

13 | Birds Aren't Allowed

ONYX

"What seems to be the problem?" I turned on my heels and saw a woman with a snarky expression on her face in a very tight and very short black blazer dress. There was a badge on one of her lapels, and I identified her as a shop assistant. And a rude one at that.

"Birds aren't allowed!" She repeated and gave me a withering glance while Filin made an unpleasant noise as if he was snorting. "And no touching! You have no idea how much these cost!"

What was this? Once upon a Pretty Woman?

"What makes you think I don't know?" I arched my brow at her, and she crossed her arms over her chest, angling her head at me as if she was so much better than everyone else. "The price tag is right there, and I can read."

"I assumed you couldn't. Otherwise, you wouldn't even be here," she replied. "It's Marko Bortegga boutique. You can't just buy things here anyway. They are made to order and are one of a kind."

"Sounds intriguing," I smirked, and she started to turn red. To be honest, I liked annoying that snob. She clearly thought I wasn't wealthy enough because I wasn't wearing anything with designer logos, which was the whole point of laying low. She didn't have a good eye, though, because what I had on right now probably had a joint value of her wages if I understood correctly from studying the magazines in Onyx's room.

"I don't think you understand," the girl went on. "There is nothing for you in this shop, and I need you and your bird to leave. It could ruin the gowns and—" she paused, frowning at Silver, "Omegas aren't allowed here as well. This shop is for Deltas and above."

Something was rising inside of me, something dark and furious, like a volcano that slept for years but was suddenly disturbed and now about to erupt. Dark, raw emotions started overwhelming me, and, for the first time ever, I imagined how nice it would feel to snap that woman's neck. The thought was both satisfying and terrifying. I had never experienced anything like this before; at the same time I realised that the anger and the desires were foreign to me. They weren't... mine. But I had to appease the beast inside somehow and give her something other than the shop assistant's death.

That woman had no idea what she had just unleashed.

I heard myself saying, "Filin, pellet!"

Both Silver, who still stood quietly next to me, and the shop assistant gaped at me while the owl ew on top of the mannequin and started making those half-choking noises. I remembered from the book that he didn't really need to drop them, but he could magic one up when necessary to distract attention. For once, that owl nugget was useful.

"What is it doing?" the snarky girl seemed terried now, losing her attitude rapidly.

"Where would the fun be in me explaining it to you?" I smirked, and, just to rub it more, I brushed my ngers over the lapels of the dress in front of me. "Let it be a surprise."

"I am going to call security!" the shop assistant gritted her teeth, but I wasn't scared. Why would I be? In the book, something like this wasn't even impressive for Onyx. And she got away with everything because of her family's high status. I could afford to put one snob in her place.

"What is going on here?" A slightly older but still incredibly stunning woman was descending the stairs of the boutique with a concerned face. She was giving me a manager vibe because the snarky girl straightened her back the moment she saw her.

"They're trying to ruin the dresses!" The shop assistant tried to explain the mess, but her superior wasn't listening as her eyes locked with mine. She had an expression of such horror on her face that I had no doubts - she knew who I was.

"Miss Tynan!" she rushed to me, clicking her ngers for her employee to move out of the way. "We didn't expect you here today!"

"I told her it was appointment only," the girl hissed, but her tone seemed less and less condent now, seeing how I was treated by the manager. However, she wasn't catching on fast, was she?

"Should I come back another time?" I uttered my lashes innocently and tilted my head slightly while my lips curled into a smirk. The Tynan family were high spenders. They loved luxury and loved showing it off, so they were welcomed everywhere as one of the best clients. And, if I was completely honest, their horrible reputation as cutthroat villains only helped them to get better service. The manager was smiling at me nervously, and I knew that it wasn't because she was afraid to lose me as a client; it was because she was afraid of what I might do if I found the service dissatisfying.

For some reason, I couldn't stop myself. There was this strange new desire to get back at the assistant, who was now nally quiet and looking down.

