

The Alpha CEO's Unloved Wife Chapter 31

Deals and Mergers

"Rather inconveniently, so, in fact," he continued. "Not only were you possibly the most expensive bride purchase in werewolf history the timing could not be any worse. But, as my mother says, life doesn't run to train schedules."

Jane was stunned into silence. "Alice..." She whispered.

"Alice is a jealous older sister," he observed dryly. "I imagine she has always been jealous of you. The malicious b-tch obviously set out to ensure that our marriage was as unhappy as possible by setting us against each other, and, she succeeded," he scowled, but then he laughed. "Thankfully my placid little omega finally lost her patience with me and spoke out of turn," he leaned down and kissed her. "Or we both would still think that the other was in this marriage involuntarily."

He rolled over and sat up to finish his champagne and then rose to bring the champagne bottle and berries to the bed. "Something to celebrate," he said reaching over her to retrieve her glass. He refilled it and handed it to her as she pushed herself up to lean against the bedhead. He refilled his glass and put his arm around her shoulders, pressing his face into her hair. "To clarity, and omega temper tantrums," he touched his glass to hers.

"It was not a temper tantrum," she sipped the champagne hoping that it might stave off the heat for longer.

"It was a temper tantrum," he chuckled. "My cheek is testament to it." Car headlights drew a line across the wall, and he frowned, setting the bowl onto the bedside table, and walking over to the window. He leaned against the window frame. "What is she playing at?" He murmured, and turned, snatching up his trousers.

"I will be right back," he said as he pulled on his shirt.

He crossed the sitting room, and out into the hall, the door not quite closing behind him. Jane pulled on her robe and followed him into the hall, pressing herself up against her wall, feeling the ooze of his seed between her inner thighs, reminding her that her body wanted more of him, needed more of him.

"What the f-k are you doing Angelique?" He demanded from the top of the stairs.

"Well, you are going to be busy for the next three days as your little b-tch has conveniently gone on heat," Angelique replied snidely. "You can't expect me to sleep alone during that time."

"This is my f-king house, you want to f-k around with other men, you hire a f-king room in a f-king dive of a motel, you do not bring other males into my home," he snarled. "There isn't an alpha alive who would tolerate an unrelated male under his roof."

"Alpha male," she snapped back. "Because right here is an alpha female who is not only tolerating another female under her roof, but she's tolerating her alpha male f-king her."

"This is not the place, time or audience for this discussion, Angelique," he replied, sounding weary rather than angry. Jane peeked around the corner of her wall and could see that he stood on the landing overlooking the hall below, his arms braced against the handrail of the balustrade. "I will, however, point out that you are the one who had her implant removed and then threw her onto the floor of my office telling me to get on with f-king her full of my litter."

"I think I am leaving," a male voice responded. The man, Jane thought, that Angelique had brought back to the house on purpose in order to provoke Baron into an argument.

"You tell me that you married her for her connection, and then when you find out she has an implant, you leave it in place," Angelique's attention was still on Baron. "One of us had to do something about it."

"Again, not the time, place or audience, Angelique," he sighed.

"I am going," the man said again, and Jane wondered if he expected Angelique to leave with him, or was hoping that she would do so, reluctant to give up his night of passion, and not realising that he had been seduced and brought to the house solely to annoy Baron during Jane's heat.

"Go" Angelique told him.

The man sighed and muttered something heavily laden with curse words under his breath and Jane heard first the front door and then a car door slam, before an engine revved and wheels screamed as he took out his frustration on the driveway.

"This is getting ridiculous, Angie," Baron said quietly.

The heat was rising insistently within Jane, sweat beading between her breasts and across her brow, an insistent throbbing aching between her legs, her nipples painful under even the slightest pressure of her satin robe. She pulled the fabric free of the tie, opening it, so that her front was exposed to the cooling air.

"I need more from you," Angelique replied. "I need guarantees. I am risking myself for you, all but prostituting myself for you, for your revenge. We have been lovers for the last two years, and I thought that meant something, Baron. I thought we were in this together, all the way. I thought we had an understanding, and now I am thinking that you've found yourself an upper crust omega to warm your bed and breed your heirs on,

and that this thief and outcast's daughter is going to find herself discarded the moment that this job is done.

