

## The Night I Kissed a Monster

I pull out the omega uniform from under my bed—plain brown cloth, shapeless, loose, ugly, and absolutely perfect for hiding the red dress beneath it. No one looks twice at omegas. Not in a palace that employs hundreds.

I braid my hair up, tuck it beneath a dull omega scarf, then close my eyes to concentrate on masking my scent.

It burns a little at rst—pressure behind my nose, the slight metallic taste of power rising—but then the shift clicks into place. My scent dissolves, replaced with the mild, earthy aroma of a low-ranking servant.

One of my rare abilities that no one knows about. one that lasts exactly three hours... if I'm back before midnight.

I stuff pillows under my blankets, shaping them into a convincing outline of a sleeping princess. My mother always peeks into my room before her evening prayers. She sees a lump beneath a blanket, assumes her obedient daughter is resting, and leaves.

She's fallen for it every time.

Hopefully she falls for it again.

The corridors outside my room are dim and quiet. Guards mumble to each other, bored and distracted as they do their change of shift—just as I predicted.

Within minutes, I'm off palace grounds and slipping into a public carriage. Something a "proper princess" should never touch.

The driver barely glances at me. Omegas don't attract second looks.

By the time we reach the obsidian-glass hotel at the center of the city, my pulse has eased into a steady, satished hum.

I head straight to the restroom. The omega uniform comes off. The red dress comes out.

My hair falls loose around my shoulders. I swipe the gloss I smuggled from my room across my lips and stuff the uniform into my small bag.

When I step out, men practically snap their necks turning to stare.

I ignore every single one of them.

I'm not here for attention, or bodies, or pleasure. I want silence. Alcohol. A moment where I am not Ravelle—princess, prophecy, future pawn.

The music thrums as I head toward the bar.

As usual, men hunting for warm bodies. Warriors, alphas hungry for power, widowed she-wolves craving release, and omegas sold as entertainment.

No "respectable woman" is ever seen here. Which is exactly why I love it. It makes me the least respectable woman of all.

I ash my VIP token, and the guard stiffens, then nods. Money buys silence. Fear buys obedience. And I have both.

I settle in the upper balcony—the seat with the best view of the chaos below—and order my drink.

The rst sip melts tension from my spine. The second smooths the edges of my anger. By the time I raise the third to my lips, I almost feel human.

Almost.

My wolf perks up, her voice soft but persistent.

Why don't we try nding our fated mate like the others do? We could run away and nd him. With him, our bond would be stronger. He wouldn't be an—

"Asshole?" I nish dryly. "Sweetheart, the only man who isn't an asshole is the one who hasn't learned how to speak yet. And even then, babies throw tantrums."

She huffs, offended, then fades into silence.

The room feels more crowded than usual. Stronger scents. Rougher energy. Even the servers are darting around with frantic eyes.

Someone powerful is here.

Or several someones.

Great. Exactly what I needed—more power-hungry men.

I'm nishing the last of my drink when a shadow lurches across my table. A man—so drunk he's practically tilting sideways—leans against my booth.

His breath reeks of cheap alcohol. His grin is crooked. His eyes drag over me like I'm a meal he ordered, paid for, and expects to be served immediately.

"We got a table," he slurs. "We got drinks. I can make you laugh, promise. Want a joke?" He squints, trying to focus, then jabs a thumb behind him. "My boys said I'm the funniest one in the pack, swear. Especially that i\*\*\*t—" he points at one of them—"he laughs at anything. Once choked on air, I swear to the gods."

My eyes ick to the VIP section where his group of overgrown toddlers sits—loud, half-drunk, whistling at me like I'm a performing animal on stage.

One winks.

Another howls like a mutt in heat.

A third raises his glass as if congratulating his friend for "scoring."

Unbelievable.

"Not interested," I say atly.

He giggles.

I blink. Slowly.

He truly has no idea whose patience he's testing.

"I said I'm not interested."

Does he listen?

Of course not.

His grin spreads wider, teeth ashing. "Stop playing hard to get, gorgeous. I like it—" he dips his voice into something he thinks is seductive, "—but only on my bed. If you don't wanna join my boys, we can go somewhere private."

"I told you," I repeat, cool and clear, "I'm not interested. I really hate repeating myself."

He chuckles and—gods help him—actually pats my arm.

Pats. My. Arm.

"You're cute, sweetheart, but you don't get it." His ngers slide to my wrist and clamp down hard. "You're coming with me. Say no again and..." He puffs up his chest like he's the strongest male in the room. "I'll make this whole place hear you scream."

I smile. Internally.

"Then lead the way," I purr.

His friends explode into cheers as I rise and follow him toward the hallway.

"Knew it!"

"Damn, she's easy after all!"

Easy?

Me?

I almost laugh.

He drags me down the corridor, bragging the whole way.

"No woman can say no to me," he slurs. "Not one. They all break eventually. You're lucky, babe."

