

The Alpha CEO's Unloved Wife Chapter 17

Sticks and Stones

It was early afternoon when Heathridge knocked on the sitting room door. "Madam," he eased it open peering around the corner. "A delivery."

Jane set the laptop to the side, carefully minimizing the screen she had been studying. "A delivery?"

He pushed the door open wider and three women entered carrying between them many shopping bags. Heathridge followed them into the room. "On the bed might be best," he decided, and watched whilst they deposited their parcels onto the bed, before withdrawing, "Madam," he smiled as he closed the door behind them.

Jane frowned as she investigated the bags, finding underwear, shoes, a purse, and a dress. An outfit, she realised, for the event that night. She didn't know what to make of it. Had Baron grown tired of her dressing inappropriately and decided to take things into his own hands? But there was something... There was something to the fact that he had taken the time out of his day to pick her clothing. Though, she thought, perhaps he had not done so. Perhaps he had simply called the store and told them to arrange the outfit.

Either way, the dress was beautiful, a deep navy-blue velvet that was almost black, its back was scooped low, and it was gathered at the hip, creating a split below. Very daring, very sexy, she thought, but in an understated and elegant way.

She tried to return to studying, but the dress kept drawing her eyes back to the bed, and the many bags. Finally, she surrendered and showered, before dressing in the underwear provided, and carefully dressing and curling her hair to sit over her shoulder.

There was a jewellery box amongst the bags, its bag standing out amongst the others, and she found a pair of drop earrings inside, the diamonds bright and showy.

At five she put on the dress and shoes and stood before the mirror, looking at herself, her heart racing. It was, she thought, a bit like putting on armour. She might be walking into a function where every person present would have seen that photo of her, but in this dress, this outfit, she would look perfect whilst doing it.

Somehow Baron had known.

She stroked her hand down the velvet and drew in a deep breath before picking up her purse. She touched up her lipstick, touched her pulse points with perfume, and stepped out into the hallway. Baron was in the front hall with Heathridge, his attention on the cuff links of his shirt. He adjusted his waistcoat, and tie, before shrugging into the dinner jacket that Heathridge held ready, muttering under his breath, and checking his watch.

His eyes fell on Jane, and he stilled, drawing Heathridge's attention.

She picked her way carefully down the stairs, feeling his eyes on her like a spotlight. Heathridge stepped back as she crossed the floor. "You look beautiful, Jane," Baron said softly. "Thank you for the dress..."

She felt his attention shift and followed his gaze to the top of the other arch of stairs, where Angelique had paused. She wore red satin that could have been painted on, it fitted so closely. She oozed down the staircase, every inch an alpha she-wolf, regal and haughty. "I am ready," she announced unnecessarily. "Late," Baron told her irritably. "You are late." "It takes time to look this good," she flicked her blonde hair back.

"The car is waiting," Baron strode across the hall and out the door, leaving Angelique to follow and Jane to trail at the rear. "It will be fine, madam," Heathridge murmured under his breath in encouragement as she passed him.

Jane

flicked her eyes up. "Thank you." He knew, she thought uncomfortably, and had probably seen the photo for himself. Baron handed Angelique into the car, and then Jane, before sliding in behind her. He sat beside Jane, and his toe tapped against the floor as the chauffeur closed the door behind them.

Angelique heaved a sigh and flicked out a compact, preening in it, and adjusting her breasts in the dress.

"The dress is probably a bit much," Baron muttered. "Drawing too much attention to yourself."

"They'll be so busy staring at my cleavage they won't be looking elsewhere," she replied, snapping the compact shut. "Trust me darling. Just keep your pathetic runt on a leash and out of my way."

Baron looked up sharply. "We have discussed this Angelique," he said, his voice full of alpha warning. "You do not want to try my patience on this."

"And you need to remember that you need me," she snarled back. "And how tolerant I am being of her."

