

## Chapter 293 Trophy Wife

Ella

Inside the grandiose ballroom of the restaurant, with its dimly lit chandeliers and expensive- looking wall hangings, Logan began mingling. A sudden sense of isolation swept over me as I clung to his arm, the only anchor amidst a sea of unknown faces.

“Do you think this is how Moana feels at the events with Edrick?” Ema asked, feeling just as cautious as I did. I imperceptibly shook my head. “No. My dad always cares for her at their events, and it’s not nearly as dangerous. Although, I do remember her telling me how people looked down on her back before she was the Golden Wolf. So maybe this is a little like how she felt back that.. But just a little.”

As we approached groups of men in tailored suits, discussing what I presumed were deals and underworld business, Logan would pause to introduce me. “This is Dahlia,” he would say smoothly, each time keeping his promise to use my pseudonym.

As we continued to navigate through the crowd, my senses became more acute to the conversations around us. While most were: banal or superficial exchanges about the evening or general pleasantries, one particular conversation drew me in. I felt Ema attune her hearing so that I could hear better.

Two men, standing off to the side, were engaged in a heated discussion. Their body language and hushed tones suggested a level of secrecy.

“...I’m telling you, the profits from the ‘W’ trade are skyrocketing,” one of them—a tall, well-built man with a scar tracing his jawline—asserted, glancing around nervously.

His companion, a man with a shifty gaze and slicked-back hair, nodded. “Investing in it was the best decision we ever made. No one saw it coming. But you’ve tried it yourself, right? To see what the fuss is all about?”

The scarred man chuckled, shaking his head. “Not me, but I’ve seen the effects. Those who have taken it—they’re different. Their wolves, man, they’re... enhanced. Stronger, faster, more dominant.”

The slicked-back haired man raised an eyebrow. “So it’s true, then? The rumors?” “Seems like it. But I’d be careful. Once you’re on ‘W’, there’s no going back.”

I felt a chill run down my spine. The term ‘W’ resonated in my mind. As Logan and I moved past the pair, I leaned closer to him, my voice barely above a whisper. “Logan, what’s ‘W’?”

Logan glanced back at the two men, then sighed. “It’s a drug, or so they say. Rumors have been swirling around for some time about ‘W’—how it enhances the wolf in those of our kind. But I don’t know much about it, to be honest.”

I furrowed my brows. “Enhances? How?”

He exhaled slowly. “The stories vary. Some say it brings out the wolf’s most primal instincts, magnifying their strengths. Others claim it creates an even more unbreakable bond between man and wolf, causing the two to merge into a single entity. All I know is, it’s dangerous. Highly addictive, and has already caused more than its fair share of chaos.”

I glanced back at the two men, an unnerving curiosity gnawing at me. “Why would anyone want to use such a thing?”

Logan tilted his head, pondering my question. “Power, mostly. Imagine having your wolf’s strength, agility, and senses amplified... all of the

time, even in human form. It would be intoxicating. But there's a cost—a heavy one. The body and mind aren't meant to handle that kind of constant surge. Many who've been rumored to take it end up... broken."

Feeling a shiver, I wrapped my arms around myself. "And those two?" I motioned discreetly towards the men discussing the trade.

Logan's face darkened, "Involved in its distribution, most likely. The 'W' trade has been lucrative for those willing to take the risk."

"I can't believe it.." I muttered, my mind racing. Logan grabbed my arm gently, guiding me away. "Best to stay clear of people discussing that sort of thing. Trust me, Ella. Nothing good can come from delving into that world."

His words made sense. The world I'd stepped into that evening was already layered with threats and secrets, and 'W' was just another shadow lurking in its corners. Yet, despite the clear danger, I couldn't help but wonder. What was 'W'? What did it truly do? How many had fallen under its spell?

The evening continued, but the knowledge of 'W' was like a stone in my shoe, uncomfortable and impossible to ignore. Every now and then, my gaze would drift back to the two men, wondering how deep they were in this dark trade and what other secrets they held.

In the end, I realized it was not just about 'W' but about the entire world that Logan was a part of a world where power struggles were a daily affair, and where lines between right and wrong were blurred.

