

34 They Sniff Out Weakness

Eve~ 1

"I am done, ma'am," Agnes announced.

"Thank you," I murmured. "I love it," I faked enthusiasm.

But I could feel her confusion because I hadn't looked in the mirror, and she noticed. 3

"Alright." She bowed before walking out the door.

I breathed a sigh of relief as the door closed behind her. I glanced at the mirror but looked away again, my heart racing.

I closed my eyes and attempted to calm my raging nerves as I stood. I looked down at the emerald dress, its silky fabric clinging to my body in all the right places, its elegance doing little to calm the storm of anxiety swirling inside me. The plunging neckline, the shimmer of the material—it was all meant to make me look powerful, alluring, but all I felt was exposed. My fingers brushed over the smooth fabric as I paced the room, trying to steady my nerves. The Lunar Gala. And Hades. 2

I hadn't even dared to look in the mirror.

The quiet creak of the door made me freeze, my heart pounding in my chest. I didn't need to turn around to know it was him. His presence was impossible to ignore, a shadow that filled the room with an energy that made the air feel thicker.

"You're not ready yet," his voice, low and cold, cut through the silence. I could feel his gaze on me.

I turned slowly, forcing my eyes to meet his. Hades stood there, an unreadable expression on his face, dressed in a sharp black suit that emphasized his predatory grace. His eyes, however, were darker than usual, and they lingered on me a beat too long. He took a step closer, his gaze traveling the length of me, slow and assessing. I could feel the weight of it, like he was peeling back every layer I had tried to wrap around myself for protection.

"I'm ready," I said, though my voice betrayed me, trembling ever so slightly. I didn't know if he noticed, but I suspected he did. He always did.

"You're nervous," he remarked, not with concern, but with cool detachment.

I swallowed, trying to steel myself. "Of course I

am. It's the Lunar Gala. Lycans, royals... everyone will be watching." Listing them out made the fear even harder to ignore.

He moved closer until the space between us evaporated. His hand reached up, and before I could react, he caught a lock of my hair, twirling it between his fingers. The gesture was intimate, but the coldness in his eyes made it feel anything but. Something had shifted in his demeanor. I couldn't decide whether I found it a relief to the intensity of his presence or even more unnerving. His grip tightened slightly, not enough to hurt, but enough to remind me of his power. The memory of his hand around my neck flashed in my head.

"They'll watch," he murmured, his voice like silk laced with ice. "And more, but you can't let them see how much it affects you."

My heart raced, and I could feel the blood rushing in my ears. I stood there, trying not to show how unnerving his proximity was, how his gaze made me feel both vulnerable and trapped. His fingers lingered in my hair before he finally released it, his hand dropping to his side.

"You look..." His words trailed off, his eyes darkening as he studied me, as though he were

seeing me for the first time. "Satisfactory."

I could tell he meant more than that, but his tone gave nothing away. I swallowed the urge to argue, knowing it would do me no good. Instead, I managed a small nod, trying to keep my voice steady. "Thank you," I managed.

He gave a small, almost imperceptible nod before gesturing toward the door. "Come. We're expected."

I followed him out into the hall, my heart still pounding in my chest. Every step felt heavier than the last as we made our way outside. The ride in the elevator was nerve-racking, his body's heat almost fighting with the cold breeze of the air conditioner.

The first time I had entered the Obsidian Towers, I had been knocked out, but now I got more of a view of my new home. It was sleek, which was to be expected. Everything was state of the art with dark accents and hues—black, grey, and an occasional icy blue.

The night air was crisp as we stepped outside, and I was grateful for the chill against my skin—it helped clear the fog of nerves that threatened to overwhelm me.

The moment we were seated inside the limousine, Hades turned to me, his expression sharper than before, more serious. "Listen to me, Ellen," he said quietly, his voice carrying a weight I hadn't expected. "Lycans are not like werewolves. They don't care about influence or status as much as they sniff out weakness."

His eyes met mine, a flicker of something dangerous in them. "You can't afford to show any fear tonight. According to our agreement, you are not only my wife but my queen."

I stiffened at his words, feeling the weight of the warning settle over me. The cold edge in his voice sent a chill down my spine, but I nodded, determined not to let it show how much his words had shaken me.

"I understand," I whispered, though I wasn't sure I did. But I had no choice.

Hades didn't say anything else. Instead, he leaned back into the leather seat, his gaze shifting out the window, as if the conversation were already over. But his warning hung in the air between us, thick with tension.

I stared out the window as well, the lights of the city blurring by, my stomach knotting with every

passing minute. I could feel his presence beside me, a quiet, lurking threat, and though he was no longer speaking, his words echoed in my mind.

Lycans don't care about influence. They sniff out weakness.

And I was terrified that they would smell mine.

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