

Chapter 288 The Lover's Dance

Ella

The crimson hue that painted my cheeks felt hotter than the finest wine.

“Dance?” I echoed, a mix of incredulity and apprehension dripping from the word. Logan’s smirk only deepened, his gaze roving over me in a manner that was equally taunting and enticing.

“Wine just has a way of making me want to move,” he said, taking a step closer, his body swaying lightly to the gentle rhythm of the song playing in the background. “Especially to a song like this. Don’t you feel it?”

Biting my lip, I fidgeted on the spot and took a step back. “I... I don’t really know how to dance,” I admitted, though it felt more like a weak excuse to get out of having to get close to him. He raised a brow in surprise.

“You? Ella Morgan, heir to the Morgan legacy, doesn’t know how to dance? Weren’t there galas, balls, and all sorts of fancy parties where dancing was practically a requirement?”

Rubbing the back of my neck sheepishly, I nodded. “They did make me take lessons. Loads of them. But,” I paused, seeking the right words, “I was a bit of a tomboy growing up. Always running around in the mud, climbing trees. Those dancing lessons? I sat there, arms crossed, as sullen as a raincloud. Refused to learn a step.”

A chuckle escaped Logan’s lips, and his eyes sparkled with amusement. “So, the rebellious little heiress. You continue to surprise me, Ella. How about now? Fancy a quick lesson?”

Though a part of me-the part that was still stung by our earlier disagreements-wanted to refuse, the ambiance, the wine, and perhaps Logan's magnetic pull made me shrug.

"Why not?" I finally relented. "But don't laugh if I step on your toes."

"That's part of the learning process," he quipped, extending a hand. Accepting it, I found myself pulled into his embrace. The warmth of his body was palpable, and the proximity made my heart race.

The first few steps were a disaster. I stumbled, nearly tripping over my own feet, but Logan's hold was secure. With a gentle firmness, he guided me, his laughter light and teasing but not unkind.

As the minutes ticked by, I began to notice just how fluidly he moved. Logan was a natural dancer, his steps graceful and assured.

I couldn't help but glance up at him, admiration evident in my eyes. Our gazes locked, and I saw something shift in his-a tenderness, perhaps. Something far different and far softer than the mafia guy I had come to know.

The realization made me blush even more deeply. Caught in the rhythm and each other's eyes, the world outside seemed to fade. The gentle strumming of the guitar, the soulful lyrics-it all created an atmosphere of intimacy, pulling us even closer.

Our movements began to synchronize, my initial clumsiness melting away with Logan's guiding hand.

"See?" Logan said, smirking down at me. "Not so bad, is it?"

I felt my cheeks tinge a shade of red. "I guess not," I murmured. "Maybe I was a bit crass for refusing to dance all these years."

Logan chuckled. "Or maybe you just never had the right partner." My face turned even redder, but we continued moving together, as one.

But as the final chords of the song resonated in the still air, reality came rushing back. Our faces were mere inches apart, our breaths mingling.

My heart, which had been racing the entire song, now felt as if it was about to leap out of my chest. We teetered on the brink of a kiss. The music was still, but the tension between Logan and me was palpable, electric. Our lips hovered, almost touching.

The anticipation was so thick it was almost unbearable. But just as the world seemed to fade, my instincts kicked in, propelling me away from him. I was out of breath, my chest heaving, my mind in chaos.

“No,” I murmured. But Logan, seemingly undeterred, took a step forward, his fingers finding mine. With a gentle tug, he pulled me into the embrace I had just fled from. Our faces were close, so close that I could feel the warmth of his breath against my lips.

“It’s just a kiss, Ella,” he whispered, his voice low, coaxing. His blue eyes, darkened with desire, locked onto mine. “I like you. I really like you. Maybe it’s this whole ‘fated mates’ thing. messing with our heads, but right now, I couldn’t care less about reasons. I want to kiss you.”

A growl rumbled deep in my chest. His words, as sincere as they sounded, felt like an intrusion—a trespass into the sanctuary of my emotions. With a surge of strength, I shoved him off, creating a distance between us once more.

