the surface.

"Oh, well, since you're sorry, I'll just go ahead and drop everything that I've got going on here, and do **whatever** you'd like!"

"Rosalie," he said, looking down at the ground and shaking his head.

"No, Ethan! I heard you say you were sorry, and I just want to make sure that I acknowledge that completely. Because as long as you're sorry, and you express that in a haphazard way, in passing, as simply as possible, I'm willing to go back with you and be your breeder, your thing on the side, while you marry that other woman, and go on with the privileged life that you deserve—because you're sorry!"

"Rosalie, I'm here because I want to be with you. Madalynn means nothing to me. You know that."

His arms were out in front of him, as if he couldn't believe I would be worried about such a thing.

"Really? You mean to tell me you're going to drop the responsibility King James and your pack have placed upon you to marry Madalynn so that you can be with me?"

"I will do it for you," he said, his eyes locked on mine.

I wanted to believe him. I truly did.

"No, you won't! You will never abandon your responsibilities, Ethan. I know that."

I took a deep breath, and then continued without thinking.

"Isn't it bad enough that you've snuck off behind your beloved fiancée's back to find me?"

He was surprised by what I said, and shook his head. "What? No, I don't love her—"

Then his forehead furrowed. It was clear he didn't know what I was talking about.

He asked me carefully, "Rosalie, did you

misunderstand something?"

“Your insignia ring,” I said, my hands on my hips. “I know how important your family ring is to you, yet she’s the one wearing it.”

Ethan finally seemed to understand what I was saying.

I heard him chuckle, pressing a hand to his forehead. He was still worried, but I could tell he was a little relieved.

Once again, I felt like I was going to erupt and spew a violent pile of volcanic ash all over him.

“Rosalie,” he said, dropping his hand. “That was strategic. Yes, you’re right. She does have my ring. I’m not sure how you know that, but it’s true. I had to give it to her in order to find out some information for the war. It’s complicated, and I don’t want to go into the details, but trust me, I didn’t give it to her because I have feelings for her. If anything, I’ve grown to loathe her even more since you left— if that’s even possible.”

That wasn’t the answer I expected. My cheeks heated up as I realized I’d scolded him based on what were apparently false assumptions.

“That doesn’t change anything..” I tried to keep my face indifferent to what he was saying, as if I didn’t believe him, as if I didn’t care—but inside, I felt as if my heart was just learning to beat again.

Was there a chance *we* could be together after all?

Would he really consider choosing me over Madalynn— even though that wasn’t what King James wanted for

the pack?

“Listen, Rosalie,” Ethan continued, and I thought for a moment I saw a hint of pain in the crinkles around his eyes, you know me well enough to know I won’t beg for something that doesn’t belong to me. If you’ve moved on, you’re no longer interested in being with me, or you no longer have feelings for me, I won’t interfere in your life anymore. You’ll never, ever see me or hear from me again.”

Once again, I felt tears stinging my eyes. But I was not the same girl that I used to be, and I was strong enough to fight them off.

“But, Rosalie... If you still have feelings for me, if you still have a tiny place in your heart for me, I won’t give up. Have you forgotten the final words you left for me?”

I raised an eyebrow. “What are you talking about, Ethan?”

Your letter, Rosalie,” he said, his eyes glinting in the moonlight. “Don’t you remember what you wrote in your letter?”

Of course, I remembered what I'd written in my letter, but when I'd written those words, thought that I would never see Ethan in my lifetime. I expressed my true feelings for him. I had selfishly hoped that he would never get over me.

I felt my face threatening to flush, and did my best to fight it.

His gaze was so heavy on my face that I couldn't keep my eyes off of him for long. When I looked at him again, he slowly pulled something out of his pocket.

I recognized it before he showed it to me. "I didn't give Madalynn my ring as a token of affection, but I gave this to you because I wanted you to wear it and think about how much you mean to me. I wanted you to have a piece of me near your heart—always."

My sight became blurry with tears.

"I can't blame you for wanting to get rid of it, but I'm asking you to take it back now. Rosalie, can I put this necklace back where it belongs— next to your heart?"

