

79 The Tour

Eve~ 1

"I am sure you've never been to the left wing of the Obsidian Tower," Jules commented as she pressed the button on the elevator, sliding the shiny metallic doors closed. 2

"I didn't even know I was on the right wing, to be honest," I replied quietly.

She chuckled lightly, her eyes glinting. "Well, then I'll have to warn you—it has a lot more foot traffic. It can even be crowded at times," she informed me. 3

I felt my stomach drop to my feet. The thought of walking in the midst of more than three Lycans at a time made me want to run. "Oh, is that right?" I tried to sound casual, but the tremor in my voice betrayed me.

Jules went quiet, and I knew for certain that she had noticed. "You know, Your Highness, you don't have to do this. You can just stay—"

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"No, no, no," I cut her off. "I wouldn't mind the company," I finished, forcing a smile that I hoped looked steady. "Besides, it's probably good for me to get used to it. I can't avoid everyone forever."

Jules watched me for a moment, her expression unreadable, before she nodded. "Alright, but if you ever feel uncomfortable, just let me know. I'll make up an excuse to get us out of there," she said with a playful grin, though there was an underlying sincerity in her voice. "We'll start from the ground floor and take our tour upwards. Alright with you?" 2

I nodded as the elevator doors slid open and the elevator hummed to life, carrying us down. I took a steadying breath, feeling a mix of anticipation and anxiety twist in my chest. Jules' easygoing presence was grounding, yet I couldn't quite shake the undercurrent of unease at the idea of mingling with Lycans beyond the safety of my quarters.

The doors slid open on the ground floor, and I was immediately hit by the faint buzz of conversation and the steady rhythm of footsteps echoing off the polished floors. Lycans in uniform and others in casual wear moved around with a confidence that only heightened my sense of isolation

Jules gestured to our left. "This way. I'll show you the main hall first—it's where a lot of meetings and events happen. And over there," she pointed down a corridor filled with elaborate tapestries and stark, dark decor, "is the wing where most Lycans train."

I nodded, absorbing the information and trying not to visibly shrink under the gazes of passing Lycans. A few looked my way, their expressions unreadable, though I caught more than one lingering look of curiosity—or suspicion. Murmuring caught my ear, and I could have sworn I heard the word *mutt*. Then their expressions morphed very quickly from curiosity to obvious disdain.

"Don't worry too much about them," Jules murmured, picking up on my tension. "Most of them are just... curious. It's not every day they see a werewolf princess walking through their halls."

I gave her a tight smile, willing myself to relax. "I suppose I should get used to being... noticed."

"Well, if it helps, I'm not liked much either." Her voice was light, but her words stunned me. Who wouldn't like her? I wondered. She was probably saying it to make me feel better about the

As we continued, Jules chatted casually, filling the silence with stories about her training, the Lycans' endless routines, and the occasional antics of her cousins. Her words washed over me, soothing, and I found myself laughing quietly at her tales, the tension slowly ebbing.

We moved up floor by floor, and I came to learn that the Obsidian Tower had twenty floors in total. Floors one to three were for public access and recreation.

Floors four and five were the guest quarters. For some reason, they recognized me even faster. Their mouths twisted quickly into sneers as we passed by, but Jules walked on and continued to speak as if they weren't shooting daggers.

There were more uniformed guards the higher we went. They greeted me perfunctorily, and it wouldn't take a genius to know that they were speaking through gritted teeth. 2

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The moment we stepped onto the eighth floor, something in the air shifted. It was so palpable that the hair on my neck immediately stood at attention. Everyone in the hall seemed to stop dead, training their eyes right on me.

"This floor is the Beta's family's residence," she informed me.

I swallowed the lump that had formed in my throat, picking at the nonexistent lint on the simple teal gown I had chosen to wear. I walked on, Jules pointing and speaking.

But this time, her talking wasn't enough to ignore the scalding looks we were getting. On previous floors, the occupants had murmured softly or whispered, but here they were openly hostile. Their eyes trailed me with thinly veiled contempt, some of them not even bothering to whisper. A

One young woman with striking, golden eyes crossed her arms and sneered, her voice loud enough for me to hear, "Didn't think the king would allow a werewolf to walk freely through our home."

The person with her laughed, obnoxiously loud. A younger woman who looked too much like the Beta for it to be a mere coincidence. "This mutt needs to go for a walk, so it's fine. We have to compromise."

"So it's really the daughter of that terrorist, huh?" another quipped. "Look at those eyes. The eyes of a murderer."

The words hit me like a physical blow, each insult chipping away at the fragile composure I'd tried to maintain. My stomach twisted, but I held my head up, swallowing the anger that clawed its way up my throat. I reminded myself why I was here—why I needed to bear this. It didn't make the sneers or the slurs any less painful, but it gave me a sliver of strength to keep moving.

Beside me, Jules' expression hardened, though she kept her voice steady. "I suggest we keep moving. There's a lot to see," she said, her tone calm but tense. She gave me a reassuring glance, though her hands balled into fists at her sides.

The two women exchanged glances, one of them scoffing. "And who asked the help to speak?" the golden-eyed woman said, her lip curling as she glared at Jules.

Jules didn't flinch, but I saw the flash of hurt in her eyes. She straightened, clearly used to this treatment but not immune to its sting. "I'm doing my job, ma'am," she replied coolly, her voice even.

"Well, you are an eyesore," the woman's cold eyes fell on me. "Look what the runt dragged in," she remarked snidely.

Runt?

"Ma'am, I'm just giving her a tour—"

"How dare you speak out of turn?" The woman snapped before her manicured hand struck Jules in the face. The slap was so unexpected that I froze for a few moments.

Jules didn't even flinch, nor did she stumble from the force, her cheek reddening from the slap. She was used to this. Anger surged through me, hotter than I'd ever felt before. My hands clenched at my sides, every instinct demanding that I step forward, that I protect her. Everyone was already gathering around us.

Her face remained expressionless as she straightened and faced the woman again. "I'm just doing my job, ma'am," she repeated, her voice steady, though her eyes betrayed nothing.

The golden-eyed woman smirked, folding her arms with a haughty air. "Then I suggest you learn your place." Her gaze slid back to me, cold and dismissive. "And take the little princess with you. We don't want her walking our hallways."

"Let's move on," I said quietly, my voice sounding steadier than I felt. I faced the woman. "You have no right to assault the help." My voice was shaky, but I meant the words.

The silence was deafening.

The woman's face twisted into an ugly scowl, her golden eyes flashing dangerously. The crowd seemed to draw closer, their disdain practically suffocating, as if they relished watching me and Jules endure this torment. And then, just as I was about to turn away, a young man with an arrogant smirk and a striking resemblance to the Beta stepped forward, his eyes gleaming contempt as they raked over me.

"Well, well," he drawled, taking a step closer. "The little princess doesn't look all that special up

"Well, well," he drawled, taking a step closer. "The little princess doesn't look all that special up close. I am disappointed in the king's taste in whores." His fingers stretched toward me, brushing dangerously close.

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