

85 A Willing Teacher

Eve~ 1

Kael blinked, clearly taken aback by my request. For a moment, I worried I'd crossed some line or made a fool of myself. My heart pounded as I rushed to explain, the words tumbling out in a flood.

"I just... I've been feeling helpless lately, and I hate it. I can't keep depending on others to protect me. Jules has been amazing, but—" I paused, searching for the right words, "—I need to be able to stand on my own. For myself. For her. For—"

"For him?" Kael interjected, a faint smirk tugging at the corner of his lips.

Heat rushed to my face, but I didn't deny it.

"Maybe. I just need to learn how to fight. To survive. And I think... I think you could help me."

Kael's expression softened, his usual humour tempered by something gentler. He studied me for a long moment, and I shifted under his gaze, suddenly unsure of myself.

"You don't have to justify it to me, Your

"You don't have to justify it to me, Your Highness," he said finally, his voice quiet but steady. "You're right. You should be able to stand on your own. It's a strength not many think to seek until it's too late."

I blinked at him, startled by his understanding. "So... you'll teach me?"

He nodded once, his easy smile returning. "Of course. But don't think I'll go easy on you because you're royalty."

Relief flooded through me, and I laughed, the sound almost foreign after everything that had happened. "I wouldn't expect you to."

Kael's eyes sparkled with amusement. "Good. We need a tight schedule."

He was the beta of course he was going to be busy. We needed a precise time and place. "I have nothing to do all day. I am ready when you are." I told him earnestly.

Kael stroked his chin, his expression contemplative. "The right wing training deck would work. It's quiet enough in the evenings, especially after the day's rush. Not many people linger there once the sun starts to set."

I nodded, eager to solidify the plan. "What time



I nodded, eager to solidify the plan. "What time are you thinking?"

He glanced toward the skyline, where the city lights were beginning to twinkle. "Right after dusk. I can spare an hour before my evening duties start. Three days a week to start. That should be enough to get you into the rhythm without burning you out."

"Evenings work perfectly," I agreed.

Kael's lips quirked into a sly grin. "Don't expect this to be easy. We'll start with the fundamentals — strength, coordination, and situational awareness. You'll probably hate me by the second session."

"I'm ready," I said firmly, meeting his gaze.

"Whatever it takes."

He nodded approvingly. "We'll need the right gear — nothing flashy, just practical."

"I will have that arranged."

"Good," Kael said, satisfied. "Tomorrow evening, east wing training deck. Don't be late."

I hesitated for a moment, then asked cautiously, "What do you think Hades will say about this?"

Kael's smirk faded slightly, his expression



Kael's smirk faded slightly, his expression darkening. "Depends. If he's in a protective mood, he might not take it well. Training yourself implies you feel unprotected, and he might see that as a personal failure." 2

I frowned, a mix of frustration and worry knotting in my chest. "That's not fair. I'm not doing this because I doubt him. I just... I don't want to be a liability." It was not always about him. 1

Kael leaned back, folding his arms. "Then make that clear to him. Hades is stubborn, but he respects strength and conviction. You've got both—just show him." 2

I sighed, glancing towards Hades' side of the bed. "I'll talk to him tonight. He deserves to know."

Kael's teasing grin returned. "Good luck with that. If he decides to go all brooding and dramatic, don't say I didn't warn you." 2

I couldn't help but smirk despite the nerves churning in my stomach. "Thanks, Kael. For agreeing to this. It means a lot."

He pushed off the door and started toward the corridor leading to the elevators. "Don't thank me yet, Your Highness. Save it for when you can



He pushed off the door and started toward the corridor leading to the elevators. "Don't thank me yet, Your Highness. Save it for when you can actually keep up with me. Tomorrow evening, right wing. Be ready."

As Kael disappeared into the shadows of the hall, I turned toward the right wing. One more conversation stood between me and tomorrow's training, and I wouldn't let it stop me.

Hades~

I swirled the glass of Sangue Eterno, watching the deep crimson liquid cling to the sides like liquid velvet. The name, Italian for eternal blood, was a promise of timeless refinement and unparalleled taste. This was a vintage revered by connoisseurs, crafted with precision and centuries of tradition. And yet, as I raised it to my lips and took a sip, I barely suppressed a grimace.

The taste was wrong—flat, metallic, and devoid of depth. It was as if the wine had lost its soul. I set the glass down with a sharp clink, my patience thinning with every failed attempt to find satisfaction.

It was Lucinda's brand. The Montague's had been

It was Lucinda's brand. The Montague's had been producing wine for generations. It wasn't the wine's fault. Sangué Eterno was flawless in its craftsmanship—aged to perfection, with layers of dark cherry, iron, and faint whispers of oak. At least, that's what I used to think. Before her.

