



35 The Princess Makes A Come Back

Hades~ 1

The door of the limo was opened, and I stepped out. I reached my hand out to the princess, and she placed a tentative hand in mine. I could feel her trembling. She stepped out as the camera lights flashed all around us.

Before, the Lunar Gala was far more private, with guests parking inside and entering directly, but now it had been turned into a more public affair, where paparazzi and spectators came to witness. I wasn't too averse to it—I didn't really care that much. But with the way the princess was trembling, I could tell it was not the same for her. Unfortunately, there was no running from it. She had to show her face to the public at some point, and this was a perfect opportunity. I was killing two birds with one stone: her first public appearance and giving her a change of scene. 1

Maybe with this, she wouldn't think too much about sticking a fork in her neck. I made her hook her arm in mine, leaning slightly to



whisper, "Smile and wave, princess."

She did as I asked, her gestures a bit awkward and unpracticed. Still, I was sure she was stunning enough to distract the tabloids a bit. It had been through careful planning that I had her reveal just the perfect amount of skin.

I had chosen right. The dress fit her well, and she had the perfect body to fill it out to perfection. Even more than I would have liked to admit.

I kept my gaze forward as we walked down the carpet, barely acknowledging the flashing lights and murmuring crowd. But I could feel their eyes—every one of them—fixated on us. On her. The princess's tension was almost palpable, radiating through her arm as she clung tightly to mine. She was trying, though. Her forced smile and awkward wave amused me more than I let on. She was out of her depth, but she was playing her part.

The air was cool, but the atmosphere buzzed with heat. Conversations, whispers, and the click of cameras filled the space. I steered us forward, deliberately slower, giving her a moment to adjust. If she was going to walk among Lycans and their politics, she would have to learn fast.

And this— the eyes on her, the scrutiny, the judgment—was just the beginning. 1

As we reached the entrance, the doormen bowed low, opening the large ornate doors to reveal the grandeur of the Gala. Moonlight spilled into the hall, reflecting off the crystal chandeliers that hung from the ceiling. The Lunar Gala was as much a political battlefield as it was a celebration, and the room already hummed with the energy of influential Lycans, their eyes assessing, dissecting, and planning.

I leaned closer to her, my voice low so only she could hear. "Remember what I said," I warned, my fingers tightening briefly around hers. "They don't care for titles. Lycans aren't impressed by your lineage. They're looking for weakness. Don't give them any." 1

Her breathing hitched slightly at my words, but she didn't respond. Good. She needed to stay on her toes.

The room quieted slightly as we stepped in, and all eyes turned in our direction. I could feel the weight of their gazes—some curious, others predatory.

We stopped as they all bowed. "Welcome, Your

Majesty," they greeted, paying their respects to the princess. It was to be expected. Lycans usually had no respect for werewolves. I nodded in acknowledgment.

I released her arm, only to lightly graze her lower back, guiding her forward as we moved deeper into the hall.

She stayed close, her every step measured, though I could tell she was struggling to keep her composure. It was as though she was used to a different kind of attention—sheltered, private. This was something else entirely.

It was ironic that a princess, used to addressing her people like a tyrant, was quivering in the presence of others like her.

We approached the central area, where the most important Lycans mingled, and I felt her falter slightly. She hesitated, and I leaned down again, my lips just brushing her ear.

"Don't stop now, princess. You've made it this far."

Her breath hitched again, and she straightened, her face tightening, but I could see the bravery she was trying to muster. She could have tried harder to turn down my invitation, but she had



accepted without any coercion. Maybe she wasn't as weak as I initially thought. That would be interesting to see.

I turned my attention to the room, my posture relaxed but my senses heightened. The game was beginning. The night would reveal who was strong and who was weak. And whether the princess liked it or not, she was now a part of that game. I'd see just how well she could play.

As we moved deeper into the hall, the atmosphere shifted. The eyes of every Lycan in the room were fixed on us—or rather, on the princess. It was a feeding frenzy waiting to happen, and she was fresh meat.

I caught sight of Maris weaving her way through the crowd with that sharp, predatory grin of hers. Notorious for being blunt to the point of cruelty, she thrived on moments like this—pouncing on any perceived weakness. I watched as she made a beeline for the princess, and though I could have stopped her, I didn't. This was the princess's moment, her test.

"Ah, the princess," Maris purred, refusing to call her by her new title as she stopped in front of us, her eyes gleaming. "You certainly look the part tonight, but tell me, Your Highness, how



does it feel? A werewolf, far less powerful than any Lycan in this hall, standing in a room filled with us? Does it make you nervous?" She tilted her head, feigning innocence, though her words were designed to sting. "After all, power here is everything, and... well, you're at a disadvantage, aren't you?"

The room quieted, all eyes now firmly on the princess. I could feel her tension, the way her fingers tightened ever so slightly on my arm, as if willing me to carry her out of here. Maris had delivered her challenge, and the Lycans were hungry to see the princess get torn apart. I didn't move. This was her battle to fight—and probably lose.

The princess hesitated, her eyes flickering for a moment with uncertainty. The silence grew heavier, thicker. I could see her scrambling to find the words, and for a second, I wondered if she would scream at Maris for being disrespectful. But then something shifted. Her shoulders squared, and her gaze locked onto Maris's.

"Power comes in many forms," the princess said, her voice steady but sharp enough to cut through the silence. "But I've noticed something

—it's always the ones who lack it that make the most noise to cover up the fact that they have none." She smiled then, staring pointedly. "So no, Maris. I'm not nervous. I'm quite comfortable." 2

A ripple moved through the room as her words landed. The sharp gasps, the murmurs of surprise. Maris's smirk faltered, her eyes narrowing as she tried to recover from the unexpected blow. She hadn't expected that. Hell, I hadn't expected it either.

"Touché," Maris said, her voice tight. "We'll see how long that confidence lasts." She turned on her heel and slipped back into the crowd, her attempt to rattle the princess thoroughly thwarted, to everyone's surprise.

The princess exhaled slowly, her shoulders relaxing as the tension in the room shifted. The Lycans around us resumed their conversations, but now there was something different in the air. Respect. Curiosity. They were watching her closely now, reassessing the princess who had just silenced Maris Davenport.

I glanced down at her, mildly impressed. Then the princess looked up at me, her eyes sparkling with something childlike—an innocent charm that seemed so at odds with the moment we

were in. That expression, combined with her bold words, would have been so easily disarming. Something twisted in my chest, a pang in the shriveled heart I thought had long burned out. 1

"Not bad, princess," I muttered, keeping my voice low, trying not to let the surprise show.

The princess's lips curved slightly into the first genuine smile since we met.

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