

4. Lycans At The Club

I have a secret hate for parties and revelries.

Back at home, there was little else to do in the castle than lavish away in the lust for joy and bodily pleasures. We are a race that lives for a long, long time. Whatever form of amusement we can find, we take it.

And I had thrived in that environment, regardless of the fact that I hated the loud booming of music in my ears. I had learned over the years, the art of wearing faces that weren't mine.

Pretence became second skin. Smiles became painful. Nobody knew. Very few cared. Only Rune ever really cared. It was easy to love him for that reason alone.

I could tell you all about my life and relationship with Rune, but that'll come later. Tonight is for Ray and I.

"You said it was a small get-together," I tell Ray, wincing at the blaring music threatening to destroy my sensitive ears.

Ray smiles, batting her eyelashes sweetly. "Loosen up, chica. You say the word, we go home."

I scowl. "I want to go home."

She grabs my arm, hurling me forward toward the huge bouncer guarding the door. "We only just got here. Don't be a nag," she whispers to me. To the guard, she reaches out, adjusting his collar while dragging long, perfectly manicured nails over his throat provocatively. "Hey there, handsome."

The male's eyes drop to her daring neckline that showcases a sinful amount of cleavage before rising back up. "Not tonight, Ray. We have guests. The boss is here."

Ray pouts, pushing her chest against his and I cover the side of my face to hide my amused smile.

"C'mon, darling. Trouble ain't my style. You know me, I'm smooth as butter. We stick to the second level as usual. Cross my heart, sugar."

The guard's eyes flick to me. His dark gaze sweeps me from head to toe. I'm in huge sweatshirt and my shorts cling to my ass like film to glass. Ray's choice, not mine. She thinks human males like seeing asses. I have no idea why I listened and put on the miserable thing.

"Who's your friend?"

Ray smiles at me, eyes monitoring me and her bouncer friend. "She's the new special edition, exclusive and off-limits to all y'all. Ain't nobody gonna mess with that fresh flavor!"

My brows rise at that, but the bouncers eyes flick over me again, heat flickering in them. "Shame."

He turns his attention to Ray. "One complaint and you will be banned from here. Do not make me regret this."

"Thanks, Charlie!" Ray beams as she grabs my arm and pulls me into Booming Palace.

The world transforms as we step in and the pulsating energy hits me like a wave. It is a sensory overload for me and all of my senses are thrown into disarray. Neon lights flash in every direction, casting an iridescent glow over the entire floor. Loud music thumps through my being, my chest, reverberating in and out of sync with my heartbeat.

People gyrate with abandon, their movements a blur of passion and desire, lost in the intoxicating melody. Laughter and cheers echoes through the air, intermingling with the throbbing bass that seems to pulse in time with my breath.

The air is thick with the scents of sweat, alcohol, and something darker. I tug on Ray's arm, and she turns to me, smiling from ear to ear. "Freakin' amazing, right?"

No, it's not, but I can't tell her that. The reason she pulled me out in the first place was to celebrate me attaining the job. I'd told her it wasn't necessary but Ray hardly listens when her mind's been made up.

"Yes. Thank you."

For the next hour, we weave in and out of the dancing throng. Ray meets a couple of people she knows and she introduces me. I forget their names right after it leaves their lips. I have no use for them. We talk, laugh, dance, sweat, laugh again.

At some point, my feet begins to hurt and my head pounds terribly. I need to catch my breath. A drink too, for my parched throat.

My eyes flick to Ray. She is lost in the fray, grinding her hips into an attractive male who seems all too eager to indulge her. She wouldn't notice if I was gone for a minute or two.

I head to the bar, discomfort seeping into my bones as someone grabs my rump, squeezing hard while calling out, "Come here, angel!"

One strike would be enough to sever his hand from his body. One punch and his face will have a dent in it. I refrain from doing either. It would draw too much attention to me. Smacking off his hand, I cross over to the bar, leaning over the table.

"What can I get you, miss?"

The bartender has a presence about him that makes me feel instantly comfortable. Perhaps, it is his disarming smile, or the warmth that brightens his eyes as he awaits my order. His hair is slicked back against his head, and he is wearing a vibrant t-shirt with a distinct apron hung over it.

"Margarita," I say. "On the rocks."

Grey eyes crinkle softly as he smiles. "Coming right up, miss."

"Gin. My name's Gin," I say hastily, eyes sizing his muscular tanned arms and broad shoulders. Could he take me if I wanted him to?

"Owen," he says, turning away from me to grab a bottle from his shelf. My eyes droop further to his slim waistline and firm ass. "You're new in town?"

"Yeah, I--" Something sharp digs into the back of my neck and I jerk, looking back as my fingers feel for the stinging spot.

There are a bunch of men and women behind me, laughing, none of which look suspicious, like they might have touched me. But I know someone did, my suspicion proven right when my fingers come away wet and I see red on my fingertips.

It kicks in then.

The room starts to spin and a sudden wave of drowsiness washes over me like a heavy, suffocating blanket. My limbs feel like lead and moving becomes a struggle as I try to maintain my balance. Nausea churns in the pit of my stomach, and I clutch the table, desperately trying to steady myself on the floors that seem to be moving.