"And I'm not going to stand for that, Baron," she had reached the top of the stairs. "All it takes from me is the wrong words, to the wrong person, whilst you're up in your office photocopying their secrets, and your aspirations for revenge are gone, poof," she blew on her fingers, throwing them out as if she had blown away an annoying bug as she stalked across the landing towards him. "So, here's the deal, Baron. I want two million, deposited into my account, tonight. It's what you paid for the runt, after all. I think I am owed that much, at least. Compensation."

"Two million," he repeated. "A steep cost, Angie, on top of all your expenses over the last two years, your shopping trips, beauty appointments, car... Not to mention the wage that I already, and still, pay to you."

"A fraction of what I would be worth as your wife," she replied tightly. "A fraction of what you owe me for having you in my bed for the last two years."

"Now, that's insulting," his voice dropped pitch and tone, becoming seductive. "We both enjoyed that."

"Don't want to pay?" She challenged. "Then drop the runt over the balcony and marry me."

"Somehow I think marrying you will be far more costly," he observed wryly. "And what do I get for my two million, Angelique?"

"My loyalty until the job is done, my silence until you have your revenge."

"Half now, half when it is done," he replied his tone shifting again, becoming crisp and efficient. Negotiations were done. "And you will sign a confidentiality clause that, should you reveal any of my secrets now or into the future, you will repay every cent."

"Two and half, then, Baron," she replied evenly. "Or maybe I will simply disappear. You know that with my contacts, I will be hard to find."

"Two, half now, half when done," he replied. "And I won't reveal what I have on you, Angelique. I have a great, big, fat file complete with DNA and voice recordings, confessions whispered in the bedroom."

She went to strike him, but he was prepared, catching her wrist, and laughing as she spat curses at him. "You didn't actually think," his smirk was in his voice. "That I wouldn't be prepared for this?"

"You never intended to marry me," she whispered. "Even before the runt."

“No,” he agreed. “It was never going to happen, Angelique. Marrying you would be signing my death certificate, as we both know. Now, I am willing to give you your two million, but you double cross me, even let the thought cross your pretty little brain, and I will ensure that you...” What he said after was murmured into her ear, and all Jane heard was Angelique’s moan of anguish. “Have we a deal?”

“I hate you, Baron Western,” she was crying as he released her.

“Apparently something you and Jane have in common.”

The Alpha CEO’s Unloved Wife Chapter 32

Liar, Liar

Jane turned the shower on full cold and stood beneath the spray, trying to fight back the clawing needs of her heat. Baron had been gone for well over an hour, having taken Angelique down into his office and stayed there

A thief and outcast’s daughter, she thought as she shook beneath the run of the cold water. The sort of person who knew how to pickpocket men at a party and transfer the items of her theft to her accomplice, so that he could photocopy the information, before returning it. The sort of person that would know what people used as their safe codes. The sort of person who could return the item that they had stolen to its owner without detection.

The sort of person who could sneak off during a house party and find a safe, especially if her accomplice was offering a distraction by dragging his wife out of the house.

If Angelique was just an employee with whom he had slept because she was available, with whom he was trying to maintain peace until his revenge was fulfilled, and not his true mate, not his love, then what did that make Jane?

He pulled open the shower door, a towel in his arms, and his face repentant. “I am sorry, Jane,” he said as she turned off the water and stepped, shivering, into the cloth. He pulled her against him and held her against him more than dried her. ” am sorry.”

“You weren’t going to marry Angelique,” she was shaking so hard the word were jerked from her.

“No, I told you that,” he replied rubbing her with the cloth to warm and dry her. He paused, frowning. “Didn’t I?” He wondered, and then picked her up, scooping under her knees, and carrying her

against his chest into the bedroom. “Angelique is...” he laid Jane onto the bed. “Useful, and vulnerable, and complicated,” he leaned back, one knee on the mattress whilst he

pulled off the shirt, and then the trousers, casting them carelessly onto the floor, before covering Jane with his body.