“I don’t feel anything of the sort,” I declared. defiantly. But within me, my wolf called my bluff. “Liar,” she chided, her voice dripping with a mix of amusement and annoyance. “You want to. Both of us want to.”

“Stay out of this!” I snapped back at her internally, my emotions a whirlwind of conflict. Tossing my hair over my shoulder in a show of defiance, I fixed Logan with a glare, my eyes aflame with a mixture of anger and something else—something deeper.

“If you ever try that again,” I warned, my voice low and deadly, “I’ll slice you open with these.” As I spoke, my claws, sharp and deadly, began to protrude from my fingertips.

There was a visceral shift within me, a callback to my more primal instincts. My canines elongated into fangs, and my ears, normally rounded, sharpened to fine points – a throwback to the fiery little girl I once was, the one who would throw tantrums that would terrify even the toughest of warriors.

I stood there, half transformed, both a testament to my strength and a warning to any who might challenge it.

Logan, for his part, seemed momentarily taken aback. But rather than cower or retreat, he raised his hands in a placating gesture, his expression a mix of regret and understanding.

“I’m sorry, Ella,” he said quickly, his voice earnest. “I didn’t mean any harm. I got carried away. Blame it on the wine.”

Every fiber of my being screamed at me to remain on guard, to stay in this state of heightened alertness. But another part, a softer, more rational side, acknowledged his sincerity.

Slowly, my more beastly features began to recede. My claws retracted, my ears rounded, and my fangs disappeared, replaced by a more human countenance. But the fire in my eyes remained.

“You should leave,” I told him, my voice more composed but no less firm. It was a statement, not a request.

Logan looked taken aback, but he quickly masked his surprise. “Ella, I’ve had a bit too much wine. I shouldn’t drive.”

My mind raced, trying to find a solution. Finally, I grabbed a plush blanket from the back of the couch, tossing it at him.

“Then sleep here,” I ordered, pointing at the couch. “But don’t expect breakfast.”

Without waiting for a response, I rushed to my bedroom, locking the door behind me. My back. pressed against the solid wood, my breathing ragged. A flurry of emotions swirled within me -desire, anger, confusion.

“Why did you push him away?” My wolf prodded, its tone a mix of curiosity and frustration. “Because it’s complicated,” I retorted, sinking down to the floor, resting my head in my hands.

The night’s events had been a whirlwind, and as sleep beckoned, the weight of it all threatened to crush me. Curling up on my bed, I pulled the covers tightly around me, trying to find solace in the embrace of the night.

Chapter 289 Hot Alpha Girlfriend

Ella

The soft rays of dawn filtered through the curtains as I stretched, pulling myself from the depths of sleep. After climbing out of bed and slipping my robe around my shoulders, I tentatively cracked open my bedroom door, expecting to see Logan there.

I glanced around, my eyes falling on the crumpled blanket on the couch. There was no sign of Logan. Instead, on my coffee table, lay a neat note, written in his sprawling handwriting. “Ella,” it began, “Thanks for a memorable evening. Apologies for overstepping. – Logan.”

I sighed, folding the note and tucking it into my pocket. Regardless of the emotions last night had brought, it was a new day, and I had a routine to stick to. Quickly, I changed into my hiking gear – a pair of durable leggings, a lightweight shirt, and sturdy boots. Pulling my hair into a ponytail, I grabbed a bottle of water and headed out, intending to lose myself in nature.

The park’s hiking trails were my favorite Saturday morning getaway, a place where I could connect with the earth and forget about the worries of the urban jungle.

It was there, amidst the symphony of chirping birds and rustling leaves, that I crossed paths with him—a gaunt, unkempt man. His eyes, wild and unfocused, darted around, finally settling on me.

The moment the unkempt man locked his gaze on mine, an instinctual shiver shot down my spine. I knew where this was going.

