

Broken Trust, Renewed Love

Chapter 3

The blend of cedarwood and the crisp sharpness of pine filled the air...

It was unmistakable and almost overwhelming. Cyrus was waiting for me in the lobby, his scent announcing his presence long before I saw him. It seemed he was here for another one of his 'makeup' dates.

I wrinkled my nose slightly. This alpha—did he not feel any embarrassment, flaunting his scent so boldly in such a public space?

I glanced around, surprised by the absence of Cyrus' usual entourage of swooning fanboys and fangirls. Instead, only a few of my colleagues were nervously peeking around corners, trying to hide their excitement.

I was slightly curious, I wonder if he had arranged for extra security to keep the usual crowd from entering my office's ground? The thought crossed my mind as I descended the few flights of stairs, my steps measured, until I stopped just short of him.

I crossed my arms and raised an eyebrow. "What are you here for?"

Cyrus frowned slightly, then walked over to the passenger side of his car, opening the door with the practiced ease of a chauffeur.

If it weren't for his suit—a mark of the Tangler bloodline—he could easily be mistaken for one.

"Rick invited us to his dinner celebration tonight," he began, his voice cool. "He's celebrating a successful expedition about some harmless liquid silver—"

I cutting him off. "And?"

A deeper crease formed between his eyebrows. "You and I will go to this party together."

I crossed my arms, not missing a beat. "I never said I wanted to go with you, did I?"

"Andrea..." His voice dropped, taking on a warning tone.

Yet, I didn't care. I turned on my heel and started walking toward my apartment, leaving him standing by the door.

There was a time when I would've rushed to him, told him to get back in the car, worried that his fanatics might catch sight of him. Cyrus was the epitome of the Braveclaws Pack's ideal. Back then, I would've done anything to shield him from their eyes.

But now? Now, I no longer cared. Let the world have its fill of him. I wasn't his girlfriend anymore and I had no obligation to protect what wasn't mine.

Beep!

"Andrea!"

I glanced over my shoulder to see Cyrus slowly following me in his car, keeping pace with my steps.

I turned my head back and kept walking, refusing to be swayed. "Stop following me, Cyrus. We're done—"

Beep!

"Cyrus!" I spun around, and my voice was filled with anger.

Just as I was about to snap at him, a voice rang out from the distance.

"Hey! Isn't that Prince Cyrus' car?!"

My heart plummeted at the realization. Oh no, I was SO not ready to face Cyrus' fanatics right now!

"Drive!" I hurriedly jumped into the car, slamming the door shut and locking it. My eyes widened as I watched his fans swarm the car with alarming speed.

Where did they even come from?!

"You really want to go with me now?" Cyrus asked, amusement lacing his tone.

I ordered him again, "Just drive!"

Cyrus chuckled softly, shifting the car into gear. We edged out of the growing crowd, leaving his fans behind as we sped away.

It was then that a thick scent of vanilla hit me, almost cloying in its sweetness.

My eyes scanned the dashboard, searching for a perfume bottle or some kind of air freshener. But as I inhaled again, realization dawned on me—this wasn't a manufactured scent. It was Lilith's. Her presence lingered in the car, like an unwanted guest.

I couldn't help but wonder what exactly she had done in here for her scent to be so strong, so pervasive.

Suppressing a scoff, I shot a sideways glare at Cyrus. "Well, well, I never knew you were so fond of vanilla."

"Hm." Cyrus gave a noncommittal grunt as he subtly adjusted the steering wheel.

What was that supposed to mean?

The unanswered question hanging in the air like Lilith's lingering scent.

After that, silence settled between us. Cyrus took me first to his favorite tailor shop, where I changed into a navy-blue dress before we headed to Wok 'n Roll Odyssey for Patrick's private celebration.

We were led to a reserved VIP room on the second floor. As the staff opened the door, I noticed Patrick and Lilith already seated inside. Lilith's expression flickered with surprise for the briefest moment when she saw me.

"Hey, you two!" Patrick beamed, waving enthusiastically from his seat.

Lilith pulled her hands off the table. "Hello Andrea, Cyrus. What took you so long? Traffic?"

I gave a simple shrug, offering her a polite smile before turning to Patrick.

"It was a last-minute invite, Rick. Sorry I didn't bring a gift, but congratulations on your successful expedition!"

Patrick "Rick" Finiteson was an eccentric with vibrant personality. In the jewelry industry, he was often hailed as a young genius. Last year, he embarked on an unexpected expedition with a carefully selected team and humongous budget, leaving many puzzled by his abrupt decision.

However, Patrick was nothing if not determined. He simply ignored all media talk about his absurdity going too far and how the young genius might finally lost his title and become mad instead.

I had become acquainted with him through Cyrus, who often brought me along to his regular meetings with his closest circle—Patrick and Lilith. It was through these gatherings that I got to know Lilith as well.

