

Kickass 301

Chapter 301

Shana blinks, clearly taken aback by my openness. She seems pleasantly surprised but doesn't comment further on the matter. Instead, she smiles warmly and nods.

"Okay. I'll keep that in mind."

As we continue our quiet walk through the garden, I can't help but wonder if I'm finally letting go of the past, of the mistakes I made in my relationship with Abby. It's a small step, but it feels significant.

I just wish that I was making things right with Abby instead.

...

The soft glow of the television screen fills the room as I sit in my office, watching Abby's interview. She looks absolutely stunning, her confidence and grace shining through as she speaks.

A smile tugs at my lips, and for a moment, I can't help but feel a swell of pride and happiness for her.

She's come a long way, and it's evident in every word she utters. Her journey from the cook-off to this moment has been nothing short of remarkable, and I'm glad to see her flourishing.

But then the dreaded question comes. The interviewer wants to know about me, about the mystery sous chef named 'Ken'.

Abby pauses, and it's then that I see it. A flicker of something in her eyes—something that looks like sadness. I feel my wolf tug at me as she responds, as poised as ever.

"We were old friends," she says. "He wanted to lend a helping hand when I needed it the most, and... And I'm incredibly grateful for his support, and I'll never forget what he did for me."

As I watch her, my chest tightens, and a fleeting thought crosses my mind. I almost consider picking up the phone and calling her. I want to hear her voice, not on the television, but directed toward me.

But I can't. My hand, which was slowly inching toward the phone, drops back to my desk.

She's in the midst of preparing for the Alpha gathering, and I don't want to disrupt her focus. Plus, there's a nagging doubt in the back of my mind. What if she's still upset with me? What if my call affects her ability to perform at the gathering?

I let out a sigh, torn between the desire to reach out to her and the responsibility that comes with being an Alpha. Duty wins this time, and I decide to postpone the call.

Instead, I focus on the paperwork spread across my desk. There are meetings to schedule, decisions to make, and a myriad of tasks that are begging for my attention. The clock is ticking, and I can't afford any distractions right now.

As I delve into the work, time slips away, and the television becomes nothing more than background noise. My mind is consumed by the responsibilities of my position, and before I know it, I'm losing track of the outside world.

Just when I'm about to delve into a particularly important report, Marcus suddenly bursts into the room, his expression frantic.

"Karl, you won't believe this!" he exclaims.

I look up, concern flashing through my eyes. "What's wrong?"

He takes a deep breath, trying to steady himself. "It's Ethan. He's awake."

Chapter 302

Abby

It's the day before the Alpha party, and I feel as though I haven't stopped running around since the sun came up. Chloe and Leah, always my biggest cheerleaders, have also been by my side since the crack of dawn.

"Abby, you should take a rest," Leah says, gesturing for me to join her and Chloe by the bar, where they've poured another cup of coffee for each of us.

I sigh, tucking my clipboard under my arm. I've made a list of everything that needs to be done—cleaning, dusting, scrubbing, inventory, the works—and it feels like I've hardly even made a dent in all of it.

"But I—"

"No buts," Chloe insists, circling around the bar to grab me by the arm and drag me over to them. "You're taking ten."

It seems as though I don't have much of a choice, so I do as they say. And I hate to admit it, but it is a relief when I slide onto one of the bar stools. Leah shoves a cup of coffee in my hand as she tucks a strand of her hair behind her ear.

"Isn't the party management company handling the big stuff?" she asks as I take my first sip. It's light and sweet, just the way I like it.

"Well, yeah," I say with a sigh. "But they're not supposed to be here for another couple of hours, and I..."

"You're being obsessive," Chloe interrupts, shooting me a stern look. "Abby, you're the chef. You're not the chef and the event organizer and the cleaner. You don't want to exhaust yourself before the big day. You should be resting."

Resting. I almost laugh at the word. But before I can come up with a retort, my phone rings, interrupting my thoughts. I slip it out of my pocket to see that it's the electrician; he's been working in the basement all morning, trying to figure out why the power went out on the night of my dinner with the judges.

We've had a backup generator running since then, but I'd like to know why our power suddenly went out at the exact same time a mystery wad of paper towels and other junk just so happened to clog up my pipes and create a huge mess.

"Hey, Frank," I say, tucking my phone between the crook of my ear and my shoulder as I stir my coffee. "How's it going down there?"

