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Phoenix: 1

I felt him walking to me, as his boots closed the distance between us. Before I could lift my head, his hands gripped my shoulders firmly, "Up!" he said, pulling me to my feet.

"When did I ask you to kneel to me?" He snapped, nodding towards the soldiers who got up from their kneeling position.

I could feel soldiers' eyes burning me, and I didn't want a scandal. In the Blood Stone pack, it was my plan to be a part of a scandal, but here? Here, I didn't want to lose my respect in their eyes.

"That's all for now, warriors," I smiled, clasping my hands together, "It was nice getting to know you all."

They bowed their heads and gradually started filing out of the ground.

"I was worried about you. Who asked you to start working on your first day?" Sebastian shot the question that made me glance his way.

He started walking towards the exit gate, and I fell in step beside him.



"Why not?" I muttered, kicking a small pebble, trying to keep up with his pace.

He shot me a sideways look, "What did you have for breakfast?"

"Umm, lemon water."

He stopped for half a beat, his brows twitched before he looked at me fully, "You had lemon water for breakfast?"

I pressed my lips together, trying to play it cool, "Yeah. What's the big deal?" I shrugged like it was nothing, even though his eyes were practically drilling through me.

His jaw flexed a little, and I saw a muscle ticking once before he looked away and resumed the walk, "The big deal is you're supposed to lead the warriors, not faint in front of them."

Ooh. How caring!

I rolled my eyes, kicking at the dirt as I followed him, "Relax, I'm tougher than I look. Secondly, it was just a get-to-know-you session. Not a full-blown fight."

He muttered something under his breath, though I couldn't hear it, but irritation was evident in his tone.

We were getting nearer to my quarters, and I was under the impression that he would walk me



to the door and leave me there. But he didn't slow down until we stopped there. Without waiting, he pushed open the door and stepped in before me.

I hesitated in the doorway, trying to ignore the sudden annoyance flaring inside me.

Shouldn't he have asked before barging into my room? I bit my tongue and stayed quiet, following him inside.

The moment the door shut behind me, he turned fast, closing the space between us in a heartbeat.

Before I could react, his hands gripped me and lifted me clean off the ground.

A startled squeal escaped my lips, my hands flew to his shoulders, "What the... Sebastian!"

He carried me straight to bed, and instead of tossing me down like I expected, he lowered me carefully, and then his weight settled over me.

"Look at me, Phoenix Black," his voice left no room for any doubts, it was commanding.

I tilted my chin up to meet his gaze, so that I could laugh it off, because honestly?

This whole thing felt ridiculous. 1

But then I caught the hard set of his jaw and the dead seriousness in his eyes that made my smile



slip.

He didn't seem to be in a good mood.

"From next time..." he said slowly, his gaze never wavering from mine, "If you ever walk out of this room without eating something first... this..." his hard body pressed me deeper into the mattress, "This is exactly what I'll do in front of all those warriors. The same warriors you were trying to impress with how disciplined you are..." 1

Heat flooded my cheeks as I tried to suppress my gasp. The man wasn't bluffing, and the image gave me chills.

"You see?" A smirk appeared on his handsome face, "Dangling in my arms with your pretty ass up in the air..."

I swallowed hard, trying to shake the picture that he was drawing in my mind, "No, please," I whispered, "You wouldn't."

His eyes narrowed, the corner of his mouth twitching like he almost wanted to smile but suppressed it, "Try me, Emerald."

I huffed, finally rolling my eyes, even though I felt something alien rolling in my chest. Something soft, unsettling yet warm and tender.

"Fine!" I scrunched my nose, "Breakfast first. And then training. Happy now, your Majesty?"



His gaze softened just a fraction, but he didn't move off right away, "Happier than watching you collapse in front of my warriors," his face was getting closer now.

My heart thudded in my ears, and for the first time, all the previous insecurities flew out of the window,

I didn't know if this time Tina and Tamia would attack me or not. If they would, then at least this time, I knew how to save myself.

This time, I didn't want to wait for a prince to keep me safe.

I wanted to be my own prince. But this man...

His lips brushed over mine, above the mask.

"What are you doing?" I whispered between labored breaths.

"Just want to insert my tongue in your mouth, woman," The way the word 'woman' rolled off his tongue did something to my heart... and my core, too.

I giggled and raised my face to kiss his lips with the mask still intact, "Woman? Huh?"

"Hmm," he rumbled, and then instead of pushing for my mouth, his lips trailed lower, grazing along my jaw before pressing against the curve of my neck.



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A shiver ran through me. My fingers curled into his shoulders, half wanting to push him back, half wanting to pull him closer.

The exposed part of my neck could feel the heat of his breath, making me squirm.

"Sebastian..." my voice came out in a whisper, almost betraying me.

"No one is allowed to call me that," there was intensity in his voice, "No one but you," and then he made an unexpected yet simple demand, "Say it again, Sweetheart. Say my name again!"

I closed my eyes and chuckled.

I didn't know why a tear droplet crawled out of my eye and absorbed into the pillow, "Sebastian..." I breathed his name, "Sebastian... Sebastian... Sebastian..."