She moaned at the heady divinity of his skin against hers, her arms wrapping around him, her hands stroking from his arse up his back as he made room for himself between her legs and thrust into her, with a groan, his hand closing on the top edge of the headboard, his muscles standing out as he bowed his head down to kiss her, dragging out her bottom lip.

“I need Angelique,” his eyes sought hers. “I need what she can do, her skills, But she was never,” he stooped to taste her lips again. “She was never my mate.”

Her cry held a sob of pain in it, and he groaned, dropping his head into the hollow of space

between her chin and chest, exposed by her thrown back head. His lips grazed her skin. “Jane...” his breath against her skin was half a plea. “My mate.”

She clutched him against her, in a bewilderment of passion and confusion. There were so many layers of intrigue, lies, and half-truths, she did not know whether she could believe him.

Had Angelique been telling the truth? Had Baron always intended to use Jane to gain access to the elite of the packs and city? It would certainly make sense considering his aspirations for revenge. In the same way, her value would be transitory, and when he had attained his goal, he would cast her off, with any children as guarantee of position.

But what would cause him to change his plans and discard Angelique in favour of Jane? Had he really felt the true mate connection as she had, and would that ever matter enough to him to change his plans?

She wanted to believe. She wanted to believe in a magic moment that they had shared at a werewolf run a connection, a recognition in each other, a belonging.

She wanted to believe that he had identified her as his true mate and had paid over two million for her, as bride price, as a result. That he had wanted to marry her, despite his relationship with the incredibly beautiful and sexy alpha Angelique. Despite every evidence of an ongoing, sexual relationship after Jane, his bride, had been brought home, despite the flaunting of his relationship to Angelique... She wanted to believe him, that she had mattered, that she still mattered...

She pressed her face into his shoulder and tried to find blind faith, hope, and innocence, but those things had long ago been crushed beneath the heels of other alpha werewolves, and, when she searched for them, there were so many contingencies attached that she was, herself, overwhelmed by them.

As he lifted over her, his blue eyes meeting hers, she searched them for assurance, but there were too many moments in between to contradict what she hoped for. The morning after their wedding with Angelique at the breakfast table, the wine spilled over Jane twice, the house part where Angelique had torn Jane's mother's picture, the many mockeries in between, the removal of the implant...

She dropped her eyes from his and felt the shudder of his exhalation.

"Jane," he groaned against her skin as he came, but she did not fall with him despite her heat and felt the sink of disappointed passion in the stillness that followed, unsatisfied, un-replete, un-sated, the heat still clawing within her, wanting more than what it had received, and yet she wondered if she was capable of receiving more. Her body felt... ragged and disconnected. Wrung out, limp and uninterested.

"I saw you," she whispered. "The moment you got out of your car, I saw you, and I thought: he is mine. And when my father told me that you had asked for me, I was certain that you had felt the same. My mother told me, she told me, that if I wanted happiness in life, I needed to wait for my One, my Only. I waited. I waited, and then you were there."

"Jane," it was a moan of pain, and his head sank onto her shoulder.

"And then you came to me drunk and hurt me," she barely breathed the words. "And in the morning, I came down to the breakfast table to find your mistress there, to find that she sleeps in the chamber attached to your bedroom, whereas I sleep in a guest bedroom, and you take her to social functions, sometimes without me, because everyone understands that being married to me isn't enough, that you need Angelique, because I am insufficient for an alpha..."

"Jane," he lifted his head and tried to meet her eyes, but she would not look at him.

"That you were only staying married to me until the connection wasn't needed any more," she said to him, cruel in her pain. "And then I would be discarded, used up, rubbish."

"Jane," he had ceased moving against her.

"So, tell me why," she said. "Tell my why and how anything has changed? When all that has come to light this night is the depth and extent of your lies?"

The Alpha CEO's Unloved Wife Chapter 33

Pillow Talk

She woke with her cheek on his chest and his fingers stroking through her hair. The day was late and both breakfast and lunch trays were on the dresser. Like her previous

heat, Jane found it hard to eat or drink, her body focused on one thing alone. Baron had summed it up crudely but accurately the first heat, she thought. She needed her alpha's c-ck, to be filled with his seed, over and over, until her body was convinced that conception had occurred and the estrus passed.