It made me reevaluate my own position in all of this and whether I was ready to learn more about the shadows that lurked beneath the surface.

As we continued making our rounds, I observed the men as they spoke, finding their discussions simultaneously riveting and intimidating. Yet, one thing stood out to me: not many of them would bother to address me directly.

Their glances towards me were fleeting, often dismissive, as if they were seeing right past me. At first, it felt as if they regarded the women at their side in a similar light- accessories, no more significant than the expensive watches they wore.

However, my patience began to wane when a burly man with a cigar, presumably a higher-up in the Mafia ranks, eyed me up and down in a disturbingly overt manner.

“Looks like you’ve picked a good one this time, Logan,” he commented, a lecherous smirk tugging at the corners of his lips. “Much better than the last one. She was too skinny and frail, but this one looks... healthy. Muscular.”

Ema growled inside of me. “Crush him,” she snarled. “What a disgusting pig.” Unable to restrain myself, I retorted, “How about you shove that opinion where the sun. doesn’t shine?”

Instead of looking affronted, the man erupted into boisterous laughter, the sound echoing throughout the vicinity. Logan’s grip on my arm tightened, and he swiftly interjected, steering me away from the group. “Let’s not make a scene here, Dahlia,” he murmured, but I could sense the tension in his voice.

Once we were out of earshot, I jerked my arm free from his grasp, my eyes flaring with anger. “Logan, if you surround yourself with these misogynists, how different are you from them?”

He sighed, running a hand through his raven- black hair. “Believe me, Ella,” he began, using my real name for a brief moment, “that’s one of the main reasons why I want to distance myself from all this. But for tonight, I need you to bear it.”

My breathing was shallow, a mixture of frustration and anger swirling inside me. “If anyone tries that again, I’ll knock them out.”

Logan chuckled, the sound deep and soothing. “I won’t lie, the fiery side of you? It’s kind of sexy.” He winked. “But promise me you’ll keep that as a last resort?”

“Last resort? I’ll give them the last punch they’ll ever remember,” I spat defiantly. “Male chauvinist pigs.”

Logan smirked.

“What?” I growled.

“Oh, nothing,” he said. Feeling the need to drown my frustrations, I downed the remaining champagne from my glass and held the empty glass out towards him. “I need another.”

His amused expression softened as he took my glass, setting it on a waiter’s tray and grabbing a fresh one for me. Handing the new glass to me, he smiled.

“That’s my girl,” he said, his voice low but playful as his blue eyes bore into mine. At his words, I felt an undeniable heat creep up into my cheeks.

## Chapter 294 Out Of Element

Ella

The ballroom dazzled, and it wasn't just because of the opulent chandeliers dripping with crystals or the intricately patterned marble floors. It was the undercurrents of power and danger, the whispered exchanges and sidelong glances. Every single person seemed important in ways I didn't understand, and every conversation felt weightier than it should.

Logan led me around the room, his charm a palpable force. I couldn't help but watch him, part in awe and part in apprehension, as he interacted effortlessly with those around him. As we weaved through the crowd, a loud, boisterous voice pulled us into an unwanted spotlight.

"Logan!" A tall man with an ostentatious suit grinned widely, slapping Logan's back with a hearty laugh. "Who's this stunner you've got with you? Another fleeting diversion?"

Logan's face tightened for just a split second before he responded, his voice dripping with controlled authority. "This is Dahlia. My girl."

A peculiar warmth flooded my cheeks, and I felt something unexpected surge deep within me. My wolf stirred, reacting with a fierce possessiveness to Logan's declaration. There was an almost overpowering urge to bridge the

small gap between us, to press my lips to his and mark him as mine. Ema growled softly, urging me to claim what she saw as rightfully ours.

“No,” I forcefully told her. “Not now. Not here.”

Lost in the whirlwind of emotions, I nearly missed Logan’s concerned gaze. “Ella? You alright?”

I blinked, attempting to refocus. “I’m just taking it all in, I lied, offering a smile I hoped was convincing. He eyed me, not fooled for a second. “You don’t have to put on a brave face. If you hate this, tell me. I get it, and to be honest, I hate it too.”