"Punish," the voice inside of me snarled, and I tried to ght it. It was clearly my wolf who did not wish to even introduce herself to me and was now demanding for me to deal with the snarky girl on behalf of her wounded Alpha ego.

"No," I replied to her in my mind because I tried to avoid trouble and not create it. However, that was when I felt how my arms and legs started acting on their own. Again. The damn wolf was ghting for control, and I was already so tired that I decided it wasn't worth it.

"Fine!" I groaned. "I'll do it! Just back off!"

Surprisingly, the ght was over, and all my limbs were back in my own control once again.

"Miss Tynan, of course not! You are our most valuable customer and we have an extra VIP room for guests just like you, always available. Follow me, please!" The manager stretched a smile so wide that it was probably painful.

I whistled softly, and Filin got the hint, ying back onto my shoulder. We were passing the assistant girl when I noticed her frowning at Silver, who was following me. She didn't say anything, but I knew what she thought. We all knew because I saw how my friend chewed on her lip and averted the glare as if it was all right.

Something snapped inside of me. I hadn't known Silver for too long, but she was a nice enough girl during these past few days. Better than Onyx's so-called best friends. She was warning me about Conrad's moods and helping me to avoid him when possible. Even at her own risk. She was a friend and I... I wasn't used to staying quiet when someone tried to hurt or diminish my friends. Even if my previous friendship experience was questionable, Silver had not let me down even once.

"My friend and I would like some champagne," I told her, and she pursed her lips but nodded.

"Of course, Miss, we always store..." The shop assistant started to respond, but I interrupted her with a raised hand.

"Silver, what would you like? We are going to be here for a while," I smiled at the omega, and she bit her lip.

"I am ne," she shook her head, probably not wishing to cause trouble. Or get even more hate.

"Oh, I know!" I sneered, remembering something from a day or two ago. "You loved these little pastries Cesarre brought us yesterday! From that bakery... Rosette's, was it?"

The shop assistant's face dropped. I didn't know much about the geography of this world yet, but I knew one thing – that bakery was right next to our house, which wasn't too close to this place. Someone would have to make quite the run!

"But–," the girl wanted to protest. However, her manager decided that it was time to intervene and shut her up.

"It's not a problem. Alison will get you whatever you'd like," she promised, jabbing the assistant softly with her shoulder. "Anything else, Miss Tynan?"

"Hmm. Maybe just some prosecco pralines to go with all that," I added and waved Alison away dismissively since I was done with her.

"Not. Enough!" the wolf growled and tried to get control, but this time I was ready and pushed her back. Surprisingly, she got quiet, and I didn't hear from her anymore.

Did I just learn how to control my wolf? My mood was suddenly lifted. This was a little success, wasn't it? But it went back down fast when one of the shop girls rolled two rails full of clothes into the room.

"You are early, Miss Tynan, but luckily everything Mr. Tynan ordered for you is ready," the girl chirped, and my smile dropped immediately after hearing my fake father's name.

Shoot! If Conrad ordered these, then I can only imagine the monstrosities... I stood up and went straight to the gowns neatly arranged for me. And, yes, I was absolutely right because what looked at me could barely be called clothes. More like black pieces of lace attached to each other by strings and rhinestones. If I were seen in public wearing these pieces, I would never get rid of Onyx's bad reputation. And that was the most important part of my plan.

The plan was simple for now. Basically, all I had to do was to survive, leave Conrad's house and nd a way to provide for myself. That was all I needed. I knew what had to be done to achieve the first two, but the third one was a bit of a pickle. Because I needed a way out soon, it had to be something that would work almost immediately. That was why I couldn't use writing. With a job like an author, you could never be sure what tomorrow would bring. When I was starting out, I always used to have a second job to keep me afloat. I had to think of something similar now, too, before I could even think about taking that risk.