"My father is dying," Baron said quietly. "Cancer. The result of forty years of smoking. He won't live to see our grandchildren."

"I am sorry," she whispered.

"Hmm," he pressed his face into her hair, breathing in her scent, a werewolf trait, she thought, seeking comfort from the scent of mate or family. "I want to give him the answer for his father's murder, to restore our family, before he passes."

She caressed his skin offering comfort. "I understand," she said. It made sense, she thought, of his determination, of his risk taking, that he was pushing his agenda of revenge on such a time schedule. "I am sorry. I wish that I could help you."

"My grandfather was a shrewd businessman," he said. "Ruthless. People say that I am like him," he was amused and proud of that. "But he had enemies. I have been investigating them first. Quite a list," he sighed. "Down, now, to four. The four that I thought least likely, as they had least motive, and least means."

"And if you find nothing?" She wondered cautiously. The heat was rising, tendrils of desire curling through her, and the subtle scent of him that rose warm from his skin, the feel of his body beneath hers, and the sound of his voice, all added

to the need for him. She wondered if it would be the same with a hired lover, if the need would rise as strongly and as specifically. She had never had another she-wolf to speak to of it, Alice would never, and it was not the sort of thing casually spoken of.

"Then I have missed something from someone earlier," his stroking had turned amorous, responding to the change in her scent almost automatically, becoming in tune with her needs. "And we will return to those that I suspected most."

He lifted her, the muscles of his arms standing out impressively, so that she straddled him, and she watched his eyes close, the tension in his face ease into pleasure as she took him into her. His hands on her hips encouraged her to the pace and motion that he wanted, and she felt him arch his back, thrusting into her in rhythm with her rocking, his stomach muscles working beneath the palms of her hands.

So beautiful, she thought watching him through heavily lidded eyes, her big, alpha husband, his skin golden-brown against the pale sheets, his dark, glossy curls tousled, and his strong jaw shadowed with stubble. His eyes, opening and meeting hers, caught her admiring him, and his strong, white teeth flashed in a triumphant smile.

“Do you like what you see?” He asked her.

“Yes,” she flushed, breathless with pleasure, the slow ache of an orgasm building.

“Good,” he was smug. “I like what I see, too. You remind me of the children’s story, the one with the maiden with skin like snow, hair like night, and lips,” he reached up, the pad of his thumb stroking over her bottom lip. “Lips like blood.”

She leaned forward, and kissed him, flattered that he would compare her with a fairy tale beauty.

He held her against him and rolled so they were on

their side, holding himself up on an elbow, and thrusting, his fingertips tracing her cheekbone and his expression gentle. “My little omega,” he murmured, and groaned as she came, clutching him to her. She felt the hot rush of his seed, the sensation adding to her pleasure.

He lowered himself onto the pillows, sliding his arm under her head so that they were face to face, nose to nose, with her cheek on his bicep. “You still have not told me who bruised your face the other night, he murmured, tracing his fingers over her skin. “The bruise is all but gone now.”

“Alice,” she confessed. “At the Colston’s party.”

“Hmm,” he wasn’t surprised. “And why did Alice strike you?”

Because Jane had pleaded to return to the family home, Jane thought immediately, but then realised that it wasn’t the truth, so she didn’t need to confess it. Alice hadn’t cared about Jane’s wishes to return to the Corbyn home, Alice had cared about why the Corbyn connection might no longer matter to Baron. “Because Angelique had told me that once the connection to the Corbyn’s was not needed, you would divorce me, and Alice wanted to know what she meant by that.”

“F-king alpha she-wolves,” he pulled a face of displeasure. “The most dangerous type of werewolf, not due to strength, teeth or claw, but because of the sharpness of their f-king tongues.”

“Will Angelique betray you?” She reached out hesitantly, touching the sharp points of stubble that broke through his skin, and then the softness of his bottom lip.

