

2. Fired

Fingers encircle my arm, halting me in my steps, and I am yanked back, hard.

I turn, wrenching my hand free of its hold, and my breath catches in my throat. Inside the building, I hadn't had the chance to truly look at him, too preoccupied with running. But now, under the sun's light, I gaze upon him, and I know immediately that he isn't human.

No human can look like that. No being can look like that.

Long ago, I used to classify men into three groups. The average. The stunning. The impossible.

The last category had been created for men like Rune, or rather Sinclair Winchester.

They look nothing alike. While Rune has moon-white hair, Sinclair Winchester's is inky black, cropped to his shoulders in a style favored by human men. A few loose strands fall over his forehead as he leans forward, the sun seemingly drawn to his hair, enhancing its luster.

His sapphire eyes...I have never seen anything like them. Crystal-like. Ocean drops. Mesmerising. Bewitching. Cunning. Piercing.

His arrogant nose crinkles as he sniffs me, and my eyes drift to his lips—I can't decide which I find more sensual, his deep-set eyes or his luscious mouth that moves as he says, "You can't leave."

Cameras flash in our direction, and I resist the urge to snarl at the reporters. Guards suddenly press in from all corners, preventing them from coming closer. My gaze returns to Sinclair, and I stagger back. "I..." I lick my suddenly dry lips. "I can't...can't stay."

His hand reaches out, but I jump back, my instincts kicking in. He straightens, brushing invisible flecks of dust from his suit lapel. "We are in a bit of a fix, are we not?"

His voice sends shivers down to my knees, making them weak. I clench my fists, gripping the boxes in my hands to steady myself. Ezra, my inner wolf, screams at me, causing my hackles to rise. I block her out, focusing on the man before me.

Something about him feels abnormal. He smells wrong. Not human. Not Lycan. Not a wolf.

Whatever it is, I don't care at the moment. I need to resolve this problem quickly before I succumb to my emotions. "This isn't going to work out for either of us. I know what happens next. Allow me to put you out of your misery."

He stills, his eyes like razors slicing into my deepest hopes and fears. "Don't—"

"Sinclair," a woman's soft voice calls from afar, laced with worry. At the same moment, I tell him, "I reject you."

The pain that follows is surreal. It cleaves through me like a whip crack, reaching for that invisible thread that binds our fates together, hacking at it, severing it, and...

Nothing.

The pain vanishes as swiftly as it assaulted me, leaving me with a very angry Ezra roaring in my head, making me whimper.

So much for that. I had known it would take more than rejections to sever the bond between Erasthais, but I had never truly believed it.

Until now. I can sense the connection between us, strong and unwavering, buried deep within me.

My fingers clutch my chest, feeling my racing heart. I raise my gaze, half expecting Mr. Winchester to be in the same predicament as I am.

But rather than wince in pain, he looks annoyed. "Pity. We could've had so much fun together."

"You think this is fun?" The disdain in my voice cuts through the clearing, reaching the approaching woman.

He reaches out, and I freeze as he touches my jaw, sliding a finger beneath my chin, tipping my face back so all I can see is his radiant beauty in the sun's light. His voice drops so low that only my heightened hearing can pick up the words. "That, it is. I might have let you go, had you not rejected me. I am unused to the concept of being refused what I want."

I swallow. "And what is it that you want?"

A lopsided grin lifts his lips. "Now? You."

That's been the problem in my life, I suppose. Men want me, but only for a moment, never for keeps. They leave. Just like Rune left me for Astrid.

I jerk my face from his touch, my eyes flicking to the advancing reporters and guests who might be family, judging from the anger on their faces. It doesn't bother me much. I'm a nobody here. But Mr. Winchester...

"Not happening." I tell him, handing him the box. "You'll be needing this."

He straightens, cracking me a grin that makes my heart stumble, and leans forward, towering several feet taller than me. "And you're fired."

I straighten at that, back becoming straight as ramrod and my eyes flare. "Why? Because I rejected you?"

He takes the box from me, a shitty grin gracing his features. "Precisely."

I grip the hem of my dress, my eyes darting between Ray, Mr. Winchester, and his bride a few feet away from us. "I need this job. You can't fire me without giving me a chance."

The corners of his mouth twitch. "Of course you do. You have no qualifications to get hired elsewhere. Perhaps, a cleaning job." His grin widens. "That is what makes this intriguing.

