

CHAPTER 12: THE DOE-EYED MAID

BRIAR'S POV

As if my situation couldn't get any worse, they decide to put me in a maid's dress. The typical long black, unattering dress with a white apron and a headdress that washes out my natural color.

Nothing could possibly infuriate me more.

I am a Beta's daughter, married and mated to one of the most powerful Alphas in the world, yet here I am, reduced to a mere maid—a position reserved for the lowest members of the pack, meant only to serve those above them.

If my friends from back home could see me now, they'd laugh.

I, myself, cannot even bear to look at myself, to watch my regal and honorable gure disgraced with cheap fabric.

To make it worse, a broom and mop are shoved into my hands before I can say a word. I stare back at the woman insolent enough to disrespect me.

Her wrinkled old face, with spectacles hanging on her nose, is set in a stiff look. Her hair, packed up in a tight bun, is gray with white streaks.

Her skin is pale, almost sickly, like a dead person risen from the grave. Her stance is as stiff and authoritative as any head maid's should be.

"What is the meaning of this?"

"The Alpha has requested you be given the proper tools to begin your newly appointed role as a member of this pack. In his words, 'no freeloader will be allowed to sleep and eat under his roof.'" She says it all with a stoic expression, so unmoving and without a smile that I almost believe she's serious.

I scoff in her face, laughing brie before facing her again more seriously. I toss the equipment at her feet and fold my hands.

"I will forgive your disrespect because you do not know who I am or who my father is, but I am not a peasant you can address however you please—" I begin.

She cuts me off with a dead expression.

"I am well aware of your background, as I am aware of the fact you were sold off like a common slave. If it weren't for the Alpha, you would have been kicked out by your own Alpha for insubordination. Rather, it is you who doesn't know where you are and on whose mercy you live." Her words are harsh and cold.

I gasp, recoiling from her harsh words, staring into piercing ice-cold blue eyes that stare me down, almost as intimidating as Tavian's.

It's clear from the way she watches me that she has not a single ounce of respect for me or who I was. To her, I'm just the girl Tavian brought in to humiliate.

"You will be cleaning the banquet hall that was used last night. You see, we left it specially for you. You need to start cleaning up after yourself," she adds, a bit of humor laced in her words to taunt me before walking away.

I'm left speechless.

The small crowd of maids around, watching us the whole time, break into ts of laughter, some concealed, others not bothering to hide it.

I scowl at them, knowing that if the situation were different, none of them would dare even look me in the eye, fearing I would personally whip half their lives out of them.

Rather than react, I pick up the broom and mop again, moving towards my designated area without a single word. There's no point arguing with any of these bottom feeders.

All I need to do is clean... for now.

Clean until I see an escape route and get out of here.

I know no one from my old pack would come for me, or even take me in, but I have acquaintances in different packs formed over the years.

I'm sure one of them would be able to take me in temporarily until I can gure out a way to escape my current situation and plan my next move.

So, of course, I will clean.

The hall is bigger than I expected, with decaying food on the tables and lth everywhere. The podium is just as I remember.

Staring at it brings back ashes of memory from the previous night, so I pry my eyes away, refusing to recall the moment my life took a turn for the worse.

And the worst part is... the blood is still there, albeit dried and darker than I remember it. They've cleaned the corpse and the guts, leaving just the blood.

Lucky me, right?

I've always been a bit squeamish about the sight of blood, ironic for a wolf like myself, and something I was mocked for by my father.

Maybe in many ways, I turned that rage on weaker wolves, and maybe Tavian and his brother were some of the few victims.

But in the end, it wasn't my fault.

It wasn't.

It was not.

I was only a child, and it's not like I was the one who told him to tie that rope to the ceiling and hang himself at camp.

It was just fun pranks, light and hilarious. Pranks were common to kids our age, so how was I to blame for the fact that Dario couldn't take a joke?

He was going through something back then, something that made him so weird and vulnerable to the rest of us kids.

Even if I hadn't teased him a bit, he would have done it all on his own.

I zone out, and by the time I'm conscious again, the hall is half clean, and by the looks of it through the large windows, the sun has already begun to set.