We step into the room. He shuts the door, turns, smirking like he's about to deliver a speech.

"You ready for—"

I don't let him nish and then I break him.

I don't need claws. Or fangs. Or power.

Just a st.

A knee.

A shoulder slam.

And his own stupidity.

He hits the wall, then the oor.

Then the wall again.

He goes from drunk to stone-cold sober in ve seconds, that smug grin wiped clean and replaced with pure terror.

And I'm barely sweating.

I drag him by the hair—still not satised.

Three hits. One kick. A twist of his wrist.

"STOP—WAIT—WE CAN—THERE'S BEEN A MISUNDER—"

There hasn't.

He collapses with a cracked sob, clutching his ribs, eyes watering, begging me to stop.

By the time I'm done, he's curled on the oor like a child, gasping.

I smooth my dress, inhale calmly, and say,

"Next time someone tells you no, try listening."

I open the door—

And nearly walk into his friends.

They're standing right outside the room, clearly having been pressed to the door, trying to hear whatever they thought was happening inside. Their wide eyes say it all—they expected... very different noises.

I give them a sweet shrug.

"He's a two-minute man."

Their jaws drop.

Right on cue, he stumbles out behind me—bruised, crooked, panting, clutching the doorframe and pointing at me with a trembling hand.

"She—she—SHE—HELP—I!"

The hallway goes dead silent.

"She ATTACKED ME!"

Another heavy silence.

His friends stare at him... then at me... then at him again.

Not a single one believes him.

I don't wait for questions.

I bolt, weaving between them while their confusion still hangs thick in the air—slipping back into the crowd before anyone fully reacts.

"Why," I hiss, narrowly dodging a server with a tray of drinks, "why do I always attract the stupid ones? I wanted one night. One drink. One."

Footsteps thunder behind me.

Just perfect.

I sprint toward the side exit—too focused on escaping to notice the corner, until I slam into someone.

Hard.

Two strong arms wrapped around my waist before I could hit the oor. A solid chest. Muscles like carved stone. And a scent—dark pine and cold storms—hit me so hard my wolf let out a stunned whimper.

Shivers exploded across my skin.

I looked up—

And my lungs forgot how to work.

Gods.

He was... devastating.

Tall, broad, built like war and power carved into every line of him forming temptation. His shirt clings to his chest like it's barely surviving. A jaw sharp enough to cut through steel. Lips sharp and wickedly shaped. Raven hair falling across his brow—

But his eyes.

Gods.

Green. Wild. Ferocious. Like a storm trapped behind emerald glass.

And his hands are still on me.

Big. Warm. Possessive.

My heart stutters violently.

He stares at me like he's trying to burn straight through skin and bone to whatever lives underneath. Probably my soul.

And I... can't make myself step away.

His grip tightens just enough to steady me, our faces only inches apart, his breath brushing my cheek.

His gaze drags over my features—slow and hungry. Not the disgusting hunger I was used to. Not entitlement. Something deeper. As if he's memorizing the exact second I collided with his life.

His eyes drop to my lips.

Mine drop to his.

Something electric snaps between us—alive and dangerous.

And then—

He kisses me.

His mouth crashes into mine with a heat that wipes my thoughts clean. His lips are erce, demanding, stealing every ounce of air from my lungs. One hand slides up my spine, pulling me ush against him. His teeth graze my lower lip—

A sharp gasp escapes me.

He growls—a low, rough sound that vibrates through my bones.

Gods.

I've never felt anything like this.

Not want. Not lust. Not even desire.

Something deeper that hooks right into my chest and pulls hard.

I kiss him back without thinking—hard, hungry—following his lead breath for breath. His hand sts in the back of my dress, dragging me impossibly closer. My ngers curl into his shirt. A faint, involuntary moan slips against his mouth.

He swallows it, no devours it.

The world disappears.

The shouting.

The footsteps.

The i\*\*\*t I'd beaten senseless.

Gone.

There's only him.

His mouth. His breath.

The way he kisses me like he's been starved for centuries.

We only pull apart when breathing becomes impossible.

I stay in his arms, chest rising and falling, drowning in those impossible green eyes—

When a shout explodes down the hall:

"There! Alpha Kei! You caught the b\*\*\*h who beat one of our warriors!"

Everything inside me freezes.

Alpha Kei.

The name hits like a punch. He's the man everyone gossiped about earlier.

The one who made my stomach twist.

The one I swore I would never—

No. No. No.

He's the dangerous Alpha whispered about across the entire region. The strongest pack leader alive. The one whose presence makes grown men tremble.

The infamous.

The deadly.

And right now—his hands are still on my waist.

A burst of butteries explodes in my stomach like reworks.

I shove him on instinct—but he doesn't budge. He just watches me, eyes sharp and unreadable.

My wolf erupts, screaming so loudly that I stagger.

MATE.

The world stops.

I stare at him.

He stares at me.

And then—he smirks.

That infuriating, arrogant smirk I hate so much.