However, everything was complicated because Onyx's sole purpose in life prior to me inhabiting her body was to nd an Alpha and live her happily ever after with him. Her education was appropriate for that goal. She knew everything there was to know about life in a pack, being a Luna, ruling, ghting and so on, but there were no skills for anything that could be called a job.

Well, okay. Maybe Onyx could have become a warrior, but I wouldn't bet on it because while she was trained to ght, I wasn't. And we were me now. If that made sense...

"So, what do you think?" the manager asked me with the dazzling smile of a salesperson. At the same time, Allison returned to the room with a tray. From the corner of my eye, I noticed a bucket with champagne, crystal utes and some snacks on it and decided to roll with it. When else would I get such treatment and get away with it?

"Sadly, I don't like anything," I announced, going through the dresses again, and everyone present got silent. So silent that I heard Silver swallow uncomfortably as she sat on a little pink couch in front of Allison, who was pouring champagne into our glasses.

"Excuse me?" the manager let out a little nervous laugh. "But this was exactly what your father ordered. Marko personally worked on each item."

Too bad for Marko. I didn't even remember who that was. Did I mention him in the book at all? Probably not. I just wrote that Onyx wore clothes from the most exclusive brands, and, later, both Ruhn and Zion got dresses for Melody from a top designer too. I giggled, remembering the scene and how startled Melody was, not knowing what to choose. The poor girl was a nervous wreck over it, and I couldn't wait to pass those two to her. After all, the wait was almost over.

"My father can wear these as well if they are to his taste!" I snorted loudly, and once again the woman's face contorted as if she ate something sour. Yet when our eyes locked, she returned to that professional grin of hers. I knew, however, that she didn't know what to do.

"Maybe you would at least try some of them on?" she suggested. "When they are on you, you will look stunning."

Ha! With Onyx's appearance? Shocking!

"I would look stunning wearing a potato sack," I rolled my eyes. "That's beside the point. But I need– something different. What else do you have?"

"N-nothing," she whispered, getting paler by the second.

"Disappointing," I sighed and went to get my purse. "We'll be leaving then."

A part of me could feel a wave of distress coming from the manager. She was really worried, and somehow I knew that. It was a very strange experience that I couldn't really explain.

"Wait!" she rushed after me and grasped my arm, taking her hand off immediately as if she had committed a grave sin and just realised it. "I am sorry," she covered her mouth with her hands.

"It's all right," I tried to smile at her, but, for some reason, she became even more terried of me. I just couldn't win here, could I?

The manager was practically trembling but still found courage to continue with what she wanted from me in the first place, "I think I can nd a few pieces. In the meantime, why don't you relax here and have some champagne? Just give me a minute of your time, all right?"

"Fine," I agreed because, in all honesty, I just felt bad for her. I wasn't in urgent need of new clothes since, thanks to Zion, I wouldn't be attending the gala after all. Onyx's unfortunate wardrobe could be xed later. I would just tell Conrad that I gained weight and the dresses did not t. Blame it on the baby that I didn't have. He'd be ecstatic.

"Are you sure it's a good idea? Your father made this order on purpose," Silver reminded me when I joined her on the sofa. I wasn't in the mood for alcohol as I needed a clear mind, but I helped myself to the pralines. I had always loved them.

"I know. But he'll have to get over it," I sighed and noticed a little sketchbook on the little table. It was extremely boring here since I wasn't the type of person who enjoyed shopping at all. Unless it was online. But that battle was already lost. Online shopping was for paupers, according to... Onyx herself. That was what Silver told me when I suggested it, and Filin conrmed it later. Nothing truly exclusive could be bought online, which was disappointing if you asked me.

"As long as you know what you are doing," my friend chuckled, relaxing into the sofa. She was enjoying this luxurious life with me, and I couldn't blame her.

"More champagne, please," I gestured to Allison, who was tending to us. "My friend's glass is already empty. And what about those pastries?"