Perhaps, I'm the one moving.

"Miss," I hear Owen say. "Are you alright?"

No, I want to tell him, but someone bumps into me, pushing me off the table. I fall on my knees and...there are feet everywhere.

I need to find Ray. We need to leave. Human drugs do not affect our metabolisms this way. Whoever pricked me used lunarroot.

I force myself up on my feet and my heart pounds violently in my chest, the sound echoing relentlessly in my ears. Each breath feels more shallow than the last, as if drawing air into my lungs is impossible.

Elbows jab into my side as I delve into the crowd, searching for Ray. I call her name, but there is no response. I can't see. I can't think. What's...her hair is black. She has a white body suit on. She has skin of the richest chocolate.

What's...her name? What is my name?

Panic surges through me and it is like trying to swim against a raging current. My consciousness is depleting swiftly. I can't stay in here. Where's...Ray? Why can't she hear me? Why can't I hear myself?

The room starts to sway, colours bleeding into each other, voices and laughter echoing in the distance, but it feels like I am observing from afar. Someone grabs my ass. Another fumbles with my breasts. Someone's fingers are in my hair. Another is reaching for the vee of my thighs. My vision starts to darken at the edges and I feel myself fall into someone.

"Hey, princess," someone mutters close to my ears, arms holding me up. "Why don't we get you some air outside?"

I peer up at him, but I can't make out his features. I can't see much. Trying to gives me a splitting headache. Getting air sounds like bliss to me.

But..."Ray," I tell the stranger. "Need to find Ray." My words come out slurred, but thankfully, he understands.

"Yeah, she's out back, looking for you. Shall we go get her first?"

I nod, thankful for the help steadying myself. His grip is strong as he pulls me away from the crowd. It takes a moment before I realize we aren't going in the direction of the door.

Perhaps, there's another entrance...I think, eyes drooping.

"Did you find it?" I hear the male say to someone else, just as I hear the ding of an elevator.

"Yeah, but security is tighter than usual. Running through might be the only way out," another male says. "Where's Ragnar?"

"Waiting in the car."

"Where's Ray?" I ask again, somewhat adrift. Their words have bells ringing in my head, but my thoughts are jumbled.

"She's still conscious?"

"Should've been enough to knock her out cold. The old man said to be careful with her."

Old man? I feel myself get tossed to the side of the elevator, cold metal biting into my skin. A moment of clarity has me sniffing the air in the elevator and my vision sharpens.

Two males, both reeking of sweat and...lycan. Two figures loom before me, their immense size and bulk making them appear like towering giants. My vision blurs again and I squeeze it shut, drawing in a ragged breath. "You're not...you...not taking me to Ray."

"No. We're taking you home."

The elevator wobbles and my back slams into it, the impact knocking out air from me. I hit the ground, whimpering. "Not...going back!"

"Got some more lunarroot?" The male who found me asks the other.

The male reaches into his pocket and I shuffle back. More, and I will pass out. I can't go back. I won't go back.

But at the sight of the dangerous, icy and intense glint in their eyes, like cold steel ready to strike, fear grips me. I suddenly feel Alaric's tongue on my cheek, and his teeth in my skin as he forces my thigh open with his knee, pushing into me. I feel his knuckles slam into my nose when I try to scream for help. Over and over again.

He'll do it again if they take me back. He'll kill me this time.

"No! Please no!" I cry, voice breaking as I struggle against my slipping consciousness and the hands that reach for me.

Ezra leaps out, and the next few seconds are hazy. Screams from me. Groans and roars from them. Later, if I am asked what transpired, I would recall none of it. I shouldn't have gotten out of the elevator alive, or conscious.

But somehow, I do. There is blood on my hands and clothes, and my limbs are heavier. My will to move comes solely from the fear of returning to Lycanthia.

I don't know where I am. Perhaps, a different section of the club. The air smells the same. Like drugs, alcohol and sex.

Stay awake!

I am being chased, and my sobs ring out in the air. I look back, squinting through the blur. One man races after me, murder in his eyes. There is blood on him, and a deep, angry gash runs from his cheeks to his chest. Twin to the slash I gave his companion before I ripped out his heart.

Oh, Goddess. No. I...killed someone.

My legs begin to lock on themselves and my sob grows louder.

Stay awake!

I look back once more as I race to one of the occupied booths. If I could find someone--

I run into a wall and I am knocked back on my ass. Still, I rise on my palms, trying to crawl, looking for a path away from the wall. Away from the man making a beeline for me.

Hands grab me and I scream, trashing, kicking, fighting. "I'm not going back!"

"Gin?"

His voice beckons to me, a light in the dark. An anchor. I pause in my hysterical feat, staring deeply into incandescent eyes, glowing with an inner fire I recognize. I surge forward, grabbing his arm. "Help," I plead.

His brows furrow, nostrils flaring at the sight of the blood on my clothes. Sinclair Winchester's eyes, like pools of deepest oceans, darken. "Who hurt you?"

"Not...my blood," I whisper, thoughts and existence fading as my vision blackens. "Don't let them take me back. He'll kill me."

"Who?"

Alaric, I want to tell him, but my body stops responding to the orders my brain gives it to stay awake, and I fall.