“It is possible,” he considered it. “But I do not think so. It would have been safer to let her continue to think she would become my wife, but...” He reached out and touched her cheek gently. “When I thought that you had not wanted to marry me, humiliating you by keeping a mistress was a petty

revenge, and had the benefit of keeping Angelique loyal and happy.

“But torturing my mate,” his eyes softened. “My beautiful little omega who married me because she knew she was my true mate, is a very different situation. As soon as you yelled those words at me...” His eyes darkened. “I don’t think I have ever seen anyone cry like that...I had to change my plans.”

The Alpha CEO’s Unloved Wife Chapter 34

Lovers

She woke to the sound of his voice, her body aching because he had left the bed. Afternoon again, she thought, by the light. The frequent, brief sleeps in between f-king disorientated her, and for a moment, she wondered what day it was, before deciding that it was Friday.

He was in the sitting room, on his phone. He laughed. “No, I don’t know an alpha who would complain about their mate having two heats close together, though it is a strain on my scheduling, and I apologise for cancelling again... The removal of a contraceptive implant triggered another heat due to the change of hormones. Apparently, it happens on occasion... Ah, of course... Yes, I would say we could schedule it for then. Thank you.”

He disconnected the call, but he did not return to the bed.

She rose, pulling on her robe, and crossed to the sitting room. He was on her laptop, and she felt a flutter of fear as she wondered if she had closed down her course material, or just shut the laptop, after it’s last use. She was falling behind on her course, she thought grimly, and would have to study hard over the weekend in order to catch up.

He looked up and smiled. “I will just be a moment,” he returned to what he was doing. “I just need to update my schedule and send some information through to Judith.” Judith must be, she decided, a personal assistant or receptionist of some type. “All done,” he pressed a button, and then closed the laptop, but remained seated, frowning.

“Is everything okay?” She was nervous and wanted her laptop as far from him as possible.

“Yes,” his expression cleared, and he set the laptop down on the coffee table, rising. “I don’t see that picture of your mother anywhere,” he observed as he reached her. “I would have thought that it would be framed and on display.”

“I keep it somewhere safe,” she said. In the hollowed book with her money, tucked away in the little stack of books that occupied a shelf in the closet.

His eyebrows raised. "Your bedroom isn't safe?"

She swallowed but then lifted her eyes to his. "It wasn't the last time.

"Ah," understanding passed over his face. He reached out and cupped her cheek. "I will ensure that Angelique knows not to enter this room for any reason. I would change your rooms, but it would be salt in the wound if I were to move Angelique at the moment," he said gently. "And I don't think it would be wise to push her further."

"No," she agreed readily. She did not want the room, anyway. She did not want to sleep in the bed where he had f-ked Angelique.

"No," his eyes searched hers for a long moment and he frowned slightly.

"Is something wrong, Baron?" The craving for his body was crawling through her more insistently, but the fear lingered, and his frowns concerned her, that perhaps he had seen something on her laptop...

"No," his expression cleared, and he leaned forward, inhaling. "Let's drag the bedding into your sitting room, and we can watch a movie together," he said as he pulled her towards him, and released the belt of her robe, peeling back the satin and stroking his hand down to her breast, teasing the nipple beneath the pad of his thumb. "There is a stupid human movie about werewolves that I have heard good things about."

It was, she thought as he leaned over to kiss the pulse point of her throat, such an ordinary thing to do, the sort of thing that humans did, that mates did, in a normal relationship, watch TV together. He released her and returned to the sitting room in order to move the furniture to where he wanted it, whilst she retrieved cushions and the bedding from the bed.

They built a nest in the space between the TV and the couch, and he brought her down onto it, onto her hands and knees, pressing kisses up the knobs of her spine, his hands stroking and teasing as he curved himself over her, thrusting into her just as she was on the point of pleading for his c-ck. He groaned as he pushed deep, the tone gritty with desire.