Chapter 88 Ethan, Do You Know Soren?

**Ethan's POV

I stood there with the necklace extended, waiting for Rosalie to tell me whether or not she would accept it. She just stood in the moonlight, and she didn't move.

Thad never seen her as angry as she was a minute ago, when she had yelled at me and told me how she had felt about things back then.

I certainly couldn't blame her. She had every right to be mad at me. In fact, she should've been even angrier than she was. If it had been me in her shoes, I would've been cursing and probably attacked the person before me. The fact that Rosalie only yelled and didn't punch me was a testament to her good nature.

But I saw in her eyes as she stared at me, looking from the necklace that she sold to my face and back again, that she was not ready to accept my apology.

She was not ready to forgive me, and I shouldn't have expected her to.

It was wrong of me to assume that she could move on so quickly after what I did. After all, I was going to have her put to death after our baby was born.

Not only was I going to end her life, but I was also going to sentence our child to a life without their mother.

I suddenly felt the very real possibility that she might refuse me.

With this realization, I was stricken with panic. I needed to do something before she could turn me down.

“Rosalie,” I say, withdrawing the necklace, “you don’t have to decide right now. I recognize that it’s too soon. I’m sorry that I put so much pressure on you to give me an answer immediately. That wasn’t fair of me. I will give you the time you need and deserve to decide... but I would like to continue to see you.”

Again, before she could say anything I was afraid to hear, I added, “Please.”

“Who are you?” she finally said, her brow furrowed. “The Ethan I know would’ve never, ever apologized twice in the same night.”

I looked down at the ground, rubbing the toe of my shoe into the soft soil of the garden for a moment, not sure how to respond to that.

She was right. I didn’t think I’d ever apologized to anyone else the way I had her that evening.

“I’ve changed too, Rosalie. Maybe not toward everyone, but I’ve changed toward you.”

The skeptical look on her face was visible even in the dim light of the moon that illuminated her hair and made her look even more lovely than usual. She made a noise in the back of her throat, a mix between a grunt and a moan.

I wanted to move forward and touch her, but I held back, knowing she wouldn’t like that.

“I know it will take you some time to forgive me, Rosalie. Overhearing what you did, knowing what I planned to do...”

I couldn’t even get the words out. I could only look down at the ground again and wish I had made better choices in my past.

“I can hardly forgive myself. I wouldn’t expect you to simply brush it aside and pretend it never happened.”

“I can’t,” she said, and I respect her honesty. “What you were going to do was—” She began to tear up, and stopped talking.

“It was heartless,” I supplied for her.

“It was cruel.” Her head rocked back and forth in agreement.

“I’m sorry.” That was all I could say.

She looked away. When she spoke again, her words were unsure.

“And now.. you want me to give up everything I have here and just go back to the same place I was before? The same life?”

I shook my head. “No, it wouldn’t be the same. I can promise you that. I’m not the same.”

“Why should I believe you?” she asked, still skeptical.

I sighed. I knew it wouldn’t be easy, but at least she was willing to give me the chance to explain.

I tried to make myself sound as gentle as possible. “You shouldn’t believe me.”

Her eyes flew wide open with surprise. “Do not take me at my word, but let me prove it to you through my actions.”

She didn’t respond, only looked at me quietly, so I continued, “You should take as much time as you need to do that.

She finally asked, “how are you going to prove it to me?”

Luckily, I already had my answer. “With your help,” I said.

“My help?” She was even more skeptical.

“Yes. I want to learn more about you so that I can give you what you want,” I told her. “I want to hear everything about your new life.”

It pained me to think about how her eyes had lit up when she spoke about Soren earlier, but I needed to show her I could control my anger, and that I was interested in whatever made her happy.

“If at any point you decide you’re done, that you’ve made up your mind, and you are through with me... I’ll go away.”

It ripped at my heart to even say such a thing, but I knew that I would do it if I had to.

Somehow

But I couldn’t allow that to happen. I’d have to find a way to prove to her that I was the right one for her, and that, if she loved me once, she could love me again. I never, ever wanted to go back to the pain I’d felt before when I thought that she was gone.