"Well," he says in his gruff voice, a telltale sign of years of smoking, "I think I found the issue."

I can't help but feel a sense of relief. "Good!" I say. "What was it?"

The electrician hesitates for a moment before answering. "It looks like a line was cut in the basement."

My heart sinks at his words. "Cut? As in, with scissors?"

I can hear the confusion in my own voice as I try to make sense of it. Even Chloe and Leah shoot me a concerned look from the other side of the bar.

"Well, it could have been an animal chewing the wire," the electrician explains. "But the part where the wires were severed seems a little too clean for that."

I frown, considering the implications. "But my restaurant is free of mice or anything of the sort," I say. "I'm meticulous about that. We all are."

Chapter 303

We all turn, and that's when I see it: Mr. Thompson at the forefront of a large group of people in uniforms. They're carrying boxes of decorations, buckets of cleaning supplies, and all sorts of things that I can't even recognize.

"Abby!" Mr. Thompson exclaims, holding his arms out as he approaches. "Good morning!"

"Er—Good morning, Mr. Thompson," I say as I take in the sudden racket and spike in activity. "You're—"

“I know I’m early,” he says, flashing me a grin. “But I knew you’d be here already. My team is just going to get started on the cleaning and decorating.”

“Thank god,” Chloe huffs. “We tried telling her that she didn’t need to worry about it, but she’s been running around nonstop all morning. We were worried she was gonna hurt herself.”

Mr. Thompson shoots me a sympathetic look. “Is that true?”

I sigh, realizing that I have no choice but to tell the truth, and I nod. “Yeah. I’ve been a bit of a wreck.”

He stops beside me, draping his arm around my shoulders and giving me a friendly squeeze. “Well, we’re here now,” he says. “And my team is the best of the best. They’ll have this place fit for an Alpha party in no time.”

I offer a nervous smile in return. “Thanks, Mr. Thompson. It’s just... I’m not used to letting others handle everything like this. It feels weird.”

“I know it’s not easy, Abby,” he reassures me. “But you don’t need to worry about anything except cooking.”

I take a deep breath, trying to quell my anxiety. He’s right; my passion lies in cooking, and that’s where I should channel my energy; not only to make history catering this Alpha party, but also to prove to people—mainly Logan—that I am capable, and I am passionate.

“You’re right, Mr. Thompson. I’ll make sure the food is amazing.”

Mr. Thompson nods, then reaches into his briefcase and hands me a menu. “Speaking of which, here’s the menu for tomorrow. I can’t wait to see what you come up with.”

I take the menu and glance through it, my eyes widening as I see some of the ingredients listed. They’re expensive and luxurious, not something I usually have in stock.

“Mr. Thompson, I’m not sure if I can afford—”

“Don’t worry, Abby,” Mr. Thompson interrupts with a grin. “Follow me.”

Curious, I follow Mr. Thompson out of the restaurant and see a big box truck parked nearby. Mr. Thompson leads me to the back of the truck, and when I step inside, I’m met with an incredible sight.

Huge crates of the most exquisite ingredients fill the truck, from rare spices to the freshest seafood and the finest cuts of meat. It’s a chef’s dream come true.

Chapter 304

Abby

I’m standing in the kitchen, the crates of ingredients scattered around. It feels unreal, how fast everything is coming together. The bustle of Mr. Thompson’s team in the dining area seeps through the walls, and although I have an urge to go out there and try to lend a hand, I know that I’m better off staying in here where I can focus on the menu.

“Okay,” I murmur to myself as I pick up the menu that Mr. Thompson gave me earlier.

Everything seems so exquisite, from hors d’oeuvres to entrees to desserts—prosciutto-wrapped asparagus, cured meat and smoked cheddar charcuterie, oysters, frutti di mare, creme brulee, and that’s just to name a few.

It’s a long list, but I know that with my team, I can manage it. Anton and John aren’t scheduled to arrive for a while yet, but I’m thankful for a bit of peace and quiet so I can get some practicing done ahead of time.

Rolling up my sleeves, I get to work with the first dish. I gather the ingredients from the crates and start chopping, sauteing, and braising.

But as I cook, my mind starts to wander. The dress that I bought is still hanging in my closet; a beautiful pearlescent white with a low back and plunging neckline. I can still feel the luxurious fabric on my skin, and I can’t help but wonder how it’ll look glimmering beneath the lights at the party.