Knowing that you will return to me and plead for it. And I will hire you again. You will have no choice but to see me every day, spend time with me in the same enclosed space, report to me whenever I demand it and only leave when I let you. The bet will be on how long it takes before you give in."

I open my mouth and close it again. What in the world... "You're literally getting married. Have you no shame?"

He flashes me a dazzling smile. "You must not know much about me. Look me up, Ms. Gin. Shame might just be the only thing I lack."

I tuck away the fact that he remembers my name in a different compartment of my brain to be revisited later.

"How could you leave me standing there like a complete idiot?" the woman asks, brushing up beside Mr. Winchester, her face stricken with worry and panic.

I wonder if I looked that way when Rune left me at the altar.

Mr. Winchester winks at me before turning to her, holding up the ring box, expression solemn. "I had to get these, El. I'm sorry if I startled you."

But the woman looks in my direction, her brown eyes studying me slowly, noting the nuances she will never be able to understand—the perfection of every inch of my body, the grace that comes with being a Lycan, and the beauty that will never wane, regardless of how weary I might look.

Those eyes shift to her groom, and I see something go off in her. Confusion, yet an epiphany.

That myself and her groom have something in common that she cannot quite place her thumb on. I could tell her, but she would rather crown me as crazy than believe that we exist. That a different realm exists.

It was a stunner when I arrived. Finding that the culture and history we had fought so hard to protect had come to be lost in these lands, considered as nothing more than mere myth. Two thousand years could do that to a group of people with very limited life spans. Forgotten truths, and whatever is retained in their libraries of us is the bare minimum. Lies at best.

The woman's cheeks flush, and I notice her eyes have turned feverishly bright, taking in everything and nothing at the same time.

Her steps falter, and she suddenly reaches for Mr. Winchester's sleeve, clutching it tightly as she breathes hard. "Sinclair..."

"El?" he says, just as Ray grabs my arm, pulling me away from the gathering guests and paparazzi crowding the area. A woman with a striking resemblance to the bride runs forward, calling her name.

The bride collapses, and Mr. Winchester catches her, lifting her into his arms as he calls for his security and an ambulance.

Ray pulls me further away, and I can't help but notice the wedding rings and the veil lying on the ground, getting trampled on by reporters whose coverage matters more to them than the unconscious woman.

"Spill it, honey. You his ex or somethin'? Ain't no man leaving his fiancée at the altar unless his ex got his baby, someone kicked the bucket, or his new girl's been playin' him behind his back. Which are you?"

My lips purse. "None. Tell me more about Mr Winchester."

Ray gives me a side eye. "I gave you six articles to read on--"

"You know I hate those things. Disturbs my eyes. You tell me."

"Damn girl. Did y'all hook up before? Did he pull a houdini and leave you with a bundle of joy? That why you was cryin' on the bench that night? Where's the kid at?"

"Ray," I growl in warning.

She raises her hands in surrender, red nails flashing in the air. She tells me all she can about Mr Winchester as I drive us to her apartment.

He's a wealthy businessman, a Casanova who moves from woman to woman without a care, indulging in the thrill of the chase. Rumors of affairs with married women surround him, but no evidence can pin him down. Ray says she doesn't think there is a woman in New York and abroad he hasn't stuck his dick in, and not one of them seem heartbroken when he moves on. They look forward to the next time they can get with him.

I think Ray is being extra. I tell her so. Sex can't be that great. No woman likes sharing. No woman is ever content with the barest minimum. That woman looks forward to a next time with a man who has whored himself to everyone else.

Perhaps, I speak for myself, because Ray's brown eyes have gone dreamy as she speaks. I can only imagine what she is daydreaming about.

Fucking him too, since every other woman in this world seems to have. Ezra growls, and I growl inwardly in return, silencing her and listening to the rest of what Ray tells me.

In the cutthroat world of business, Sinclair Winchester is a ruthless force, feared and respected. His supposed ties to the underground add to his mystique, and his enemies disappear without a trace. He's cold and cruel when it comes to the affairs of his business. One mistake and it's over.

Whatever that means.

She goes on and on, chipping in little facts that she thinks will help me at work to relate with him better.

I haven't told her of my small predicament. I've lost my job and Mr Winchester is playing a stupid game with me.

I have only ever begged for one thing in my life, and I have sworn never to beg for anything else. If I have to get a cleaning job—it takes all of my strength not to retch at the idea—but it doesn't disgust me as much as returning to him.

I won't. So I don't ever have to see him again.