“Hey! Hey, miss!” His voice was rough, betraying years of exposure to the harsh outdoors. I quickened my pace, keeping my eyes trained on the path ahead. But the nagging feeling that I was being followed persisted, and sure enough, his footsteps grew louder and more persistent.

“Hey! I’m talking to you!” His voice grew more insistent. “Spare some change?”

“Sorry, I don’t have any money on me,” I replied, hoping that my firm tone would discourage him. from continuing this pursuit. But I had little such luck.

“Oh, come on,” he laughed, a raspy, almost mocking tone to it. “Look at you-dressed all nice, with that shiny hair and those expensive- looking boots. Yo’ve got to have a little something.”

I halted abruptly, rounding on him. “I said I don’t have any money. Now please, leave me alone.”

His eyes, once distant and glazed, now sharpened with a mix of desperation and malice. “You Alphas... always thinking you’re better than everyone else. But I’ve been watching. I’ve seen how you move, where you put your stuff.”

His gaze slid to my side pocket, and the realization struck me like a blow. My wallet. Before I could react, he lunged at me, fingers. reaching for my pocket. Panic surged, and my wolf responded, adrenaline coursing through my veins.

My wolf instincts took over. In one swift motion, I side-stepped and grabbed his wrist, twisting it behind his back and pushing him to the ground.

“H-Hey!” the homeless man stammered, struggling beneath my grip. “Alright, alright, I’m sorry. Please let me go.”

A low, guttural growl rumbled in my throat. For a moment, I considered tying him up and leaving him there, but I decided to release my grip. I stood, allowing the homeless man to scramble to his feet. Without a word, he took off and disappeared into the woods.

I didn't even have time to catch my breath when I heard it-the wolf-whistles and vulgar comments. A group of men, clearly impressed by what they'd just witnessed, approached with leering smiles.

"Look at that," one of them remarked, his voice dripping with sleaze. "Who wouldn't want a hot Alpha girlfriend like that?"

"Great," I murmured to myself, brushing myself off as I picked up my pace. But the men followed. The sound of their wolf whistles grated on my nerves, each one more insistent than the last.

"Hey baby, why the rush?" one jeered, a predatory smirk splitting his face. Another added, leaning in closer with every word, "Such a fierce little Alpha, aren't you? Why don't you come home with us?"

The once benign banter turned sour, their intentions clear. The looming bridge up ahead cast an ominous shadow, its underside masked in darkness. It was the perfect cover for them, and I felt the familiar icy tendrils of panic weave their way around my chest.

Summoning every ounce of courage I had, I squared my shoulders and raised my voice. "Back off! I'm not interested." My claws extended menacingly, the tips glinting sharply in the sunlight.

Rather than heeding my warning, the largest of the group, a tall man with slicked-back hair, sauntered forward, chuckling, "Ooh, so scary. Think you can take us all on, sweetheart?"

Another, emboldened by his friend's bravado, displayed his neck mockingly. "Go ahead, baby. Cut me. I like it rough." His suggestive tone only heightened my disgust.

Internally, I berated myself. Why had I been so careless to forget my pepper spray? But self-pity wouldn't help me now. I had to think fast. Every instinct in me told me to run, but with the looming bridge and these men trailing me, that was a dangerous choice.

Yet as my wolf grew more agitated, urging me to fight and defend, I took a deep breath, preparing to unleash whatever I could muster. I just needed a small distraction or an opening to break free.

My fangs bared instinctively, a warning growl emanating from my throat. But instead of deterring them, it seemed to pique their interest even more. They closed in, their intentions clear.

Just as I braced myself for another confrontation, a strong arm slid around my waist. I looked up to see a young man, his face a mask of irritation, standing protectively beside me.

"Back off," he snarled, addressing the group. The authority in his voice was unmistakable – the power of an Alpha. "She's with me."

The men hesitated for a second, clearly weighing the risks. But seeing the unmistakable fire in the young man's eyes, they decided it was best to leave. Muttering under their breaths, they retreated.

With the immediate threat gone, I turned to face my savior. He looked barely older than me, with tousled black hair and piercing green eyes. He had a rugged charm to him, with a faint scar tracing his cheekbone a sign of a fight survived.