I want to go to the party. After everything, after all of the hard work I put in, isn't it only fair that I get to enjoy the fruits of my labor for a little while? But the truth is, I never asked if I could even attend, if it would even be appropriate.

As I stir a pot of pasta sauce, I keep going back and forth in my mind. Finally, I set the pot aside and wipe my hands on my apron.

I should ask. It's that simple.

I make my way out to the dining area, where the team is still in full swing. Tables have been rearranged to create a dance floor, pristine white table cloths cover each surface, and beautifully curated vases of flowers are scattered around.

A man is standing on a ladder in the center of the room, hanging garlands, and Mr. Thompson is standing beneath him and watching. I hesitate for a moment, and almost scurry back to the kitchen, but it's too late. Mr. Thompson is already turning, and he sees me.

"Abby, what can I do for you?" he asks.

I clear my throat, feeling a bit self-conscious about bringing up my request, but it's a bit too late now. "Well, I was thinking about the party, and I was wondering if I could... you know, mingle a bit. Just for a while."

Mr. Thompson's eyes twinkle with amusement. "You want to attend the party tomorrow?"

I swallow and shake my head nervously. Suddenly, I feel like I'm being ridiculous. I'm the caterer, not an attendee. "No, never mind. It's silly—"

But Mr. Thompson just chuckles. "Of course you can attend, Abby. In fact, I think people would be excited to see you there. You've become a bit of a local celebrity, you know."

"Really?" I ask.

He nods. "Absolutely. I'll send a hair and makeup artist for you—"

But I shake my head again, more firmly this time. "No," I blurt out. "I'd rather do it myself."

Mr. Thompson quirks an eyebrow. "Are you sure?"

I nod, thinking back to all of the times that I felt like my makeup was a mask meant to hide my true self. It's a choice I've made, and I'm sticking to it.

Mr. Thompson, seeing my conviction, simply smiles. "Okay, that's fine. We'll be looking forward to seeing you at the event, then."

...

The kitchen is alive with activity as John, Anton, and I work together to perfect the dishes for the Alpha party. The sound of music plays over the kitchen speakers, drowning out the din of preparations in the dining area.

We've been at it for hours, but each of us is too excited to stop anytime soon. With each successful practice dish, it's like we get another wave of adrenaline pushing us forward.

At one point, though, something unexpected happens.

Anton's phone rings, and he glances at the caller ID with a puzzled expression before answering it.

"Hello?"

There's a pause, and then it happens. His eyes go wide, and without another word, he's slipping out the back door into the alley, his voice fading before I can make out anything that he's saying.

John and I exchange glances.

“Wonder what that’s about,” John muses as he sears a steak on the grill.

I shrug and don’t say anything. It’s not my business, and I shouldn’t snoop. But it’s also rare for Anton to receive a phone call, especially one where he rushes off like that. I can’t help but be a little curious.

When Anton returns to the kitchen, there are tears in his eyes, and he looks at me with a mix of emotions that I can’t quite read.

“Anton?” I ask, setting down my knife. “Are you okay?”

But he doesn’t answer. Instead, he approaches me and, without a word, pulls me into a tight hug. It takes me by surprise.

“Anton, what’s going on?”

He releases me, wiping away a tear, and takes a deep breath. “My ex-wife just called me,” he says, his voice trembling slightly. “She heard about my work here, and she wanted to congratulate me.”

I can’t help but feel a rush of joy for Anton. “That’s wonderful news, Anton,” I say, offering him a smile. “I’m really happy for you.”

Chapter 305

Karl

I’m standing outside of my brother’s room, my hand lingering in front of the doorknob. This is it. After years of being in a coma, my brother is finally awake. I take a deep breath and push the door open.

And there he is, sitting up in bed.

“Ethan,” I breathe, my voice catching in my throat.

He turns to look at me, and for a moment, we just stare at each other. Then, without a word, I rush forward and hug him tightly. Neither of us lets go for the longest time.

“Karl,” he croaks, his voice still hoarse from years of not being used. “It’s good to finally see you, little brother.”

I pull away and look up at him, holding his shoulders in both hands. He’s thinner now than he was before, but he’s still my brother. His eyes are the same, filled with that same light that they always were. He’s just older now, and a little gaunt.

“I can’t believe you’re awake,” I murmur.

He laughs. It’s a gravelly sound, but it lifts my spirits. “I’m glad to be back, brother,” he says.