The woman pursed her lips but took the bottle and started pouring like a good little shop assistant. "They are on the way, Miss."

"Great!" I nodded and started doodling in the sketch book, imagining what dresses Onyx would be wearing to the gala if she had my taste. I was always quick with these things because I needed to visualise them for my books before writing. The sketches were ugly, but they gave me a full idea and helped me to stay consistent. I was on my third when a clanking noise distracted me.

"Oops, my bad!" Allison sneered at Silver, who was now all wet from the champagne. "I twisted my heel and–"

Oh no, she didn't! The rage was back in me, and it took all of my inner strength to keep it down. She did that to get back at the omega for having to serve her. Now, thanks to her, Silver was drenched.

"I am so sorry!" The shop assistant pretended to care, but I wasn't buying it, noticing the happy glint in her eyes.

"No, you are not," I stated plainly, putting the sketchbook away.

"Onyx, it's ne," Silver placed her hand on mine. "It's colourless and will dry out. It's not a big deal!"

"Of course not," I couldn't help but sneer, folding my arms smugly. "After all, Allison here is about to buy you a Marko Bortegga outfit to wear!"

The assistant went pale, and it was satisfying to watch. She didn't expect this kind of retaliation.

"There is no need," Silver mumbled. "They are so expensive!"

"Uh-huh!" I sent another praline into my mouth, enjoying the burst of its rich nutty taste. "And you are going to enjoy it since it's on the house!"

Gosh, I unleashed my inner Onyx today for real! It was both scary and satisfying, but I needed to tone it down. After all, I had to change her reputation to survive.

Silver looked at me pleadingly, and that Alison girl lost her smugness too. She probably got my point now.

"I can't wear such outts anywhere anyway," Silver said, noticing my thoughtfulness.

"Fine!" I groaned and darted my eyes at the shop assistant. "Go and help her clean up. She has to look like new when she comes back!"

"Of course!" Alison jumped readily. "My apologies again."

They both left, and I relaxed with my sketchbook again.

Filin sat the whole time quietly, and I smirked at him, taking a new praline.

"I still haven't forgiven you for what you did today!" I informed him bluntly so that he wasn't counting on me forgetting about the set-up with Zion.

I expected him to make a snarky remark or to play dumb, but he sat as quietly as if he was just a regular bird.

"Someone wants to become an owl nugget!" I muttered while chewing.

"I see you are back to your old ways," I heard the ice-cold voice of the Lycan Prince and almost choked on my praline. It went down the wrong pipe, and I started coughing vigorously, trying to get it out. Nothing was helping, and the voice inside of me cackled again, "Stupid death for a stupid girl!"

Great timing, as always. Seriously, weren't wolves supposed to care about their hosts?

A sharp slap over my back brought me back to reality. And then another and another. They were so unexpected that I started to lose my balance and realised that soon my face would meet the oor. At least the sweet was out. I wouldn't die from kissing the marble tiles. Hopefully...

"Easy!" Ruhn said as his hands entwined around me in a protective hold.

We froze like that, my heart racing...

"Are you okay?" His raspy voice tickled my ear when I realised his face was buried in my hair. Was there a need for that? My super helpful memory threw a line of spicy ashbacks right that very moment of him... doing things to me, and a little whimper escaped me.

"I'm ne," I squeaked, waiting for him to let me go.

But he didn't.

"Can you stand?" Ruhn pressed me even harder against himself. Was this some kind of test? Should I distance myself not to fail?

"Yeah," I tried to pull away slightly. "It's all right. You can let go now."

I could swear I heard a low growl, but the lycan's hands unclenched, and I was free once again. I quickly wiped my face, hoping I wasn't covered in chocolate or drool.

"Tha–" I was about to thank him as I turned, but he got ahead of me.

"Are you following me, Onyx?" Ruhn crossed his arms over his chest and was now trying to drill a hole in my skull with his mesmerizing garnet eyes...