"Who are you?" I asked, more out of curiosity than suspicion. His lips curled into a half-smile. "Just a friendly passerby who couldn't stand by and see a woman in distress." He paused, his gaze searching mine. "You handled that Rogue impressively, by the way."

My cheeks flushed. "Thank you," I murmured, "and thanks for the help."

He simply nodded, glancing at the retreating figures of the men. “Be careful,” he advised. “Those trails can attract all sorts. Not all of them have good intentions.”

Before I could ask him anything more, he turned on his heel, beginning to walk away. A strange sensation fluttered in my chest, a mixture of gratitude and an inexplicable draw towards him. I watched as he melted into the woods, the morning light playing on his silhouette.

I took a deep breath, trying to center myself. Between Logan’s lingering memory and this stranger’s unexpected intervention, it seemed my Saturday hike had taken quite the unexpected turn.

With a shake of my head, I headed home, deciding that my ritual hike would have to wait until another Saturday.

Chapter 290 Last Minute Plans

Ella

The forest's lingering scent still clung to me as I made my way back home. My feet moved over the familiar asphalt path, my mind still replaying the events of the day.

The feeling of freedom and serenity from my hike, followed by the shock of the attempted mugging and then the mysterious young man's timely intervention, made for an interesting concoction of experiences that day. I was a bit roughed up after the experience, but also intrigued.

As I returned to the hustle and bustle of the city, the familiar sounds were almost a relief after my experience in the quiet woods. I imagined Moana scolding me for not bringing my pepper spray, and my father having a full-blown mental breakdown over it.

It was things like these that I decided to keep from my parents. Not because I wanted to hide anything, but because I didn't want them to worry. If they knew about half of the dangerous things I dealt with in this city, they would be at my doorstep in an instant, demanding me to come home.

My phone buzzed in my pocket, breaking my reverie. I fumbled for it, flipping it open to see Logan's name on the display. I hesitated, but then swiped to answer anyway.

"Ella, Logan's voice greeted, sounding unusually hesitant. "Did you see my note?"

I sighed, shifting my handbag to my other shoulder. "Yes, considering the fact that it was right out on my kitchen counter. It was a bit hard to miss."

"Well?" he asked, somewhat expectantly. "Are you still mad at me?"

I sighed, pausing at an intersection while I waited for the light to change. All around me, the sound of cars and people filled my senses. Somewhere nearby, I could smell the fragrant aroma of a food truck, and I suddenly felt my stomach grumbling at the thought of something cheap and greasy to eat.

"I was never mad at you, Logan," I muttered, stepping out into the street along with a group of other pedestrians as the light changed.

"What were you, then?" he asked. "Because you certainly seemed mad when you bared your fangs like that."

I winced a bit at the mention, thinking back on my encounter in the woods. "Okay, maybe I was a little mad," I said. "Next time, when I tell you not to kiss me, I mean it."

"Of course." Logan sounded remorseful. Genuinely remorseful. It was a little surprising. "Well, I'm sorry, Ella. Forgive me?"

The sound of his rueful voice made me soften a bit. As I stepped into line for that food truck, I nodded, forgetting momentarily that he couldn't see me from the other end of the phone. "I forgive you," I answered. "For now."

There was a small chuckle on the other end. "Good."

“Was there another reason why you called me on a Saturday afternoon?” I asked, handing the vendor my cash in exchange for a steaming hot empanada.

I heard a sigh on the other end of the phone. “Yes, actually,” he said. “Look, I don’t know how to break this to you, but there’s an event tonight. A restaurant owned by one of my father’s business partners. You and I need to be there.”

“Again? Already?” I groaned. The previous event still lingered in my memory, a potent cocktail of awkwardness and tension and rude questions.

Logan’s voice held a touch of humor to it. “It won’t be like last time, promise. There’ll be live music, dancing... a much larger crowd.”

I could almost hear the smirk in his voice when he added, “Maybe you can grace everyone with those incredible dancing skills of yours again?”