We spend the next few hours talking, catching up on everything that has happened during the years he was in a coma. Ethan tells me about the dreams he had, how he could hear the sounds of the voices that spoke to him even when he couldn’t respond, and how he always wished to be a part of it all.

But neither of us knows how he managed to wake up so suddenly; he just did. It feels random, out of nowhere, but like a miracle at the same time.

“I’ve heard about your achievements as Alpha,” he says at one point. “I’m proud of you.”

I can’t help but feel a swell of happiness at his words. “I’ve done my best to lead the pack well, Ethan. I hope to make you even prouder.”

He smiles warmly. “I have no doubt you will.”

As we talk, I can’t help but notice the bouquet of fresh flowers on the table beside Ethan’s bed. There were fresh flowers here last time, too, but these ones are brand new.

“Ethan, those flowers,” I say, nodding toward them. “Are they from a visitor?”

Ethan grins mischievously. “Ah, you noticed. Yes, they are. Someone came to visit me during my coma, and her voice was like a lifeline in the darkness. I couldn’t see her face, but I could hear her, and it kept me going.”

I’m intrigued. “Who is she, Ethan? Do I know her?”

He chuckles. “You’ll find out soon enough, Karl. She’ll be at the Alpha party.”

I raise an eyebrow, surprised. “The Alpha party? But Ethan, you only just woke up. Are you sure you’re up for it?”

Ethan’s eyes sparkle with excitement. “I’ve been trapped in a coma for so long, Karl. I’m dying to socialize a bit, and besides, I have a date.”

I can’t help but smile at his enthusiasm. “Well, in that case, I’m looking forward to meeting this mysterious lady.”

“Speaking of ladies,” he says, his voice filled with a hint of mischief, “did you ever win Abby back after all?”

For a moment, I freeze, the pain in my heart resurfacing. The memory of the day I vented to Ethan about Abby comes rushing back, and I feel a twinge of regret. I thought that he couldn’t hear me, but as I’ve discovered today, he heard almost everything.

But I can’t let Ethan worry about me. I put on a smile and shake my head.

“No, Ethan,” I say, my voice steady. “It won’t work out with Abby after all. But I do have a date for the Alpha party.”

Ethan looks at me, his eyes searching mine for a moment. Then, he smiles and pats my shoulder.

“That’s the spirit, Karl. Life is full of surprises, and you never know what the future holds.”

As I leave Ethan’s home, a mix of emotions washes over me. Reuniting with my brother, hearing about his dreams during his coma, and knowing that he’s on the path to recovery—it’s all overwhelming, and although I hate to say it, a little scary.

Will he want the title of Alpha back someday? And if so, how soon will that day come?

And then, there’s the mystery of the woman who visited him, the one who will be his date at the Alpha party. I’m intrigued, to say the least.

I’m just about to head out the door when I spot the doctor who has been attending to Ethan and decide to approach him. The doctor is a middle-aged man with a kind demeanor, and he greets me with a warm smile.

“Doctor, I can’t thank you enough for taking care of my brother,” I say, extending my hand for a handshake.

He nods and shakes my hand firmly. “The road is long from over, but it has been a pleasure.”

I take a deep breath and decide to broach the subject that’s been on my mind. “I have to ask, Doctor. How is it possible that Ethan woke up from his coma so suddenly? Is there any medical explanation for it?”

The doctor sighs and leans against the wall, looking thoughtful. “You know, sometimes, I don’t have all the answers. There are cases where patients wake up from comas with no rhyme or reason. It’s a mystery, but it’s also a miracle.”

I nod, understanding that not everything has an explanation. But then, a thought occurs to me. “Is it possible that his wolf had something to do with it? Could finding a mate have triggered his awakening?”

Chapter 306

Abby

Excitement courses through me as I fasten my pristine white chef's coat in front of the full-length mirror in my bedroom. My hair is pulled back into a neat bun, still a tiny bit damp from my morning shower.

"Today is the day," I say out loud, even though I'm completely alone in my apartment.

The sun has barely risen, but I'm already raring to go. Today is the day of the Alpha party, after all; I'll need to get an early start.

Back at the restaurant, we've got a mountain of prep work to get through. But I'm more excited than anything. After everything, here I am. And I'm almost positive that everything will go perfectly.