Even thinking about it made my heart ache, despite the fact that she was standing right in front of me.

I could hardly even believe that she was here, that I could stretch out my arms and—but I still couldn't reach her. I couldn't touch her.

Because she wasn't mine.

"I don't want to have to have that conversation with you, Ethan," she said, her voice just a whisper. "What if you get mad? You would probably kill me..."

My heart broke into a thousand pieces knowing what she thought of me. And the sad fact was, I couldn't blame her for saying that. She didn't know the power she had over me.

But the most urgent thing right now was to think of a way around her doubt.

I shook my head. "No. If you decide you don't want to see me anymore, then keep the window closed."

She looked at me, a little bit confused.

"If the window is open, I'll know you still want to see me, but if it's closed, I'll go away. It's as simple as that." | spoke in the gentlest voice, as if approaching a frightened deer. "Would you do that for me?"

It took her a moment, but then Rosalie nodded.

"I suppose so. I'm just... nervous, Ethan. I don't want to get hurt by you again. It's taken me a long time to be able to move on. Now, I'm here, and I've started over. If you find a way to suck me back into your world and end up breaking my heart again. I'm not sure I'd survive. But then... I'm also not sure that would matter to you."

"Of course it would matter to me, Rosalie." I looked her straight into the eyes as I spoke. "You and the baby mean more to me than anything."

After letting out a loud sigh, she finally said, "Fine. I'll try. But if the window is closed, you have to go away."

A rush of joy ran through me. It wasn't ideal, but it was more than enough for now.

I nodded. "I promise."

Her eyes went to the cottage. "I should go. I have to work tomorrow."

I knew that all of the oxygen would be pulled from my lungs the moment she left.

"What's your job now?" I asked her, not wanting her to go. The moment she walked away from me, I knew the pain in my heart would start to radiate throughout my body again. I needed to be with her, to be close to her.

“I watch over someone’s home while he’s away,” she said.

I wanted to know more about her relationship with Soren, but I didn’t ask further questions.

That had to be very careful not to let Rosalie know that I had a history with the man—or my other purpose for being on the island.

“He’s been tremendously helpful to me, Ethan. I ran into some trouble when I first got to the islands, and he was the one to help me. He has provided me with a home, a job, and a friendship.”

When she mentioned “friendship“, she had a mild smile on her face. A smile that I hadn’t seen the entire time! Was with her as it more than that?

“You must

really like him,” I knew I should’ve avoided this topic, but I couldn’t help it.

“Soren is one of the kindest, most giving, most loving people I’ve ever met in my life,” she said, and it was all I could do to keep from shouting at her that she was wrong, that she was being tricked, and she needed to run far, far away

But I knew telling her those things under the circumstances would only make her hate me and like him even more.

All of sudden, as if she realized something, she turned to me and narrowed her eyes.

She stepped back, and she asked me in a serious tone, “Speaking of that... Ethan, tell me one thing.”

That had a bad feeling about what she was about to say, but I maintained my smile. “Of course.”

“Do you know Soren?”

That was the last question I wanted to answer right now.

What was I supposed to say? That, yes, he was my half-brother, and he had without a doubt approached her and the baby because he had some scheme in mind? That the new life she thought she’d been living was just something Soren fabricated for her, and it wasn’t real? That I was here to kill Soren and ruin the dream life she thought she had finally built?

No, I couldn’t possibly let her know that. Innocent as she was, I couldn’t imagine how heartbroken she would be. I couldn’t bring myself to hurt her like that again.

She was waiting for my answer nervously.

What should I say?

Chapter 89: Open or Closed?

**Rosalie's POV

“Do you know Soren?” I asked Ethan.

I should've asked this question much sooner, but I was very used to seeing Soren, so their similarity no longer bothered me. And the past few days, I'd been so distracted that this question never came to mind... until just now.

Ethan and Soren looked alike... was there any relationship between them, or was this purely coincidence?

He looked at me, and his eyes filled with a mix of emotions.