I couldn’t help the face I made, even though he couldn’t see it. Last night’s memories of the two of us dancing in my living room made me cringe, although I couldn’t deny the red tint that came to my cheeks.

“You’re treading on thin ice, Logan.” His chuckle deepened. “Sorry, I couldn’t resist. I swear, I only found out about the event this morning. Hence the short notice.”

I stopped walking, taking a moment to process this. “You expect me to get ready for a major event in,” I checked my watch, “less than two hours?”

Logan’s voice softened. “I’ll make it up to you. Whatever you want.”

“You’re lucky I’m a woman of my word,” I muttered around a mouthful of empanada, already thinking about my wardrobe options for that evening. “But in exchange, I fully expect a free pass out of the next last-minute event.”

“Now, now,” Logan chided, and I could hear his smile through the phone. “That’s a bit much to ask. You are supposed to be my girlfriend, after all. Fake or not...”

“I know, I know,” I replied. “I was just joking. I’ll see you later.” He sounded relieved. “Thank you, Ella. I’ll be there at eight.”

“You’d better be,” I replied, trying to sound stern but unable to keep the hint of a smile from my voice. “And Logan?”

“Yes?”

“I really did have an enjoyable night with you. last night. Before...”

There was a tense pause on his end. “Understood. See you soon.”

Hanging up, I quickened my pace, my heels clicking rhythmically on the pavement. The apartment building loomed ahead, and as I entered, the cool air enveloped me, instantly. bringing relief.

Riding the elevator to my floor, I began mentally preparing for the evening. My reflection in the lift’s mirror showed tired eyes, a product of the day’s events, and the previous night’s lack of sleep, thanks to an intoxicated Logan on my couch. A shower would help.

As the hot water cascaded over me, I tried to push away my reservations about the evening.. Logan was trying, in his own way, and as much as I wanted to tell him to screw off and that I would most certainly not be attending any events with him today, I knew that we had an arrangement. If I expected him to hold up his end of the bargain, then I had to do the same.

Towelng off, I stared at my wardrobe, finally deciding on the first dress that I had bought with Logan, the emerald one with beads around the waist.

It was modest, but the color brought out my eyes. I slipped it on, pairing it with matching heels. My hair, normally restrained, was let down, cascading in soft waves over my shoulders.

By the time I had finished my makeup and added a delicate silver necklace, it was nearly eight. Perfect timing, I thought to myself as I heard a knock on my door. Taking a deep breath, I opened it to see Logan, looking dapper in a tailored suit.

I hated to admit it, but he looked... incredibly handsome. His dark hair was neatly combed to the side, and his facial hair was perfectly trimmed, leaving a soft shadow on his jaw that made him look masculine yet put together.

His suit, all black even down to the tie, was perfectly tailored to fit his body. He stood with one hand in his pocket, and the other holding something. A box. "Wow," he whispered, his eyes widening. "You look... amazing."

I raised an eyebrow, using the sarcastic gesture as a means to hide the blush that threatened to creep into my cheeks. "Only took me two hours," I murmured, my eyes flickering down to the box. "What's that?"

His smile was sheepish as he held it out to me. "Just a little something," he said. I tentatively took the box, opening it to reveal a delicate silver necklace. My eyes widened slightly upon seeing the beautiful opal that was set in the pendant. "For me?" I asked.

Logan nodded, his smile growing. He reached into the box and gestured for me to turn around with one finger, which I did. I lifted my blonde waves off of my shoulders to allow him to clasp the necklace around my neck. As he did, I felt the close proximity between us, and so did my wolf. His scent was almost overwhelming.

“Ready to go?” he asked once he was finished. His voice was low and husky, and when I turned back around, I saw that his cheeks were red, probably as red as mine..

I nodded, grabbing a small clutch purse and slipping out the door with him. The night awaited.

Chapter 291 The Alpha Princess

Logan

“Ready to go?” I finished clasping the necklace onto Ella’s delicate neck, taking note of how my hands threatened to shake just from our close proximity.