"Don't worry. Rick found a treasure worth millions—literally. He's got more than enough gifts," Cyrus quipped as he guided me to the table.

“Hey,” Patrick retorted, feigning annoyance. “I’d appreciate any gift from a good friend, especially a pretty lady like Rhea here. Unlike some picky alpha prince!”

Lies. My gaze snapped back to Patrick, narrowing slightly.

I had never seen him use or even acknowledge any of the gifts I’d given him. Not like that gold-framed pair of sunglasses from Lilith that he carried everywhere, even when he didn’t wear them. Or that ridiculous sunflower pin toy Cyrus had given him as a joke, which he often brought up for laughs.

It was only then that I fully grasped the truth—Lilith was the same. She and Patrick never really used my gifts, except for the occasional social media post.

A sinking realization settled in my gut. Maybe my suspicions weren’t so far-fetched after all. Perhaps they had never truly accepted me, merely tolerating my presence to save face for Cyrus.

They had never approved of our relationship and their coldness toward me was always just beneath the surface.

“I’m not picky!” Cyrus’s voice rose slightly in defense as he stopped. “I just don’t see the point in using certain things. That’s why—”

And there it was—the start of Cyrus and Patrick’s usual banter. Normally, I would have found their back-and-forth amusing, but tonight, I don’t want to participate. My eyes scanned the room for a seat.

The remaining chairs were opposite one another, with Patrick on one side and Lilith on the other.

“Since we’re late, let’s not keep Rick and Lily waiting any longer,” I said, settling into my seat, eager to get this over with.

A heavy silence settled over the table. I didn’t bother to glance at Cyrus to see his reaction.

“Alrighty! Let’s eat!” Patrick’s exuberant voice cut through the quiet as he waved over the waiter.

Soon, the table was filled with a set of dishes and conversation started to flow. I made occasional comments but otherwise remained silent, content to sip my drink and savor the food.

As the evening progressed, I watched Cyrus peeling prawns with meticulous care, placing them on a plate beside Lilith. I couldn’t help but chuckle inwardly. Cyrus had always despised prawns, claiming that peeling them was too much hassle.

Yet here he was, serving them to Lilith without a word of complaint.

The sight made me frown. The effort he put into catering to her was starkly different from how he treated me. Cyrus just simply moved on an instinct when it came to Lilith.

It seemed I wasn't the only one who noticed.

Patrick suddenly shot a sidelong glance at me before nudging Cyrus with a playful shove.

"Look at you, Mr. Alpha Prince! Don't just pile all the prawns on Lilith's plate. Can't you see this plate over here needs some prawn love too?" He gestured with his thumb toward the empty plate beside me.

Cyrus blinked, momentarily dazed as if he had just realized his oversight.

He paused, looking down at the prawns in his hand with an unreadable expression, before he looked at me again.

Chapter 4

Cyrus blinked, his eyes lingering on me before shifting toward the VIP entrance. His expression was unreadable, but something in his gaze unsettled me.

"Another round of the tangy dragon prawns," he ordered the waiter, wiping his hands with a napkin, his movements deliberate and controlled.

"There's no need." I raised a hand, stopping the waiter in his tracks as I reached for the glass of water beside me. The coolness of the glass steadied my nerves. "I'm not in the mood for prawns."

Cyrus's brows furrowed, a hint of frustration flickering in his eyes. "We can try something else. How about the fish?"

"No need," I repeated.

His brows knitted together as he studied me. "What about beef then? It's your favorite."

"No," I said, my voice firm, leaving no room for negotiation.

Cyrus froze for a moment, clearly taken aback by my tone. The tension between us thickened.

I broke eye contact, focusing on the napkin as I calmly wiped my mouth, forcing myself to remain composed.

I turned to Patrick, “Sorry, Patrick. I’ve got to hit the office early tomorrow to wrap up a project. My head editor would have my head if I showed up late.”

I rose from my seat, my steps unsteady but manageable. “I’ll be heading home now. Can’t afford to be behind schedule.”

Lilith’s voice, laced with concern, cut through the conversation. “Andrea, is this because of me? Are you upset?” Her eyes were downcast, the guilt evident. “You can have the prawns on my plate if you’d like. Cyrus was just trying to help me with them. Please, don’t be mad at him.”

Her tone made it seem like I was the villain in this scenario. I raised an eyebrow, incredulous.

“Me? Upset? No, no, no! It’s not like that.” I waved her concern away with a dismissive gesture, trying to bite back sarcasm. I wasn’t angry—I was simply exhausted with all these. “I just really need to get some rest is all! I’ll be heading out now. Enjoy the rest of your meal.”

With a calm smile, I slid out of my chair and pushed it back under the desk.

Suddenly, someone grabbed my wrist!