Ethan finally replied, “I know him now.”

I looked at him in confusion, not quite understanding what he meant.

He smiled bitterly, and looked at me with a heartbroken expression on his face. “He's my rival in love.”

That not expected that to be the answer, and was struck dumb for a moment.

Then, I felt my face beginning to heat up, and I heard myself trying to explain, “He... he's a good friend of mine!”

Why did I feel the need to explain myself to him?!

Ethan visibly relaxed a bit, and the corner of his lips turned up slightly.

“I'm glad he was here to help you when you needed him,” he said.

I let out a deep breath, feeling relieved.

Soren never mentioned anything about his family, and I didn't remember hearing about Ethan having brothers when I was back in the Drogomor pack. It was just that I had a strange feeling that I was missing something, so wanted to be sure.

“What sort of trouble did you have when you got here?” Ethan asked. It was obvious that he didn't want to talk about Soren any more.

Was he... jealous?

“I was robbed. It was awful.”

Ethan was immediately nervous. “Were you hurt? Are you okay now? And the baby?”

“Yes, we’re fine now,” I smiled. “Thanks to Sor.. my friend, and the doctor he provided us with.”

Feeling uncomfortable talking about Soren after what Ethan had said, I stood up from the swing. “Really, Ethan, / need to go,” I said, walking towards my cottage.

“Rosalie!” His voice stopped me in my tracks.

I turned and looked over my shoulder.

“The necklace,” he asked. “Was it stolen from you when you were attacked?”

Was Ethan trying to confirm whether I actually did sell the necklace?

I thought for a moment, and decided to be honest.

“No, it wasn’t taken,” I answered. “At first, I held onto that necklace because I wanted a piece of you with me, Ethan. But the longer I was away from you, the more I realized I could do this on my own. So.. I sold it, so that I could move on.”

He stared at me for a moment, looking like he was trying to stop his emotions from showing on his face.

I felt I was justified in every word that I had said, but seeing him suffer still broke my heart, even after everything that happened.

I sighed and softened my tone. “I need to get back inside and get to bed. I’m tired. Goodbye, Ethan.” “All right,” he replied with a sigh. “I’ll come back tomorrow. If the window’s open, I’ll wait for you to come out.”

“But if it’s closed... you should leave,” I said. My hands were on my abdomen, like they usually were.

He nodded. “Good night, Rosalie.”

I didn’t respond—only waved and went back into the house.

Once I was alone, I tried to process everything that had happened recently.

I didn’t know if I should be happy that Ethan had finally shown up outside of my cottage again or if I should be furious at him for waiting three days to come back.

In those three days, I'd come to a decision. I was going to stay here and live my new life.

Why would he suddenly decide he had time for me again and start giving me reasons to change that decision?

SO

It shouldn't have been that way. I should have just stayed secure in the decision I had made earlier that day.

After I got ready for bed, I lay there, uncomfortable because of the baby anyway. I stared at the ceiling with pillows shoved under my back and under my belly, trying to find a way to fall asleep... but thinking about Ethan.

Had he really apologized?

Alpha Ethan had said he was sorry, to me— twice?

What kind of a world was I living in now?

Maybe he really had changed, and he deserved me giving him a second chance.

Letting out a deep sigh, I closed my eyes and reminded myself of how kind Soren had been to me. How in the world could I tell him that I was going back to the life I had left, the one that I had fled to come here? He'd be so disappointed in me.

He wouldn't be wrong to feel that way, either.

Thad no hard proof that Ethan could actually change anything once we were back at the capital. Just because he said he wanted to be with me and didn't want to be with Madalynn, that didn't mean that he was going to be able to get out of what King James had in store for him.

These thoughts kept turning over in my mind, but eventually, I fell asleep.

The next morning, I woke up a little later than usual.

Seraphine and Lola were already there. *We* went about our morning routine, and then I went over to Soren's house to check on things, like I always did, because that was my job.

I was still distracted, but I did my best to stay more focused than I had the last three day, during which I'd constantly dropped things, had stabbed myself with the sewing needle, and had made my companions worry.