Ella nodded, grabbing a small purse. She followed me out the door and down the steps of her apartment building, her heels clicking in the quiet atmosphere of the building’s hallways.

“So,” I said as we descended through the narrow stairwell, “that dress looks lovely on you, just as it did when you bought it.”

Ella blushed slightly. “Thanks. And thank you. for the necklace.”

I shrugged. “It’s nothing, really. Consider it an... apology.”

“An apology?” Ella chuckled wryly as we walked down the stairs. It was an oddly charming sound that I had gotten all too familiar with over the past weeks, ever since I met her. The Alpha Princess had a sarcastic air about her that was honestly a nice reprieve from all of the giggling and useless conversation I had become used to with the sort of women who were interested in me.

“Yes, an apology,” I replied. “For being an ass. And for coming at you with this event last minute.”

Ella said nothing, but I could see how she surreptitiously reached for the opal pendant around her neck, touching it delicately. In the dim light of

the stairwell, I could see how her cheeks turned a delicate shade of pink upon touching it. She didn't want to admit it, but she did really like it. And it suited her..

"I do have to ask, though," I said, not wanting to come across as abrasive with my next question, "but there are going to be a lot of events like this in the future. Do you have any other cocktail dresses, or do we need to buy you some more?"

Ella's face turned a little more red. "What do you mean?" she asked. "Is this one and the white one not enough?"

"Well, no," I replied, then saw how she shot daggers at me with her eyes. "I mean, that's not what I meant. I only mean to say that you'll need more than two dresses. As lovely as you look in the two we bought that day, outfit repeating is... not looked upon very well by the people in my circle."

"Well, maybe the people in your circle aren't worth having in your circle, then." Ella stopped at the bottom of the stairwell, her hand resting on the doorknob to the outside.

I let out a soft sigh.

"She can say that again," my wolf said.

"I know."

I liked how blunt Ella was. It was... refreshing, to say the least.

Going into this whole fiasco, I had thought that Ella would be just another spoiled princess. A vapid, entitled woman who would jump at the opportunity for a free chance at moving up in the world. A woman who only wanted to be spoiled by her man as a replacement for her father.

But now that I was actually in it, I realized just how wrong I was. Ella was different, and not in the cliché sense. She overturned many of my expectations, and exceeded the rest of them. I was impressed.

“You’re right,” I said, managing a smile in response to her cold look.

We stepped outside. The evening air had a gentle chill, a perfect backdrop to Ella’s radiant beauty.

I watched her from the foot of her apartment’s steps as she locked her door, thinking how the soft glow from the corridor lights perfectly outlined the silhouette of her dress, shimmering ever so slightly.

That emerald green dress-the one we picked out together that day we went shopping-clung to her form in a flattering manner, making it impossible for me to tear my eyes away.

“You know, staring is impolite,” Ella teased, sauntering down the steps.

Chuckling, I retorted, “Can you blame me? Besides, that dress... The green really brings out your eyes and your hair. You can’t fault a man for wanting to bask in your beauty.”

Ella flicked her blonde, almost white, hair over her shoulder. It was a playful, flirty gesture, although something told me that it wasn’t intentional. “You know what else likes to bask?” she asked. “Lizards. On rocks.”

“Very funny,” I muttered. Ella smirked. “And to follow up on your previous question, no, I don’t have any other dresses.. Not here, at least. I left most of my cocktail dresses at home, in my parents’ house.”

“Why?” I asked.

“I didn’t think I would need them here,” she replied as she walked down the steps and followed me to the car. “I figured I’d be spending most of my time working, not... going to events with a mafia guy.”

At Ella’s words, I felt a warmth creep into my face. I dreaded hearing that word: mafia. It was a constant reminder of my status in life, of all of the luxuries I had afforded because of crime and violence. But Ella was right.

I opened the passenger door of my sleek black sports car for her. “So, do you have any other leisure pursuits apart from work?” I asked, wanting to change the subject. As Ella settled into the plush leather seat, she replied, “I hike on Saturdays.”