His candor caught me off guard. Looking around, I tried to imagine seeing this world through his eyes, a never-ending battlefield of politics and power plays. “I don’t hate it,” I admitted. “It’s just... a lot.”

A soft chuckle escaped him, but his eyes remained dark and serious. “Trust me, I know. It’s like being in a nest of vipers, every single time. But it’ll end soon. And I promise to steer clear of those who might be... problematic for you.”

Touched by his consideration, I felt a warmth toward him that was becoming increasingly difficult to ignore.

“Thank you,” I whispered, the weight of the sentiment heavier than the words alone. He simply tightened his grip on my hand, pulling me closer to his side, as if that would somehow shield me from everything around us.

As the evening continued its relentless march, the weight of everything my internal battles, the overbearing atmosphere-threatened to crush me.

“I need a moment,” I murmured, needing a reprieve. Logan nodded, his fingers lightly brushing a strand of hair out of my face, putting on the show of a couple in love. A facade.

“Take all the time you need.”

With that, I slipped away, heading towards the restroom. When I pushed open the door, I was met by a stark contrast to the opulent ballroom. The restroom was an oasis of soft, ambient lighting and muted colors, designed to soothe the senses. A beautiful crystal chandelier hung from the ceiling, casting gentle patterns onto the intricate tilework below.

To my right, I could hear faint sobs. I hesitated, but my empathy overrode my sense of privacy. Three women stood near a gilded mirror, one crying softly while the other two tried to console her. Their elegant dresses spoke of the same affluence I had seen outside, but their faces held tales of a different kind.

“Hey,” I ventured softly, my reflection meeting theirs in the mirror. “Is everything okay?” The crying girl, her mascara smeared, lifted her head slightly, revealing a deepening bruise around her eye.

“Just another evening with these animals,” she murmured, her voice laced with resignation. One of her friends, a tall blonde with a sharp jawline, sighed heavily. “She didn’t play her part. well, apparently. The bastards think they own. us.”

A flame of anger kindled within me. “Who did this?” I demanded. The third girl, with chestnut curls cascading down her back, gently nudged the crying girl. “You don’t have to tell her, Lina.”

Lina wiped away a tear and tried to straighten. up. “It doesn’t matter. They’re all the same.”

“Not all of them,” I protested, my thoughts drifting to Logan and our moments of genuine connection. Lina smirked bitterly, wincing in pain. “Are you one of us, then? An escort?”

I felt my cheeks flush, not from embarrassment, but from the stark reminder of my own privilege, whether it was fake or not. “No, I’m a... girlfriend. To one of them.”



The blonde raised an eyebrow, a sardonic smile playing on her lips. “Lucky you. Riding the wave without getting drowned, are you?”

“Mel!” the brunette admonished. Mel shrugged. “Just calling it like I see it. We all have our roles here.” I wet a washcloth with cold water, offering it to Lina. “Here. It might help.”

Lina took the cloth gratefully, pressing it against her eye. “Thanks,” she mumbled. The three of them exchanged glances. I felt like I’d unwittingly stumbled into a world I didn’t quite understand.

“So,” Mel began, her icy blue eyes studying me, “do you love him? Your mobster?”

I hesitated, caught off guard by the directness of her question. “It’s... complicated. But he’s different. He’s kind.”

Lina snorted, and the brunette shook her head. “You’re new to this, aren’t you?”

I bristled. “What do you mean?” Mel leaned in, her gaze unflinching. “These men? They’re all the same. They wear different masks, but at their core, they’re predators. Some are just better at hiding it.”

I looked at Lina, her face a canvas of pain and vulnerability. “I can get my... boyfriend to handle this. He won’t let it go.”

The three of them burst into soft, almost cynical laughter. “Oh honey,” the brunette said, her eyes filled with pity. “You really don’t get it. These men don’t operate on the same moral compass as the rest of the world. They don’t ‘handle’ things. They manipulate.”

