

Chapter 0003

Grace

I turned around and tilted my head up to look into the man’s face. He was tall, towering over me. In a crisp green button-up, a dark vest, and dark wash jeans. He wasn’t so close to loom over me, but he was warm enough that the air between us was sizzling. It was the confidence in his tone and his easy expression that told me he was an older man, but I wasn’t sure how much older. His hair was dark and styled just short of messy, brushing his forehead. His face was clean-shaven and chiseled. He was handsome, but it was his eyes, a rich forest green that seemed to glow in the low light that got me. There was something about his face that felt familiar, but I couldn’t place it.

His lips twitched. “Though I would take your name in lieu of a seat.”

My face heated as I turned back. “It’s Grace, and the seat’s yours if you want it.”

My heart fluttered with anticipation and anxiety.

He settled into the seat beside me easily. The heat of his body so close sent a shiver of awareness through me.

“A pleasure, Grace. I’m Charles,” he offered me his hand.

He lifted my hand to his lips and brushed his lips across my knuckles. The heat of his breath sent goosebumps up my arm.

“Can I buy you a drink?” He glanced at my empty glass. “Whatever you’d like?”

I hesitated for a moment, feeling a bit flustered. “I… really shouldn’t. It’s… been a long time since I’ve drunk, and I think that one was a little strong.”

He smiled and gestured vaguely as if calling the bartender. “I’m sure the renowned White Claw has at least one mocktail to your taste.”

I thought to protest, but he was already turning to the bartender and ordering with easy confidence. When the drink arrived looking suspiciously like the fruity whiskey thing I had ordered before, topped with a huge chunk of pineapple, I looked at Charles with a raised eyebrow.

“Your former drink had a non-alcoholic twin,” he said and lifted his tumbler to his full lips. “What brings you here tonight?”

I tore my gaze away and decided to play it safe. “It’s… my birthday.”

“Happy Birthday,” Charles said warmly. “Though you are dressed for the occasion, I noticed you hadn’t moved from the bar since you arrived.”

He’d been here the whole time? How had I not noticed him? Had he been watching me all this time? I scanned him. He didn’t look like a reporter. There was something a bit too dangerous about him that made me think that. Was he in security? Was he a lycan Enforcer?

“Does that mean you were watching me?”

He licked his lips. “It was hard to do anything else with all your lovely skin on display.”

He leaned close and murmured in my ear. “You also smell delicious.”

My heart started pounding. “You’re… a lycan, aren’t you?”

His eyes glinted. “What gave it away?”

I swallowed. “I used to be married to one. He was always talking about how I smelled.”

He sat back. “How long have you been divorced?”

I checked my watch. “Exactly twelve hours now.”

“Hell of a birthday present.” I lifted my glass and took a sip.

Without the whiskey, it tasted better, like a tropical punch. I smiled, drinking it, enjoying the tang on my tongue.

“Last I checked, a newly divorced woman should be celebrating,” he smiled. “How old are you today?”

“Thirty,” I said.

He leaned closer with a grin. He was so much larger than me, much larger than Devin had been. The spicy scent of his cologne filled my nose and made a mess of my head. I wanted to be closer, to press my face into his chest and breathe deep.

“I’m not usually so forward, but is there any chance I could convince you to come back to my hotel with me? This dress is too sexy to end up anywhere but on the floor tonight.”

My eyes widened. My heart jumped, and heat pooled in my gut that felt almost foreign. Desire. I had forgotten what it felt like to want a man.

“I’ll make it worth your while, birthday girl.”

I bit my lip, and despite the fear and the sense of wrong that twined through me, I closed my eyes. This was the distraction I needed, and I was going to take it.

“Let’s go.”

As we entered his top-floor suite, he cupped my face in his hands and pressed our mouths together in a searing, possessive kiss. I melted, whimpering as my back hit the door and he pressed against me, rocking his hips against mine so I could feel the hard, hot length of him against my stomach.

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