As I finish getting ready, I find myself stealing a glance at the elegant dress hanging on the hook on the back of my door. The pearlescent white is shining in the golden glow of the morning sun, the delicate beads on the bodice casting tiny rainbows around the room. It's stunning.

But for a moment, doubt creeps in. Is it too extravagant? Should I leave it behind?

No. I shake my head as if to dispel the thought. I deserve to look beautiful tonight. I deserve to wear the gown that caught my eye. I'm not going to let anxiety stop me from doing that.

With determination, I carefully place the dress into a garment bag and sling it over my shoulder. It's time to head to the restaurant, where the final preparations for the Alpha party await.

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As I step into the restaurant, the kitchen is already buzzing with activity.

"Hey, Abby!" John calls out from behind the line, waving his chef's knife in the air excitedly. "Today's the day!"

"Indeed it is," I say with a chuckle, and nod my head toward his knife. "Be careful with that."

John, realizing what he's doing in his excitement, quickly lowers the knife and clears his throat. "Well, the vegetables are all prepped, so we're ahead of schedule."

"And the meat we left in the smoker overnight looks délicieux," Anton chimes in with a grin.

I let out a soft sigh of relief. Everything seems to be going perfectly so far. No fires, no sabotaged ingredients, no burst pipes or cut wires.

With a smile, I make my way to my office, where I carefully hang my dress on the back of the door. I let my hand linger on it for a moment, picturing how it'll look later. I'm so excited, I can barely contain myself.

And then my mind begins to wander. Karl will be here tonight... will he see my dress? Will he like it?

Once again, though, I shake my head to dispel the thought. Karl has a date, or so I've heard. I'm sure that, whoever she is, she's stunning. The perfect picture of a future Luna. And I'm happy for him, really.

At least, that's what I tell myself. I pretend not to notice the tears pricking behind the backs of my eyes, and wander out to the dining area where Mr. Thompson and his team are rushing around, making last-minute arrangements.

"Ah, good morning, Abby," Mr. Thompson says as he notices me. "Are you ready to take on the day?"

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John gets to work preparing the meat, and Anton starts on the desserts. I place my focus on the main courses, a wide variety of different meals that all need to be prepped, from luxurious seafood dishes to hearty steak and potatoes.

Daisy and Chloe, with their impeccable attention to detail, begin to float in and out of the kitchen as the hors d'oeuvres are prepared. They're working as servers and bartenders tonight, and I couldn't be more grateful. Meanwhile, Ethan is preparing the charcuterie boards, his face a mask of laserlike focus.

As we work seamlessly in our respective roles, I can't help but feel an overwhelming sense of pride and gratitude for my team. We've come such a long way, and yet here we are, catering the Alpha party like we've been doing it for years.

Before I know it, though, Mr. Thompson is announcing that the first guests will be arriving soon. The hour hand has almost reached seven o'clock, but the day flew by.

"Everyone, gather around," I call out over the sounds of the kitchen.

My team gathers around me, their faces expectant and a little nervous. For a moment, I feel frozen—but only for a moment. I'm not on stage anymore. I'm not in front of a live studio audience or the flashing red light of a camera.

I'm here, in my kitchen, my home, with my family.

"I can't thank all of you enough," I begin with a smile, and pause to look around at the faces of my team.

There's Anton, with his weathered but bright eyes.

There's John, with a smile hiding behind his beard, his chef's coat looking only a little out of place on his frame. There's Ethan, leaning on the counter to support his bad leg, but there's a light in his eyes that will never go out.

There's Daisy, leaning against Ethan—as if I wouldn't notice the chemistry between the two of them lately—with her hair piled up into a spunky bun on top of her head. There's Chloe, her arms folded across her chest, her eyes fixed unwaveringly on me.

And then my eyes flicker over to the space by the doorway; the space where he used to stand. It's empty now. Karl should be there, but he isn't, and he won't fill that space anymore.

Taking a shuddering breath, I quickly look back at my team and manage a smile. "You've all put in a lot of hard work lately," I say. "You deserve a vacation after all of this."

“Is Abby taking us to Paris?” Daisy exclaims, resulting in a chuckle from the rest of the team.

I shake my head with a laugh. “I wish I could, but no. All I can promise is an enormous thank-you, which I know isn’t enough.” I pause, licking my lips. “Really, I love you guys. I don’t deserve you.”

My voice trails off, and for a moment, I think I might cry. I quickly look away, blinking back the tears that threaten to spill.