"Next full moon," he said between his teeth as he thrust and she braced beneath him, moaning at the feel of his c-ck sliding through her. "I will chase you through the trees, until your heart races with prey response, and then I will f-k your sweet little wolf in the undergrowth, until we tie. It is what your body is craving now," he said. "It knows that, inside, you are a wolf, and your mate should knot in you, to ensure..."

He moaned suddenly, and came, laughing as he sagged over her. "Sorry," he said ruefully. "Just the thought finished me." He wrapped his arm around her and stroked her clitoris, pushing her into her orgasm, and groaned as she clenched around him, before

collapsing them both onto their sides in the cushions and bedding, pressing his lips to her shoulder.

He started the movie and arranged her against him. Watching him laugh at the utterly unrealistic predicaments of the werewolf on the TV, she smiled, enchanted. His eyes when he looked down at her were bright, happy, and carefree.

Emboldened, she trailed her fingers over his jaw, through the cleft in his chin, down the line of his throat. She followed the ridge of collar bone to the hollow point at the base of his throat, and then down the center-line of his body.

It was as if, she thought, his body had been sculpted to direct a woman's touch, the furrow between the muscles of his stomach exactly measured to her fingertip. At his waist, a v of muscle tempted her to trace it to its point where his c-ck stood hard and ready.

He was no longer watching the movie, his eyes on her, his body stilled, waiting, she thought, to see what she did next.

She touched his c-ck, exploring the twist of veins under skin felted so soft, the core of him densely hard. He was beautiful here too, she observed.

She had never thought that a man's c-ck could be a thing of beauty, but his was perfect in every way. Pre-come beaded, and she spread it under her thumb.

His moan was filthy with desire. "Don't stop," he whispered when she paused, flicking her eyes up

to his uncertainly. "Your touch feels so good, my mate."

She tried to close her fingers around his c-ck and failed, and his eyes closed, his head arching back. He swallowed, hard, on a groan.

She traced the line from tip to balls, the skin-tight to her touch.

"Oh f-k," was dragged from him and his c-ck jerked, his hips twitching. His hands were fisted, the knuckles whitened. On the edge, she realised, of coming. He broke suddenly, pulling her beneath him and thrusting into her with a jagged cry, his body bowing with his orgasm, every line of him masculine beauty in perfection.

He laughed as he lowered over her. "Twice now," he said wryly. "I have lost control and come without bringing you pleasure, Jane. You will start to think that I am a terribly selfish lover."

The Alpha CEO's Unloved Wife Chapter 35

The Hyenas Gather

Exhausted, she only woke when Baron leaned over and kissed her cheek. She was on her stomach in a tangle of sheets, as their last round of sex had left her. He was showered and had dressed, the fresh scent of his cologne still heavy on his skin after recent application. His cheeks were smooth, and his hair slicked back as he preferred it.

"I have to go into the office," he told her, stroking his hand down her spine. "Sleep, Jane. It is still early, and we have a function tonight."

She could not fall asleep again and so she rose and had a shower before stripping the over-used bedding off the bed and stuffing it into the hamper. She dressed in running gear, and cautiously made her way through the house hoping to avoid Angelique. As she reached the front door, movement on the landing caught her attention, and she looked up meeting Angelique's eyes, before she dropped her gaze and hurriedly escaped into the morning.

She ran to the café and knocked on the kitchen door.

"Good morning," James opened it. "We were beginning to worry," he added as she stepped inside. "It has been a few days." His eyes searched her for bruises. She had deliberately worn a long sleeve running top to hide the now yellowing bruise left by Baron's teeth on her shoulder and so knew there was nothing for him to see.

She smiled brightly. "I just couldn't get away, I am sorry. They would stop me if they knew, so sometimes it's just harder than others."

"They?" Patrick was in the kitchen unpacking boxes onto the shelves.

"It's complicated," she rolled up her sleeves.

"Baron is... Well, that is complicated too, but not in the way you think. I don't think he will hurt me. Not on purpose. But my family... and Angelique... Well, they would be furious. Baron would be too," she added under her breath. "But I don't think he would hurt me."

"Honey," James exchanged a look with Patrick. "I don't even know where to start with that."