After I finished my work in the mansion and went back to the cottage, Lola asked me, “Are you going to prepare dinner for Mr. Soren, Miss Ro, or should I do it?”

“Oh,” I said, having temporarily forgotten he was coming back that afternoon. I had been thinking about it a lot the day before, but my mind had been on Ethan today, and I’d let it slip my mind.

“I’ll make something,” I told her. I liked to make dinner for Soren when he came back from one of these longer trips.

“Yes, Miss,” Lola said. “Do you need any help?”

“No, I don’t think so,” I told her.

I gave her a small smile and started to go into the kitchen when I noticed that the window behind her was open. I stared at it for a moment, wondering if I wanted to leave it that way. I knew it was the window Ethan would be looking at to see if I wanted him to come back that evening. It was the one that overlooked the garden.

Without another thought, I went over and pushed the window closed.

That was that. I didn’t need to think about it anymore. I had made my decision.

I went about making a chicken dish I’d made for Soren before. I knew he really enjoyed it. It would be done about the time he arrived, but it had to cook very slowly to keep all of the flavors in. I added all of the herbs and put it in the oven to cook.

But while I was preparing it, my mind kept going back to Ethan.

He had been so sincere the night before. At one point, I even thought I saw tears glistening in his eyes.

Really, all he was asking of me was the opportunity to speak to me. Was that so wrong? Wasn’t I being awfully cruel in not even giving him the chance to express himself?

After I popped the chicken into the oven, I found myself going back into the living room and opening the window, the smell of food was getting a bit strong, even though it smelt good.

My eyes looked out over the garden. It was mid-afternoon, and the sun was still up. So I didn’t expect him to

show himself.

I just wanted a glimpse of him— another quick taste.

I didn’t see him, though, so I went back into the kitchen.

I decided to make a pie. It could bake at the same temperature as the chicken and for the same amount of time. That all of the ingredients for a fresh apple pie, something I'd never made for Soren before.

I made the crust, rolling the dough out with the rolling pin, which was tiring.

As I rolled, I thought, "You're being stupid, Rosalie. You're just inviting trouble back into your life. Think about all of the good times you've had here since you left Ethan behind. Soren has taken good care of you. He's provided you with everything you could possibly ever need. If you let Ethan back into your life, you're going to regret it."

I put the pie crust in the pan and headed into the living room to close the window.

"Is everything all right, Miss Ro?" Lola asked me.

"Yes, everything's fine," I said, pausing on my way back to the kitchen to look at her.

"Well, you keep opening and closing the window. I just wanted to make sure there was nothing wrong." Lola shrugged and went back to dusting, but she was looking at me.

"Oh, uh, I just... I'm baking a pie. So.. it's getting a little warm in here," I said as I headed back into the kitchen.

"Then shouldn't you have just opened the window?" she called after me, but I just kept walking because I didn't really have a response for that.

All I wanted to do was tell her to leave it closed.

After I finished making the pie and slid it into the oven, I realized I was exhausted. The last few nights, I had not slept well, thanks to Ethan and his games.

It was almost as if he was practicing playing peek-a-boo when the baby arrived. Would he show up, or wouldn't he?

Well, now that the window was closed, I wouldn't have to worry about that anymore.

I decided to lie down and take a nap for a little while. However, I found that I couldn't fall asleep at all.

As I was tossing and turning, I heard Seraphine say to Lola, "It's so hot and stuffy in here with the oven on. I'm just going to open this window for a bit..."

Did she open the window? I wasn't sure if it was real or I dreamed it.

However, I felt too tired to get up and check—so I stayed in bed, and finally was able to fall asleep.

When I got up a bit later to the sound of the kitchen timer going off, the window was closed, and everyone was gone. I got the food out of the oven and hurried to get ready for Soren to come over for dinner.

I was confused whether Seraphine had actually stopped by, and was frustrated with myself that I couldn't make up my mind.

However, it didn't matter. I told myself that if Ethan had come by while I was sleeping and that window was open he might be expecting me in the garden that night.

He'd be disappointed.

I wasn't going.