There’s a brief silence, but not for long. Chloe quickly steps forward, draping her arm around my shoulders. “You deserve the world, Abbs,” she says, rubbing my arm. “And we’re happy to be a part of this. Working with you, seeing you grow...”

Chapter 308

Abby

I take a deep breath as the Alpha party begins, the buzz of excitement and chatter filling the air. It’s finally here, the culmination of months of hard work and preparation. I couldn’t be more excited—and I also couldn’t be more terrified.

“Abby, the first orders are coming in,” John calls out, a bead of sweat glistening on his brow as he stands over the grill.

I nod in acknowledgment and grab the first order ticket: frutti di mare. An easy one, because all of the ingredients were prepped ahead of time. I just need to throw it together on the stove and then it’s done.

But it doesn’t stay easy for long. Before I know it, the kitchen is rapidly turning into a warzone. The orders are flying in faster than a dinner rush on a Saturday night, and the hors d’oeuvres that we prepared earlier need to be restocked.

I hate to say it, but I didn’t expect the food to be this much of a success. I feel like if I don’t watch it, I’ll drown.

“Two steaks coming up, one medium rare and one medium,” John says. “Abby, how are the potatoes coming along?”

I glance at the pan of potatoes cooking in the oven. “Almost done. Another minute.”

Anton, our resident pastry chef for tonight, is busy at the dessert station, meticulously assembling the tiramisu. He’s a perfectionist when it comes to his desserts, and it shows in the intricate layers he creates.

In fact, it appears as though his perfection isn’t going unnoticed at the Alpha party.

“Abby, the tiramisu is a huge hit out there,” Chloe calls out as she bursts through the door, her excitement palpable. “People are raving about it!”

“That’s fantastic! You hear that, Anton? Your tiramisu is a hit!”

“Merde,” Anton huffs as he wipes his brow with the back of his wrist. “I can hardly keep up. Who knew!”

I let out a soft sigh and turn to Chloe. “Chloe, try to push a different dessert for a little bit. Recommend the peach cobbler instead.”

Chloe nods, but I can see the worry in her eyes. “I’ll try,” she says, “but people are seeing other people eating it and they’re getting FOMO. I can only do so much.”

“Well, just try your best,” I encourage. “If they want the tiramisu, just tell them that it’s on backorder and might take an extra couple of minutes.”

With another nod, Chloe disappears from the kitchen. I pull the potatoes out of the oven and toss them onto the same two plates that John is placing the steaks on, adding a sprinkle of parmesan and some rosemary before they’re ready.

“Anton,” I call out, “are you sure you’re okay over there? Need a switch?”

Anton pauses for a moment, then nods. "If you don't mind."

"Not a problem." Without a second thought, I jog around the line and switch spots with Anton. It's a bit of a relief to get away from the heat of the stove anyway.

As Anton and John start working on the next wave of dishes, I quickly gather the ingredients we need for another batch of tiramisu. Ladyfingers, mascarpone cheese, espresso, cocoa powder. Before I know it, I'm lost in a world of layers and sweetness.

But just as I'm settling into my new groove and the entree orders seem to be dying down, chaos erupts. Daisy rushes into the kitchen, her face flushed with concern.

"Abby, we've got a problem," she says, her voice quivering. I've seen this look before—the tears in her eyes, the way her lower lip is shaking. She's about to cry.

I pause mid-step, my heart racing. "What's wrong?"

Chapter 309

Daisy hesitates for a moment, her eyes flickering with discomfort before she finally answers. "I think so. It was a table of Lunas."

My heart clenches. I think I know exactly who Daisy is referring to; and yes, they would absolutely, without a doubt, do something horrendous like this.

They've never been supportive of my culinary career, and with me catering the Alpha party now, there's no doubt in my mind that they felt it necessary to knock me down a peg.

I take a deep breath, trying to keep my emotions in check. This is not the time for personal grievances. We have a party to run, and I won't let the actions of a few ruin it.

"Okay. Daisy, toss those cakes and bring out these ones," I say, my tone firm but controlled as I nod my head toward a fresh tray of tiramisu. "And keep an eye on those Lunas for now. If they cause any more trouble, come to me."

Daisy nods, relief washing over her features. “You got it, Abby.”

As she rushes off with the new tray of tiramisu, I turn my attention back to the kitchen. We can’t afford any more disruptions tonight. The show must go on.

