

#Chapter 7 Save me!

I turned, relieved to see Candido coming through the crowd. They parted and bowed their heads. No one said a thing, probably quaking at the thought they might have been heard bad-mouthing me and agreeing with Eric.

"You must be, speaking to anyone in my pack that way. Perhaps you'd like your pack to pay the price for your idiocy?" His eyes narrowed. "Penance is owed, isn't it?"

Eric paled and stepped back, glancing at me and then dropping his gaze. Candido glared at him, daring him to say anything as the raw power of his presence loomed over Eric. Bella shifted the top of her dress down, just enough to reveal more of her cleavage. She looked ridiculous, but Candido didn't even glance at her. His gaze swept past Bella and Lilian down to the blood-stained corner of my dress. His eyes narrowed as he looked at me.

"Hedy," he said. "Are you alright?"

I swallowed and gave him a trembling smile as I nodded. It wasn't a lie. Now that he was here, I was just fine. I stepped closer to him as he wrapped an arm around my shoulders and pulled me close. His eyes continued to dart across my face, searching for something, but I kept smiling.

Candido had a temper. As much as I wanted Bella, Lilian, and Eric to get what they deserved, they didn't deserve to be

turned into bloody stains on the banquet hall floor. 2

Lilian lowered herself and lifted Bella from the ground. She said something in her ear that made Bella's expression turn sour. Candido turned back to look at Bella and Lilian.

"Is your blood on Hedy's dress?"

"I-I—" Bella glanced between Candido and me. "She pushed me. I was just—"

The microphone cracked on, cutting her off as Steven stepped up to the podium on the other side of the room

"Thank you all for coming here for my birthday," Steven called out through the microphone system. "But this evening isn't just to celebrate me, but the engagement of my dearest Bella and Eric."

A round of applause went around the room as the projection screen turned on. There was a photo of Eric and Bella on the screen.

"Let's give them a round of applause," Steven said, lifting his glass and turning to look over at us as a spotlight shined down on Eric and Bella.

His eyes widened. His face flushed with anger. "What the hell —?"

My eyes widened as the room gasped. I turned to look at the screen with the rest of the crowd. It's a video of Eric thrusting into some woman from behind. They were both

naked. The sound of their skin slapping together echoed through the banquet hall.

"Oh, Eric, more! Give me more."

My face heated, and I covered my mouth. For a moment, I thought back to the first time I had seen Candido mostly naked. Heat washed through me as I bit my lip and remembered the ripple of muscles in his back as he pulled himself out of the swimming pool. The moonlight chased every drop of water, sliding down his back. I remembered not being able to speak to him without imagining him shirtless for weeks.

Eric was thinner, paler, and less defined than Candido. I glanced at Eric, who had gone pale with shock.

"Turn it off!" Steven cried.

Bella collapsed back to the ground, rocking, and sobbing. Eric turned to explain to Lilian, but her expression was hard. He turned towards the podium, but Steven was gone. The video continued to play. The sound of him thrusting and the women moaning was the only thing I could hear in the banquet hall. The crowd gasped as another woman crawled across the large bed. 1

"Wait, it's just a misunderstanding—"

"Don't touch me! Go away! You're disgusting!" Bella surged back to her feet, snarling at him. She ripped off the ring and threw it in his face. "We're done!" 1

Steven's birthday party was ruined, as was the alliance between the two packs probably.

I looked up at Candido and then to Lilian, who covered her face and dashed out through the crowd. Soon after, the crowd started to thin out. The sounds of Eric's affair had apparently turned everyone off of food. The party was over, and everyone started to leave as quietly as they could, with the video still playing.

I looked up at Candido, who seemed unbothered by the situation. He hadn't been watching Eric and Bella dash off or the video. His gaze had been focused on me. He stepped away a bit and crouched beside me.

"Candido?"

He lifted the edge of my dress to examine the smears of blood. His lips tilted down into a frown before he stood again.

"Is it really bad?" I asked. I had no idea what the dress was made of. Could they get the blood out?

"The car will come back around shortly."

I nodded as Bella's scream ripped through the air.

"Let me go!"

I turned to see Eric grabbing Bella by the arm and pulling her back towards him. I hated Bella, but my feet darted towards

them.

"Hey, let her go!"

I was a few feet away when Bella twisted away from Eric, but she didn't leave the hall or try to escape him. She turned with wide, furious eyes and snarled at me.

"Happy now, Hedy? I know this is all your fault! I know you did this! Are you happy to embarrass me like this?"

The truth was that I was a little happy to see her get a little comeuppance, especially for the stunt she pulled on my dress earlier, but I couldn't reply.

It felt like I was back in my childhood again when Bella had fallen into a mud puddle and blamed me for the mud ruining her new clothes. She'd punched me and kicked me before dragging me through the mud. Steven had taken her side when she said that I had started it. I'd had welts for days from the beating he'd given me and hadn't been able to leave my room for anything but the bathroom.

My jaw trembled. I tried to get the words out, but I couldn't.

"You bitch," Bella shrieked, pulling me out of my memories. "I knew you were here to make fun of me!"

I said nothing. Before, I might have tried to defend myself, but hadn't I learned that there was no point in that? Hadn't I learned that the best thing I could do was escape? I forced myself to relax and turn back to Candido. I had to get out of here. There was no reason to stay any longer now that the

party was clearly over.

"You're not going anywhere!" Bella said. I heard her feet rushing across the floor towards me.

I turned back to glance at her. Her hand was raised. Her face was flushed with fury. Behind her, Eric was pale with terror and looking behind me.

"I'm going to teach you a lesson!"

My heart raced, and her words echoed through my mind, pulling up memories I never wanted to remember. Pain, fear, and despair colored most moments of my childhood. For a few moments, I could see. Was I going into shock? I could almost taste the poison on my tongue again. My stomach churned. I thought I was going to be sick.

Someone help me.

How many times had I prayed for someone to save me? Familiar, solid footsteps came up behind me. Before I realized it, I darted back towards Candido and around him until I was behind him.

"Save me!"