They both fell silent, the air of the cabin heavy with the scent of anger and aggression. Jane sat between them and thought that if she was granted one wish, it would be the power of invisibility. She tried to distract herself from the night ahead by thinking of all the ways being unseen could rescue

her from her life. Too soon, the limousine slowed and queued for the loop to the front of the house. The car door was opened for Baron, and he stepped out, smoothing down his dinner jacket before reaching in to hand out Jane. He put Jane's hand on his arm and started up the carpet.

The journey from car to event and event to car was the only time, Jane thought, that propriety enforced that Jane, as wife, took precedence over Angelique, and even as insistent as he was that propriety bend to allow Angelique's attendance at these events, Baron did not push the tolerances any further

Even as they approached the door, Jane saw their arrival noticed by those handing in their cards to the doorman ahead of them, and their smirks and sniggers. She felt Baron stiffen at her side. Her humiliation reflected on him, she thought woefully, as always.

At least this time, the fault did not lie with her, but with him, so he could not be annoyed and angry with her over something that he caused in taking the photo in the first place, and then leaving his phone somewhere where someone, probably Angelique from his anger at the blonde alpha she-wolf, could steal it.

They stepped into the entry hall where their hosts waited to greet them.

"Baron," Charles Wolston clasped Baron's forearm. "Jane," there was a lecherousness in his eyes. "It is lovely to see you." "Baron" Lily Wolston kissed the air near each of Baron's cheeks. "Jane," her tone was frosty. "Ah, Angelique," her tone warmed. "My dear, you look lovely." Jane sighed as Baron continued into the hallway.

"The worst is over," he said under his breath. Oh, no, she thought, the worst was yet to come. He might be oblivious to the ripple of laughter and whispers that rolled out in waves around them, but she was not, each snigger felt like a blow, every gaze like a pinch, every mocking hand to mouth murmur under the breath a slap.

Baron kept her at his side through endless greetings, passing her a glass of champagne, but otherwise ignoring her as if she were simply

an accessory to his outfit for the evening, not trying to include her into the conversations that followed, but determinedly keeping her under the palm of his hand.

She stood at his side, his hand on her waist as he laughed light-heartedly, and saw her father and sister arrive. She watched them weave their way purposefully through the crowds.

Angelique's bright laughter drew her eyes from her father and sister, and she spotted the alpha she-wolf through the throng of people in formal wear, in the center of a huddle of men in suits, drinking champagne and glittering under the attention. "Baron," Matthew Corbyn greeted his son-in-law warmly. "Matthew," Baron was genuinely pleased to see him and shook hands. "Alice," he leaned forward to kiss Alice's cheeks, no sign on his face of the regret Jane knew he must feel, for her sister was stunning in the black lace dress that Jane herself had contemplated buying.

"An eventful week," Matthew flicked his eyes to Jane and rolled them upwards in irritation. "Unfortunate."

"My fault," Baron replied. "I was negligent in leaving my phone where it could be accessed by someone with motivation to embarrass Jane." "It would only happen to Jane," Alice sighed wearily. "It is as if she is a magnet for trouble. Always has been." "That is rather unfair," Baron frowned. "It was not Jane's fault at all. So, Matthew, did you get the schematics...?" He turned the conversation back to business, and unconsciously released Jane as he did so. The movement of the people around them jostled Jane slowly to the wall, where she belonged anyway, she thought, almost relieved to find herself there, shielded by a potted palm, in a niche created by the grand piano.

She sat on a chair pushed up against the wall and watched the beautiful upper-class werewolves mingle and drink. A group of women placed themselves before her. She saw them slide her looks, so knew that they were there deliberately. "Did you see it?" One asked, her voice pitched to carry. "Who didn't see it, is the question," another replied.

"I heard it wasn't even Baron who took the photo," the third said. "That he hired someone to f-k her through her heat because he finds her so unattractive, and that the photo was sent to his phone as evidence that the job had been done."

"Well, who could blame Baron? If you had a choice between Angelique or plain Jane?" They laughed and, goal achieved, wounds delivered, they moved on.