Mel chimed in, “And if your man gets involved, it could mean trouble for Lina.” “But he’s not like them,” I argued, struggling to reconcile their words with my experiences.

Lina sighed. “Maybe he isn’t. Today. But what about tomorrow? When you say the wrong thing or wear the wrong dress?”

Mel crossed her arms, leaning against the ornate counter. “Don’t be naive. We’ve seen it all. The sweet nothings, the promises, and then the snap when we don’t bend to their will.”

The brunette added, “It’s not just about physical hurt. It’s the mind games, the manipulation. They’re masters at it.”

I looked down, struggling with their words. These were lives lived in the shadows of powerful men. And as much as I wanted to deny it, these women were right. Logan was one of them.

Lina’s voice broke through my thoughts. “Look, I appreciate the offer for help. But some battles you just have to fight on your own.”

The women exchanged a final glance before moving towards the restroom door. Lina paused, turning back to look at me. “Take care of yourself. Remember, in this world, no one’s going to do it for you.”

The door clicked softly behind them, and I was left alone, surrounded by opulence but feeling a chill in the air. Their words hung heavily, forcing me to confront the truth of my own situation. I watched their reflections fade away, swallowed by a growing sea of questions and doubts.

## Chapter 295 Black eyes & White Lies

Ella

The dim light of the restroom cast shadows that danced eerily across the ornate walls. I stood there, staring blankly at the face reflected back at me from the gilded mirror. The hushed, whispers of the escorts in the adjacent stalls echoed painfully in my mind, punctuated by the occasional muted giggle from the ballroom outside.

A world of stark contrasts. My heart thudded painfully, each beat, screaming a desperate question. What could I, Ella, do in a world of opulence, where beneath the surface, darkness thrived?

“Ella.” The soft, husky voice in my mind was familiar, comforting. Ema always seemed to speak up when I was in turmoil, a constant friend and source of reason. “These women... they need our help.

I closed my eyes, trying to still the tumultuous emotions raging within. “It’s not our world, Ema. Interfering might bring danger to us and them.”

There was a pause, and when Ema spoke, there was a gentle conviction in her tone. “We are strong, Ella. We are wolf and woman. These women, they’re victims of predators of a different kind. Women should help women, stand together, protect each other.”

“But Logan’s world is intertwined with theirs,” I whispered out loud, my voice shaky. “If I do something, there could be dire consequences. Not just for me, but for those escorts too.”

Ema’s presence in my mind was warm, a stark contrast to the coldness of my fears. “All you need to do is tell Logan. Perhaps he’ll have advice, or maybe he’ll act on it. From what we’ve seen, he cares about you. He can be trusted.”

I leaned against the cold marble sink, letting out a shaky breath. Images of Logan’s tender touches and sweet words from earlier that night, memories of our dance in my living room, it all swirled in my mind.

But there was also a lurking fear, one that had been planted by the whispered tales of the escorts about the unpredictable nature of men tied to the mob.

“But what if he really is just like them?” I questioned, my voice barely audible. “What if he’s just playing a part, portraying himself as sweet and caring, but beneath the facade, he’s just another monster?”

The weight of that possibility was crushing. What if bringing this to Logan was the trigger, the thing that unveiled his true nature? What if I ended up becoming another whispered tale among these women, another story of a girl who tried to fight the darkness and got consumed?

Ema’s response was a gentle nudge, a feeling more than words. It was a reminder of the bond we shared, the strength that came from being wolf and woman.

“We can’t predict the future, Ella. But if we stand by, do nothing, the weight of that inaction might be too much to bear.”

I inhaled deeply, the scent of the perfumed restroom filling my senses. The realization hit me with a clarity that was jolting. Yes, there was danger. Yes, there was uncertainty. But the idea of not acting, of letting

another woman suffer without trying to help, felt like a betrayal to my very soul.

Drawing from the strength that Ema provided, I made up my mind. I'd talk to Logan. Regardless of the outcome, I had to try. Because the true danger wasn't just in the world outside, it was in the battle raging within—the fight between fear and doing what was right.