My curiosity instantly piqued. “Interesting,” I said with a smirk as I started the car. “That must be why you’ve got such toned legs.”

“Logan!” She shot me a playful glare, but I caught a hint of a blush on her cheeks. There was a pause, during which she seemed to be debating between saying something or not. But then, she licked her lips and spoke. “Speaking of hiking...” her voice trailed off, growing more somber. “I had an... encounter today on the trail.”

I started the engine, merging onto the bustling streets of the city, which were alive with the neon hues of billboards and the honking of impatient drivers. The soft hum of my car’s engine and Ella’s sudden hesitation filled the space.

“What happened?” I asked, concerned, tinging my voice as I navigated through the sea of vehicles,

“Some men harassed me on the trail,” Ella began, her voice shaky. “And then this stranger, out of nowhere, put his arm around me and claimed I was his girlfriend and scared them off.”

A rush of jealousy and protectiveness surged within me. “You shouldn’t be out alone. And letting random men touch you, even if they’re ‘helping’, isn’t a good idea either.”

She scoffed. “You’re overreacting. I can handle myself.”

But the cityscape outside, with its towering skyscrapers and endless sea of cars, was a constant reminder of the dangers lurking in every shadow.

“Listen, Ella,” I began, glancing at her before turning my attention back to the road, “your safety isn’t a game. You have a target on your back.

Either I can accompany you or I can hire a bodyguard you don't know. Choose."

She sighed, her fingers drumming on the door handle. "Are you doing this to prove you're not a coward?"

"That's not the point. It's about your safety."

She paused, then whispered, "Alright. You can come. But you'll have to keep up."

I smirked, the city lights casting a warm glow inside the car. "Challenge accepted."

Chapter 292 Dahlia

Ella

The restaurant loomed ahead, a tall edifice much like the first place Logan and I first officially ‘met-after our initial alleyway meeting, back when he thought I was a ‘peasant’.

The building’s height mirrored its reputation. It stood out distinctly against the city skyline, with its harsh gray reliefs and facades. It was a cold metal obelisk, much unlike the beautifully ornate buildings I had grown up surrounded by while growing up, but it had its own brutalist charm as well.

Behind the glass facade, I could see a sea of figures moving around. The street was lined with expensive sports cars, and men and women dressed in even more expensive dresses, tuxedos, watches, and jewelry were stepping out of them..

My heart raced as Logan and I stepped out of the car and joined them. The thumping of my heels against the pavement reminded me of the beats of a war drum, resonating with my rising anxiety.

Growing up, I had become used to events like. this. The red carpet was no stranger to me, nor was the flash of cameras. Years of practice and training had given me the uncanny ability to stop whatever I was doing, pose

perfectly, smile for the camera, and then continue on my way with no second thought.

But this was different. Colder. There were no cameras, no red carpet. There was no doubt in my mind, either, that each and every one of these people was armed in some way, and I wouldn't have been surprised if blood was shed tonight-either behind the scenes or out in the open, for everyone to spectate..

It was like walking into a den of lions, and for the first time in my life, I felt like a lone meerkat just waiting to be eaten.

I kept my face down, pulling my silky shawl tighter around my shoulders. The last thing I wanted was to be recognized. I could already imagine the outrage if my parents found out that I was walking into a mafia event on the arm of the son of one of the biggest mafia bosses.

"Don't worry," Logan whispered, sensing my trepidation as we approached the entrance. "No one here will spill the beans on your presence. We have rules."

I glanced up at him, my eyebrows raised. "Rules?"

He smirked. "Remember how I told you about rule number one when we went shopping? Well, this is rule number two: "No snitching"."

"What do you mean?" I asked quietly, taking note of how closely I was walking beside Logan, as though he served as some sort of barrier against the other attendees.

"I mean," he said, casually draping his arm around my shoulders, "everyone here is part of the mafia or some other criminal organization. They don't give a shit if some billionaire's daughter is here, and that's if they even notice you-which they won't. No offense."