The kitchen continues to operate like a well-oiled machine, and I can see the satisfaction on my team’s faces as they send out beautifully plated dishes. It’s moments like these that remind me why I became a chef in the first place—the thrill of creating something extraordinary and the joy it brings to others.

But as the night wears on, my thoughts keep returning to the Lunas. It’s hard not to feel a pang of hurt and frustration. I’ve worked tirelessly to prove myself, and yet, some still view me as an outsider.

As the kitchen staff takes a brief break to regroup, Daisy approaches me cautiously.

“Abby, are you okay after earlier?” she asks, her eyes filled with concern.

I force a smile, masking my inner turmoil. “I’m fine, Daisy. Don’t worry. Are those Lunas behaving?”

She lets out a soft sigh and hangs her head. “Well, they haven’t wrecked any more food, but they’ve been nasty all night,” she says. “One of them called me a whore when I came and took their dirty dishes.”

My eyes widen. “Daisy! Why didn’t you tell me?”

Daisy shrugs and tucks a strand of blonde hair behind her ear. “I don’t know. I guess I’m just so used to having people treat me as lesser than because of my past that I didn’t even think of it.”

I don’t know what to say. I know about Daisy’s past, as does everyone else in here. None of us look down on her, and I guess it makes me forget sometimes that the entire world isn’t like us.

But now, more than ever, I want to give those Lunas a piece of my mind. They can insult me, but my staff, my family? I won't let that happen. Ever.

"Don't worry, Daisy," I reassure her, touching her shoulder. "Let one of Mr. Thompson's staff handle that table for the rest of the night."

She shoots me a wary look. "Are you sure?"

I nod. "Absolutely." Then, with a mischievous smile, I lean a little closer and lower my voice so only she can hear. "And take a piece of cake for you and Ethan to share. You deserve it."

As I speak, Daisy's eyes widen, her mouth falling open. "Ethan and I—We're not—" she stutters, but I can see it in her eyes, and I just grin.

Chapter 310

Karl

The Alpha party is in full swing, and I've got Shana on my arm, introduced as my date for the evening. We make our entrance onto the dancefloor, and immediately, I sense the eyes of the other Lunas—the ones who used to be Abby's 'friends', and also who I just so happened to kick out of Abby's restaurant for being rude.

There's a distinct smirk on their faces as they glance our way.

I try to ignore their glances and maintain a smile, acting as if I'm unfazed by their scrutiny. Shana looks stunning in her elegant dress, and for a moment, I'm genuinely grateful to have her by my side.

As we navigate through the crowd, people start to approach us, making small talk and dropping not-so-subtle hints about my past with Abby.

"Karl, I heard you've moved on from Abby," one Luna says with a sly grin. "It took you long enough."

I nod politely. “Yes, Shana and I are together now. Abby and I are still friends, though. I’m proud of her and her career taking off.”

Another Luna chimes in, “I heard Abby might attend the party for a while. After her TV appearances, perhaps she’s got some... ‘fans’ here who might want to see her.”

I offer a nonchalant smile. “Well, if she does drop by later, she deserves it. She’s put in a lot of hard work.”

The conversations continue in a similar vein, and I can’t help but feel like I’m constantly defending my choices. Shana, on the other hand, seems uninterested in engaging with the other guests.

It’s clear she’s not particularly interested in socializing, and our interactions are limited to the occasional dance or a brief exchange of words.

We take to the dance floor, and as we move to the music, I find myself lost in thought. Shana’s a nice enough girl, but there’s an undeniable lack of chemistry between us.

Even dancing with her feels stiff and choreographed. It feels more like a formality than a genuine connection. Is this what my life would be like if she became the future Luna—bland and uneventful?

I lead Shana through a graceful waltz, our movements perfectly timed but lacking the passion and intensity I’ve felt on the dance floor with Abby in the past. She follows my lead dutifully, her gaze occasionally drifting to something or someone else in the room.

The music changes to a livelier tune, and I make an attempt at conversation. “Having a good time?:

Shana offers a small smile. “Yes, it’s a lovely party.”

I nod in agreement, but there’s an awkward silence that follows. It’s becoming increasingly clear that Shana isn’t interested in engaging in a meaningful conversation.

I decide to press on. "Do you like parties like this?" I ask.

She hesitates for a moment, as if searching for an answer. "I don't mind them."