The weight of the opulent restroom's door against my hand seemed in stark contrast to the reality I'd just witnessed within. As I stepped back out into the main area, the voices and laughter from the ballroom flowed over me like a rushing river, but I felt detached, lost in the stories the escorts had shared.

"Hey." Logan's voice broke through my reverie, his clear eyes searching mine. "You were gone for a while. Everything okay?" I hesitated, wondering once more if I should share. But the memory of Lina's pained, blackened eye, and my wolf's urgency, made me blurt out the truth.

"I met some girls in there. Escorts. One of them... she had a black eye."

Logan sighed, running a hand through his dark hair. The fine lines on his face seemed to deepen, as if he was all too familiar with stories like this.

"It happens sometimes," he murmured, a shadow crossing his features. "Some of these men only see them as objects, thinking their wealth and power lets them get away with treating them like trash."

I felt both surprised and relieved by Logan's response. "They can't just... hurt these girls without consequences, Logan," I countered, my voice shaking. Logan glanced around before leaning closer. "I'll take care of it," he promised, his voice laced with a lethal calm. My heart raced. "Are you sure? Won't that cause issues for you?"

He chuckled darkly. "Ella, I'm the son of one of the biggest Mafia bosses in this city. If anything, giving someone a lesson will be entertainment for most of these men."

I stared at him, torn between gratitude for standing up for what was right and horror at the thought of violence that might ensue. Before I could protest further, Logan motioned to two of his men.

“Find the guy who thinks it’s okay to hit women,” he said, his voice low and menacing. It was surreal, watching Logan’s men scan the room, and then, with a nod from one, converge on a man who instantly looked alarmed.

He was standing alongside Lina, gripping her upper arm with an intensity that frightened me even from where I stood. But upon seeing Logan’s men descend on him, he released his grip on the escort, his eyes widening.

The weight of realization sank in as they began dragging him toward the restroom.

“No...” I whispered, feeling my stomach churn. The ballroom’s ambiance seemed to fade as I was acutely aware of every muffled thud and pained groan emanating from the restroom. Within minutes, which felt like an eternity, Logan emerged, his demeanor one of cold satisfaction. Blood stained his knuckles, a stark contrast to the white shirt he wore.

I felt my knees go weak, and I grasped the edge of a table for support. “Is he...?”

“He’ll live,” Logan said, wiping his hands with a cloth one of his men handed him. “But he’ll think twice before laying a hand on a woman again. A few scars might serve as a good reminder.”

The room around me swayed, and the weight of what had just transpired pressed down on me. I struggled with the morality of it all.

Was it right to stand up for an innocent and watch another beaten so brutally? What if Lina or the other escorts faced consequences for speaking out?

## Chapter 296 All that Glitter is Not Gold

Ella

The stretcher bearing the injured man maneuvered its way through the crowd. The room seemed to be in slow motion, with each passing second feeling like an eternity. The stark contrast of the man's bloodied face against the pristine backdrop of the opulent ballroom was a sight that would stay with me for a long time.

Logan, ever the picture of calm, nonchalantly picked up a white cloth napkin from a nearby table. With deliberate strokes, he began to clean the blood from his knuckles. To the casual observer, it would seem like he was simply wiping away a spill from dinner. But I knew better. A well-dressed man approached Logan, a smirk playing on his lips.

"Well done, Logan," he said, clapping him on the back with an almost brotherly familiarity. "That guy was a real Class A pest. Maybe now he'll finally learn his lesson."

Logan just nodded, his face expressionless. He said nothing; there was nothing he could say. It wasn't exactly like he could reveal that he had beat up a man for hitting an escort, especially when most of these men likely treated escorts exactly the same.

While the men around him congratulated Logan, offering their approval, I felt at maelstrom of emotions within me. It was almost surreal. With just

a few words, I had set in motion events that resulted in a man being brutalized.

The weight of what had transpired was overwhelming. On one hand, I felt a certain satisfaction-justice had been doled out. The escort, a victim, had been avenged. But, on the other hand, the realization that my words held so much power was terrifying.