Leaning back in my chair, I closed my eyes, but the memory refused to be pushed away. The first time I'd tasted Ellen's blood, it had been a mistake—or so I'd told myself. The pull had been undeniable, her presence igniting something ancient and feral within me. When I'd finally given in, I was utterly unprepared for the experience.

Her blood was a revelation. It wasn't just sustenance—it was life itself. Warm and impossibly vibrant, it carried the essence of everything I craved but could never claim. There was a fiery sweetness, like wild honey, underscored by a complexity that was both intoxicating and haunting. It was electric, alive, and devastatingly intimate, lingering on my tongue long after the last drop.

Since then, nothing else has come close. Every sip of blood wine was hollow and disappointing, a pale shadow of that first, perfect taste. I lifted the glass again, glaring at the liquid as if it could



I set the glass down once more and leaned forward, bracing my elbows on the table. I'd tasted perfection, and now I was cursed with the knowledge that I could never go back. Her blood had ruined me in ways I couldn't fully admit—even to myself.

It wasn't just the taste that haunted me. It was what it represented. She wasn't just sustenance; she was something I couldn't allow myself to have. Since yesterday, every flash of her flushed skin in the bathtub had me hardening. I wanted nothing more than to thrust into her and feel her velvet walls of her core strangling my cock like a vice.

Sex wasn't a mere indulgence for Lycans; it was a biological imperative. A necessity. The bond between mates wasn't just emotional—it was physical, a connection forged through touch, shared breath, and ultimately, release.

Our kind had evolved with certain truths, and one of the most unrelenting was the need for release. Without it, the feral energy within us festered, growing uncontrollable. Our heightened senses and raw power demanded balance, and sex was that anchor. It wasn't just about pleasure—it was survival.



And then there was knotting.

Knotting was the pinnacle of the mating bond, the act that solidified a pair's connection. When a Lycan knotted their mate, it wasn't just about coupling—it was an unbreakable claim. The process was deeply instinctual, primal, and undeniably binding. The knot, once swollen and locked within the mate, served as a biological assurance that the bond was sealed.

But I had been abstinent for so long, using anything else as an outlet. I was different from my Lycan subordinates, that was why there were some exceptions for me. Yet, exceptions could only go so far.

There were no such things as interspecies mates. So Ellen had no right to be able to drive me mad with this amount of craving. It was unprecedented. It had only gotten worse since I tasted that damn wine. 9

But there was something else. Something I'd been avoiding.

The temptation was locked away, hidden behind the imposing mahogany doors of my cabinet. It had been there for weeks, untouched but never forgotten. A single bottle—Lucinda's so-called



The temptation was locked away, hidden behind the imposing mahogany doors of my cabinet. It had been there for weeks, untouched but never forgotten. A single bottle—Lucinda's so-called apology. It wasn't just any vintage; it was *special*. I knew exactly what it was, even before her note had confirmed it.

"For old times and new alliances, Hades. A gift born of my finest craftsmanship and your greatest enemy. Enjoy responsibly."

Lucinda had always been a manipulative creature, her every action laced with ulterior motives. This gift wasn't just an olive branch—it was a calculated move. And I hated how well she knew me.

I stood, my chair scraping against the floor as I pushed it back. My steps were deliberate, the distance to the cabinet feeling longer than it should. My hand hesitated on the polished brass handle, my reflection distorted in its gleam.

This was a mistake.

And yet, I opened it.

The interior of the cabinet was immaculate, the shelves lined with bottles from across centuries. Each one told a story, a fragment of history

I reached for it, my fingers brushing against the cool surface. The weight of it was familiar yet unbearable. It felt alive in my hand, as though it carried more than just wine within.

I didn't bother with a glass this time. Pulling the stopper free, I brought the bottle to my lips and took a tentative sip.

The effect was immediate.

Warmth spread through me, rich and all-consuming. The taste was... divine. A rush of wild sweetness flooded my senses, followed by an intricate dance of flavours I couldn't fully comprehend. It was her. Every part of her—fierce, vibrant, and utterly unyielding. It was the fiery strength in her eyes, the softness in her voice when she let her guard down, the unspoken defiance that dared me to challenge her.

I closed my eyes, savouring the moment even as guilt coiled in my chest. This wasn't just indulgence; it was something far darker. Every drop was a betrayal of my better judgement, a concession to the part of me that refused to let her go.

The air shifted, heavy with unspoken truths. The

The air shifted, heavy with unspoken truths. The bottle in my hand felt both precious and damning, a symbol of everything I couldn't have but couldn't resist.

I set it down, my breaths uneven as I wrestled with the conflict raging within me. She was more than a distraction. More than an obsession. And this—this was a reminder of just how far I'd fallen. I just need to claim her once, have her writhing beneath me and I would be able to think straight. This obsession would fall away like chains.

But even as I tried to pull myself back, I knew I would take another sip.

And another.

Because the taste of her wasn't something I could give up. Not now. Not until I was satisfied and she meant nothing. 3

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