



## 80 DRESSING FOR THE FEAST

### BELLE'S POV 1

Belle clapped for Xaden, excited to see that his pack members were celebrating his victory.

They sang songs in his praise, and she swelled with pride.

She was proud that this man, who many people so loved, would be here to keep her one day.

She had not doubted it once that he would emerge without the horns.

Xaden was a fighter.

Then, from the corner of her eyes, she saw someone in the distance looking over a balcony.

It was that stupid serving girl.

She felt the fury grow within.

She glared at her, and the girl saw her and hurried away from the balcony.

She was angry.



First, she had seen her last night on the balcony with Xaden when he had returned from the forests with the horns.

What had he been doing with her in the first place?!

What had she been doing in the forest?

Belle had seen her in her miserly dress and rumpled form.

Why was such a nobody hanging around his lover?

The man she was to marry. 1

She was beyond words angry and just wanted to slash and destroy.

Upset, she turned around and marched up to her bedroom, where her mother and her grandmother were discussing.

"Mother! Aunt!" She shrieked. "I saw that girl! With Xaden!"

"What girl, Belle? You're going to have to be more precise." Her mother said she was sounding weak and tired.





Belle frowned.

Throughout yesterday's event, it seemed that when they came back from their ride in town, they encountered a problem.

Her mother and aunt had been gloomy.

"What's wrong with you two?" She asked them.

She didn't care; she was extremely selfish and only wanted her matters discussed, but she also wanted gossip.

"It's nothing," Aunt Cherry said. "Say what you want to say or leave."

Belle jolted up.

Aunt Cherry was strict and gave her chills—more than her mother.

"The serving girl," Belle said. "The one who has made Grandma think she was seeing my Skype aunt—the ugly one with the scar." 1

Both women turned sharply to look at her.

"What did you say?" Her mom asked her.

"That girl. The red-headed girl." Belle repeated,



disgusted. "I saw her last night coming out of the forest with Xaden. She was standing not so far from him when he presented the elk horns. And then again, I saw her happy and smiling this morning when the women were singing Xaden's praises."

Aunt Cherry and her mother exchanged stares.

"I'm worried it might affect our plans for tomorrow's last and final ritual." She said. "There are rumors that he protects her. What does she have that I don't have? She is ugly, and I am a royal princess. Everything about her is miserable. Why doesn't he look at me?"

And she started crying.

"My Goddess, do you have to cry about everything?!" Aunt Cherry said. "No wonder he wouldn't even look at you. No man wants a weeping woman. How did you even raise her?"

Corral sighed and put her hands in her face.

"Mother, you said we're going to execute our plans tomorrow, didn't you?" Belle asked.

She didn't want to make the mistake of losing





Xaden.

This was her opportunity.

Aunt Cherry turned to look at her. "What plans."

"Tomorrow is the night of the ritual, and he will look for the maiden. We will make some spells and make sure she is the maiden. When the moon's power enters him, he will see Belle and go to her." Corral said. "Hmmm. I'm impressed." Cherry said.

Then, her grandma mused for a while.

"Forget about that girl." Aunt Cherry said. "She is irreverent to our cause. We can't touch her because this pack currently owns her."

Belle suspected something was amiss.

They knew something and didn't want to tell her.

She sighed. "Alright. I'll go get prepared for the feast tonight."

"That's much better." Her mom prodded. "Look your best. Go and check out the dresses. I heard Aurora is gone, which means you would have Xaden all to yourself. That slave is insignificant."



Belle smiled even though her mind told her they were singing these praises to get her out of their hair.

She sighed, turned on her heel, and left the room.

She walked out of the room and down the hall to her ladies-in-waiting.

"Get me my dresses!" She snapped. "I'm going to look my best today!"

The ladies bowed down and scurried off.

She followed them to a dressing room and tried on the different hairdos.

The feast was the middle ritual of the Halo Moon Festival.

They were all expected to dine and feast.

To dance and rejoice for their victory in the first ritual.

Belle ensured she would be seated by his side and wanted to look her best so he would not miss her.

She tried on her dress, which they stitched,





fixing the ropes behind the corset.

"Push the cleavage higher!" She swore.

She looked at herself in the mirror.

All her life, she had wanted Xaden. 1

He was the only man who made her feel the way she did.

He was everything she wasn't supposed to have.

He was wild, dangerous, and had a strong will.

Even her grandfather's father had limits to what Xaden could do.

She wanted to look her very best.

She tried to breathe as the dress was tightened over and over.

But she reminded herself that beauty was pain. 1

She saw a young girl coming in and remembered that she had been one of the girls in the room cleaning with that slave girl.

"You." She called out.

The girl bowed. "Your majesty."



"What's your name?" She asked her.

"Lisa." She responded.

"Well, Lisa, how long have you been in this pack?" Belle asked her.

"Over five years, your majesty." She replied.

Belle realized that she needed someone who would know about that slave girl.

She felt something was amiss with her, and she would investigate to find the cause.

"Do you know the slave girl whom you worked with?" She asked.

"Yes, Your Majesty." Lisa bowed.

"Tell me everything you know about her." Belle said.

Belle didn't know that Lisa was loyal to her arch-enemy.

Aurora.