“Ella.” Ema’s voice, gentle yet firm, echoed within the confines of my mind. “You did the right thing.” I closed my eyes momentarily, trying to find solace in the connection I shared with my wolf. “It’s just... this power, Ema. It’s both a gift and a curse.”

Ema’s response was soft, almost a caress. “Power isn’t inherently good or evil, Ella. It’s about the choices we make, how we use it.” I leaned against the bar, my heart still pounding, watching as medics wheeled the man away.

The grandeur of the ballroom, the opulence of the event, it all seemed so absurd when contrasted against the stark reality of what had just occurred. As I glanced around, I was astounded by the apathy in the room; no one seemed even remotely interested in the brutal scene that had just played out.

Out of the corner of my eye, I spotted the young escort with the blackened eye. She was standing near the back, looking equal parts relieved and terrified. As our eyes met, she managed a weak smile. It was a small gesture, but it spoke volumes.

“Talk to her,” Ema said, urging me. “She needs you.”

Pushing off from the bar, I approached her, my heels clicking softly against the marble floor. “Are you okay?” I asked, trying to keep my voice steady.



She cast a nervous glance around the room before answering, her voice low. "I'll live. But that guy? He was a big customer. My boss... he won't be happy about this."

Fear bubbled up within me, intertwining with a desperate need to help. In a frantic motion, I grabbed a cocktail napkin and a pen from the bar and quickly scribbled down an address.

"Listen to me carefully," I urged, holding her gaze. "Go to this address. Tell them Ella sent you. If anyone asks, say you were a client of mine and are looking for work."

The escort's brows furrowed in confusion. "Client? What do you-"

I shook my head, cutting her off. "It doesn't matter. Just use that story. It's in a different city, but it's safe. The work is hard, but they'll give you a job. Decent pay, health insurance, and most importantly, safe working conditions."

The girl eyed me suspiciously, doubt evident in her gaze. "How can you offer this? Who are you?"

A pang of realization struck me. Sharing my real name was a risk I hadn't considered. I hesitated for a heartbeat, then leaned in closer.

"Just trust me. Don't ask questions. If you really want a way out, a fresh start... this is it."

She hesitated for a long moment, uncertainty clouding her eyes. Finally, she nodded slowly. "I'll think about it." She offered me a tentative smile, gratitude flickering in her eyes. "Thank you."

As she walked away, I felt a mixture of relief and apprehension. Had I done the right thing? Before I could process it further, a familiar presence enveloped me..

Logan's hands found their way to my waist, drawing me into the dance floor. The music surrounded us, but the world seemed to fade away as he gazed intently at me.

Through our Mindlink, I heard his voice, tinged with frustration and concern. "Ella, what the hell were you thinking? You could expose yourself!"

I met his gaze, determination fueling my words. "I had to help, Logan. I couldn't stand by and do nothing."

He spun me around, the motion fluid and graceful, but his voice was sharp. "And what's your plan? Offer every escort in the city a job? She'll talk, Ella. She'll tell her friends, and then what?"

Swallowing hard, I replied, "I'll handle it if it comes to that. But women need to look out for each other. She needed a way out, and I had the means to give it to her."

For a moment, Logan seemed taken aback. The intensity of his gaze never wavered, but there was a hint of surprise in his eyes. As we moved in harmony to the music, I could feel the tension between us, the weight of the choices we'd both made that evening.

The dim lights of the ballroom cast a gentle glow on the dance floor, making the world beyond it seem to blur and fade.

"Fine," Logan said aloud, his voice low. "It's your choice. But onto other matters..."

"Other matters?" I asked, cocking my head to the side. Logan nodded, his grip tightening around my waist. "You look beautiful tonight. And you haven't stepped on my toes once since we've begun dancing."

I felt my cheeks flush a deep scarlet red. As Logan pulled me into his embrace, the sensation was one of paradoxical contrasts.

On one hand, the physicality of our bodies pressing together-every curve, every muscle- was a testament to our undeniable chemistry. Yet, on the other, the intensity of our silent conversation through the Mindlink rendered us impossibly distant, even when inches apart.