My back hurts, and I realize I'm going to be here all night.

Footsteps draw my attention to the door, followed by a slight chuckle that annoys me instantly.

"Wow, a whole day almost gone and she hasn't even nished."

I look up at two girls walking in, two maids in uniform.

One of them has dirty blonde hair cut short in a bob, soft doe-brown eyes, and a gentle gazelle-like cuteness.

The other has plain, forgettable, brown, dusty frizzy hair and darker eyes. Their faces are almost as dull as their clothing.

I ignore the one who spoke, scrubbing at the blood that doesn't seem to want to come off the tile.

"Look, Annalise... she doesn't even know you need soap to get stains off the oor," the frizzy-haired girl snickers, practically snorting like a pig in the process, the sound both irritating and annoying.

"Leslie... we shouldn't be here," her companion responds, with meek, soft eyes lled with worry, tugging at the sleeve of her friend's dress.

Her voice matches the whole innocent countenance about her.

"Why? Because she's technically the Luna? Please, you saw how the Alpha and everyone tossed her like a pair of used socks. She's lower than us now."

Teasing. I'm used to it; if anything, I practically invented the term back in my teenage years.

If I were to rate her, I'd give her a hard 4.5. It would hurt much more if her laughter was more pleasant or if she was remotely pretty.

I ignore them, deciding they're not worth my time right now. I need to nish up, I need to rest so I can gure out a way to get out of here with a clearer mind.

The ugly girl nally ends her laughter after agonizing seconds.

"Wait here, I'll call the rest of the girls so they can see this," she says, running off before her friend can stop her.

I'm relieved by the immediate silence when she's gone, pleased to be able to hear myself think again.

I nally wipe the last bit of stain off the oor, after hours of brute force, and stare down at my handiwork.

It's not the shiniest, but for my rst time doing grimy housework, I'd say I did fairly okay.

"You missed a spot," the girl behind me nally speaks up, giving me a moment to turn and look at her.

I meet her eyes, the doe-shaped, down-turned eyes that only a second ago looked soft and gentle.

Now they're lled with a kind of sinister amusement rarely seen in anyone. Just before she knocks over the mop bucket with her leg, spilling the dirty water over the oors I had spent hours cleaning.

"Oops, my bad," she offers, pouting and feigning innocence.

I was silent before; I ignored these low-level runts because they weren't worth my time. But now I feel my anger bubbling.

I rise to my feet, walking towards her, ready to give her a piece of my mind, until I see something I hadn't noticed the rst time while I was engulfed in work.

The dark purple book with gold-plated edges tucked away in her hands, clutched tightly against her chest.

I recognize it instantly, having seen and stared at it all my life, cherished it from the moment mom died tragically.

It's Mom's diary.

"Where did you get that?" I say, lowly, getting up from my knees.

"This?" She stares down at the book, tilting her head to the side like she has nally gone daft.

My rage level continues to rise.

"Hand it over... now."

"Why?" she asks—the most stupid thing that's come out of her mouth since I've met her. "As you can see, I'm using it..." She explains, opening it right in front of me and ripping out a single page. "... I need a napkin to clean the tables with."

Her evil smile is the last thing I see before everything in front of me turns blood red.

Hell f****g no, b****h.

I grab a bottle, the nearest one next to me, and smash it on her head without warning.

Her scream echoes right through the hall before she falls backward, landing on her butt and onto the wet oor with my book.

Blood drips from her forehead, but it's not enough to quell my anger.

How dare she? How dare someone like her touch my property, touch Mother's diary, and rip it?

An eye for an eye, a f****g nger for a f****g page.

I grab at her hair and yank it, pulling her against the dirty oor. I pick up a butter knife from a nearby table.

"Let me go, you crazy woman!" she shrieks desperately, something that sounds like music to my ears.

"Oh, you haven't seen crazy yet," I yell, ashing the dull weapon in my hand at her, watching her fear morph into unbridled terror. "But I will show you what crazy truly is."

She has no idea what I've been through—the humiliation, the disrespect. I've been looking for some way to let off all this steam piling up inside me.

And thank Goddess I've found one.