"I just need to... If I can just, somehow, disappear," she dropped her voice to a whisper. "I often fantasize about becoming invisible, just... dissolving away, vanishing out of sight, so that no one can find me. I just need to be invisible and then..." And then what? She asked herself. She did not know.

As she washed the endless stream of dishes, she thought through the last three days with Baron. Alice was to blame for the unhappy start to their marriage, she thought

angrily. Baron had been cold and cruel, and deliberately trying to wound her, because of what Alice had said, and perhaps that made a difference, but she no longer believed that her mother had been right, and marrying her true mate, her One, her Only, would lead to happiness.

Life was just not that simple.

Even if her marriage to Baron changed, there was still Angelique in the house until his mission for revenge was fulfilled, there was still her pack and the other packs in the city to contend with, and she would still be the runt, the weak, snivelling, pathetic omega of the pack. She would still humiliate and embarrass Baron at social functions because she would still be the subject of the pack's vindictiveness. At some point, their opinions on her would penetrate, and Baron would look at her with distaste and wonder what he had been thinking in taking her as a mate and wife.

He would curse the fate that had brought him her as his true mate and come to resent Jane as her father had come to resent her mother.

She needed to escape that future, she thought, or, like her mother, she would surrender to their hatred.

As she ran back along the road, a car swerved and deliberately drove through a puddle dousing her in its spray. She stood for a moment in shock as the cold, filthy water covered her head to toe, and then grimaced and continued towards the house. She was not surprised to see the same yellow sports car parked out front of the house. As she ran across the lawn, other cars began to pull up.

She groaned. Angelique had called in her friends. They were gathering out front of the house, being greeted by Angelique, exchanging air kisses, their laughter and exclamations loud. One of them spotted her cross the lawn, and all turned in unison to stare at her, wearing identical expressions of hostility.

What had Angelique told them? She wondered. Not the truth, of that, Jane was sure. Not without betraying the secrets Baron was paying the she-wolf to hide. How would Angelique explain her demotion from mistress and future wife to employee? Had she even said that much, or was Jane still the unwanted, unloved wife of Baron Western and Angelique the long-suffering mistress?

Jane approached the kitchen entrance and found the staff busily prepping for Angelique's guests, arranging petit fours and canapes on high tea plates, mixing cocktails, and filling champagne buckets with ice.

"Madam," Heathridge met her eyes across the frantic activity. "Best to be to your room quickly now. The hyenas are gathering, and it will not be pretty."

The kitchen staff sniggered, and for once, it was not Jane being laughed at, but included in the joke, a part of the pack, rather than the subject of its vitriol. Here, it was Angelique who was reviled and hated, not Jane.

This is what it felt like, she thought, to be included rather than an outcast.

Baron's office was closed when she snuck past it on her way to the back stairs. She wondered if he were in it, or whether he had gone to the glossy tower in the city. It was impossible to know. She crept up the servant's stairs and along to her room. There was no one in it. She closed her door and pushed a couple of the armchairs against it to discourage attempts of entry, before showering quickly and dressing in casual clothes.

She sat on the couch with her laptop and studied, managing to regain lost ground. She did the practice test and had begun the final assignment when the door handle turned, and the furniture lurched.

Baron's muttered curse had her set aside her laptop and hurry to move the furniture aside for him.

"Thank f-k," he said entering and closing the door behind him. "When your door did not open, / thought I was done for."

He crossed the room to look out the window. "They are everywhere," he muttered and then turned to Jane. "Well, I guess we are prisoners, Jane," he observed. "What is it that you are doing, anyway?"

"Nothing," she said guiltily as she saved and closed her file. "Nothing important," she lied.

He threw himself onto the couch beside her, his big body sprawling and taking up most of the space. "You were working very hard at it when I arrived," he pointed out. "So, I am intrigued. I am curious as to how you spend your day when I am not filling it."

Her heart was racing. "I was online shopping," she lied.

"Or online selling?" His body remained relaxed, but his eyes were sharp. "A notification popped up the other day when I borrowed your computer," he said. "You sold a pair of shoes. Which made me wonder why you were selling them in the first place?"

She swallowed, hard.