His hands, which had only moments before been stained with blood, were now clean but held me with a firm grasp, guiding me gracefully around the floor. His scent, a potent mix of masculinity with an underlying note of danger, enveloped me, making me feel protected and simultaneously overwhelmed.

With every step, every sway, the lingering metallic smell of blood reached me, binding itself with his natural aroma. It was a cocktail that was both intoxicating and terrifying-a heady blend that was Logan in his truest form.

His piercing eyes never left mine, conveying a sea of emotions. I could feel the energy between us, electric and alive. It danced around us, drawing us even closer, urging me to lean in, to close the distance and press my lips to his.

Every rational part of my mind screamed at me to resist, to remember the blood on his knuckles, the violence he was capable of. Yet, the temptation was almost unbearable.

## Chapter 297 Temptation & His Mistress

Logan

The symphony of the ballroom surrounded us: the gentle murmur of voices, the soft clink of glasses, and the mesmerizing notes of the orchestra weaving a spell around the dancing couples.

But amidst all the sounds, there was a silence, a charged void, between Ella and me. Every step we took, every turn, and every glide was a wordless conversation.

My wolf, always alert beneath the surface, yearned to entangle with hers, to join in a dance of their own. I could feel the pull, the almost magnetic attraction between our two spirits, and it was maddening.

“I wish she would let me in,” my wolf complained, his voice a growl in the back of my mind as it mirrored my own turmoil. “Just for a moment.”

“I know,” I answered. “She’s a fortress.”

No matter what I did, Ella and her wolf resisted. There was a barrier, a wall she had erected, both to protect herself and to maintain at distance from the chaos of my world. My wolf growled low in frustration, longing to bridge that gap, to assert our bond..

I wanted to pull her close, to feel her breath against my lips, to lose myself in the intoxicating allure she radiated. The urge was overwhelming, almost primal, yet the conscious part of me fought it..

I knew it wasn't the time, nor the place.

"You keep staring at me," Ella said, a ghost of a smirk playing on her lips. "It's weird."

"Is it?" I asked, guiding her gracefully through a twirl as the music swelled. "You keep staring at me, too, you know."

Ella's face turned an even deeper shade of red than it already was. "You're flirting with me." "So what if I am?" I asked. "You're a beautiful woman, Ella. And fascinating."

The final notes of the dance approached, and the intensity between us grew. My hand tightened on her waist, her fingers gripped my shoulder a tad firmer, our eyes locked in an unwavering gaze.

We were on the edge of something profound, a precipice, and the fall was tantalizing. But just as the dance concluded, with our faces inches apart and the promise of a kiss hanging in the air, I felt the weight of a gaze upon us.

Breaking our intimate moment, I glanced to the side and met my father's piercing eyes. They held a clear warning, a silent command.

Ella must have sensed the shift, the sudden tension. Her eyes, previously soft and lost in our connection, now held a hint of confusion, perhaps even hurt.

"You should..." I swallowed hard, the words catching in my throat, "get yourself another drink at the bar. I'll join you in a few minutes."

She blinked, processing the abrupt change. “Alright,” she replied, her voice betraying what almost sounded like a hint of disappointment. “I’ll wait for you!”

As she gracefully made her way to the bar, I took a deep breath, attempting to quell the tempest of emotions within. I knew I had to face my father, to address whatever reservations he held. But the thought of it, the inevitable confrontation, filled me with dread.

The dance’s last note still lingered in the air as I walked over to my father, a poignant reminder of the emotional whirlwind that was Ella.

Ella confused me. One moment cautious, almost timid, the next, a fierce protector of a stranger. And yet, the very elements of her that baffled me also drew me in, like a ship to a lighthouse on a stormy night.

“Logan,” my father’s voice cut through the gossamer thread of thoughts weaving Ella into my consciousness.

I turned, facing him. His stature always reminded me of the old oaks on our family estate-solid, enduring, and occasionally imposing. “Your ‘girlfriend’ seems quite taken with the hired help,” he remarked dryly, his eyes trained on Ella.

My gaze followed his. Ella, in her ethereal beauty, looked slightly out of place amidst the grandeur, like a wildflower in a manicured garden.