"None taken," I said, feeling somewhat relieved. I couldn't help but chuckle a little at the simplicity of it. But still, my gut twisted with unease. "Just to be safe, though, maybe you should call me by a different name."

Logan laughed, that deep, rumbling laugh that I was starting to get used to. “Alright, what’ll it be?”

After a moment’s thought, I replied, “Dahlia.”

He tried, and failed, to suppress a grin. “Dahlia, huh? I like your style. It’s cute.”

My gaze turned sharp. “Don’t patronize me. This is important.”

His eyes twinkled with mischief. “Sure thing, Miss Dahlia.”

We headed inside, immediately being met with the soft hum of an elevator waiting for us. As it took us up, I felt the subtle shift beneath my feet. The world seemed to disappear, leaving just the two of us in that confined space.

“Now,” Logan said, turning to face me with his hands in his pockets, “a few more rules. Don’t ask any questions. Don’t get involved in other people’s business. And most importantly, for the love of all things holy, do not eavesdrop on other people’s conversations.”

“Most importantly?” I asked, cocking my head to the side. “It’s a party, Logan. I can’t help if I overhear other conversations-”

“That’s all well and good,” he said. He was leaning casually against the railing, but his eyes were stern. “But if you hear something, no you didn’t. If you see something, no you didn’t. If it doesn’t involve you, then it doesn’t exist. And as far as you’re concerned, absolutely nothing- aside from being by my side tonight-will involve you, if you stay out of trouble.”

I couldn’t help but scoff a little. The elevator floors ticked by rather quickly, but the building was so tall that we weren’t even halfway to our destination yet.

“Why the scoff?” Logan asked. I shrugged. “Staying out of trouble,” I replied. “It’s like you think I’m a rebellious teen.”

“Well?” Logan asked, smirking slightly. “Are you?”

“Not a teen, no,” I said, unable to deny the hint of mischief in my own voice. There was silence, but my mind was anything but silent. Logan’s words struck me to my core. The thought of hearing or seeing unsavory things, and being completely unable to do anything about it, made my stomach churn a little.

But Logan was right: these were the rules. And if I wanted this evening to end well, if I wanted my real identity to stay hidden, then I had to follow them.

When the doors finally slid open, we were greeted by a lively scene. The large room hummed with conversations, the soothing tones of a live band, and the occasional clink of glasses.

Waiters gracefully wove through the crowd, trays balanced with glasses of champagne and mouth-watering hors d’oeuvres. The atmosphere was heavy with cigar smoke, mingling with the light fragrances of various perfumes.

Despite my reservations, I couldn’t help but admit that there was something exciting about it. The energy, the opulence- it was all so different from my usual scene. There were business people here, just like my father’s events, but they were of a different ilk.

It was like flip sides of the same coin, one side was dark, and the other was light. This was the dark side.

Logan plucked two champagne flutes from a passing waiter’s tray, handing one to me. “You look tense. But I promise, once you get some alcohol in you, you’ll feel right at home,” he teased, clinking his glass against mine..

I took a hesitant sip, the bubbles tickling my throat and my nose. “And after that?” I challenged, arching an eyebrow. He smirked, drawing closer. “Then we dance.”

For a moment, Logan's scent overwhelmed me. I felt an undeniable urge to kiss him, heard my wolf's voice in my mind, begging me to close the distance between us. I loved it and hated it all at once, and something about the smoky and lively atmosphere made me want to give in to my urges.

"But first," Logan said, stepping back and extending his elbow to me, "I need to mingle a little. So, hold onto me."

I hesitated, my fingers barely grazing his arm. He seemed so solid, so real beneath the fabric of his suit, and that unnerved me a bit.

Seeing my reluctance, Logan's eyes darkened. With a swift motion, he grabbed my hand and pressed it firmly against his bicep. My face heated up instantly, and I was acutely aware of every point of contact between us-the warmth of his skin, the texture of his suit, the steady rhythm of his heart.

"I said, hold on," he murmured, his voice a low growl, reminding me of the wolf that lingered within.