“She’s... unique,” I replied, the shadow of a smile dancing on my lips. “She has a way of connecting with people, a rare gift.”

My father’s eyes held a cool skepticism. “I allowed that little spectacle earlier because the man you brutalized-Rodrick-was a problem. His businesses were cutting a little too close to mine, so I allowed you and your Alpha Princess to play your little game of ‘sticking it to the man’. But remember who you are, Logan. And who she might turn out to be. It’s unwise to trust someone who so openly fraternizes with escorts.”

“Dad, I had no choice,” I defended, my gaze still fixed on Ella. “Rodrick beat that escort, and you and I both know that it’s a favorite pastime of his. It was about time someone stopped him.”

“And I suppose next, you plan on taking on half of the men in this place,” my father said, subtly gesturing around with his martini glass. “Then perhaps after that, you’ll go straight for the pimp himself.”

My father, even more subtly than before, nodded his head toward a man in the corner. He wore a blood red suit, with snakeskin shoes and a dark look in his eyes. And he was looking right at me.

“But don’t worry,” my father hissed, drawing my attention back to him. “Rodrick hadn’t paid his bill in quite some time, so it’s all settled now. But cross that line again, and you-and ‘Dahlia’-will both be sorry for it.”

Before I could reply, Harry sauntered over, his gait confident. Marina, dressed in an expensive red dress, was on his arm, laughing at something he had whispered. But the laugh only went as far as her lips; it didn’t reach her eyes, which were like two snake eyes. Calculating. Watching.

Harry and I were night and day. Where I was reserved, he was boisterous. He reveled in the attention, while I often found solace in the shadows.

“Logan!” Harry’s voice boomed, a smirk playing on his lips. “Drowning in the depths of another philosophical debate with father?”

“Always,” I retorted, glancing from Harry to Marina. “And you, enjoying the simpler pleasures, I see.”

Marina’s laugh tinkled, like wind chimes in a gentle breeze. “Harry does have a way of making everything feel light-hearted,” she said, giving me that snakelike look once more. “Where is your date?”

I nodded, my focus returning to Ella, watching as she gracefully interacted with those around her.

“She’s... mingling,” I said, looking back at Marina and Harry. I noticed, briefly, how Harry’s tongue shot out across his lips. How his eyes darted over Ella’s body, drinking her in. Like she was a buffet with no customers.

“Speaking of light-hearted, what brings you over?” I asked, wanting to draw Harry’s attention back to me. “Planning another one of your infamous pranks? Found another billboard to drop on me?”

Harry’s eyes twinkled, his smirk deepening. “No,” he said, “no billboards tonight. Actually, I wanted to tell you that I’ll be holding an after- party on the yacht tonight. Care to join? It’ll be a change from your usual nightly musings.”

“The yacht?” I asked, frowning. “After last time?”

“Oh, come on, brother,” Harry said, clapping his hand on my shoulder. “That gunshot at the last party was an accident; a simple case of someone forgetting to... turn the safety on. I’m sorry one of your men got injured, but it really wasn’t intentional.”

“Right,” I hissed, remembering the incident at the last party. There had been so much blood. “Forgetting to turn the safety on.”

Or maybe remembering to turn it off, I thought to myself.

Marina tilted her head playfully, her dark locks cascading over one shoulder. “Well?” she asked. “Are you coming? Of course, your date is invited. The night’s just getting started.”

I hesitated. The thought of drifting away on a yacht with my brother was alarming, but my father was standing right there, and Ella and I had already made enough transgressions that night. We needed to appear open, friendly. Otherwise, Ella would have a target on her back.

Before I could mull over it further, my father interjected, his tone firm. “A party sounds lovely,” he said, his voice laced with something I couldn’t



quite read. “I think you should go, Logan. Introduce your girlfriend to the Barrett lifestyle.”

I sighed, meeting Harry’s amused gaze. “Fine.

Let me talk to Ella.”

“Ella?” Marina asked with a mischievous smirk, cocking her head to the side so that a lock of her hair fell onto her slender collarbone. “Or is it... Dahlia?”