

22 | Pancakes

ONYX

I was only able to get back to my courtyard thanks to Filin leading the way. Since I was finally alone, I took the heels off and walked on my bare feet again. This was becoming a tradition.

"It wasn't that bad," the owl nugget insisted.

"Sure," I couldn't help but roll my eyes. "I made a fool out of myself, got threatened, insulted, made a laughing stock of in front of everybody; chances are my Fake Father will beat the crap out of me later... It's awesome! I am peachy!"

"Well, when you put it **like that**—" Filin said and then suddenly got quiet. That could only mean one thing – someone was here. He always knew when to pretend to be a normal bird, so I had no doubts that we had witnesses. However, when I looked around, I saw no one, only the dim lighting of the

palace street lamps illuminating my little private garden.

Chills ran down my spine. What if it was Jessica seeking revenge for the fountain? Or some other enemy of Onyx? That girl did not have too many friends. Being in her body was so dangerous!

"Then vacate it!" the wolf inside of me sneered.

"Hey, Quinn," I remembered the name just in time, *"I'd be happy to do just that when the time comes. We still need to figure out how, though. But as soon as we do, I'd be happy to go back to my life and my body. In the meantime, however, why don't we keep Onyx's body safe for her return? As in... one piece?"*

Quinn was quiet, but I knew that since I did not get a snarky remark, that was a yes. So, I started walking with a bit more confidence. My steps were quiet, with only the ruffles of my dress rustling over the

grass.

"Blood!" someone said, and I screamed at the top of my lungs, jumping away and knocking the boy who had spoken off his feet.

The boy...

"Oh. My. God!" I tried to catch my breath, looking at the familiar child who seemed scared to death now. "Are you all right?"

He did not reply, but I could tell that he was on the verge of beating me in a screaming contest.

"Blood!" His eyes were fixated on the dark wine stain on my dress.

"No, no, no!" I shook my head, trying to look for an explanation. I couldn't let more rumours spread about me.

Bloody Onyx scares children at night. Yeah, God forbid. My frenemies would love talking about that.

"It's not blood," I tried to explain. "It's juice! I swear!"

"Blood," he insisted.

"Juice!" I furrowed my brows. A stubborn kid was the last thing I needed now.

"Bl—" he wanted to repeat the same word again, but that was when he noticed that I had no shoes on. And it looked like his interest in the "blood" stain was gone.

"My heels were killing me," I joked, and his eyes widened. As if that was really possible. He looked about six or seven years old. Surely he had to know that it wasn't possible.

"This is why blood," he concluded, though. Damn, it was too late for all this.

"Where are your parents?" I asked. "Where do you live? I will take you there."

He was still looking at my shoes and the stain, confused and probably terrified to

speak, so I did the only rational thing in the given situation and threw the pair of shoes as far away as I only could.

"There," I told him with a smile, "killer shoes gone. Can you tell me where do you live now?"

He clicked his fingers a few times, but no response followed. Sh*t.

"All right," I sighed, getting up and offering him my hand which he took after a moment of hesitation. "I have a better idea. Let's go inside. I will make you hot chocolate, and we will try to find your parents. Sound like a deal?"

I really felt bad about this. It could backfire so much. Evil Onyx takes unfamiliar children into her house at night—the horror story was writing itself.

He did not look like he was going to go with me, but he still held my hand tight. I kneeled to be at his level and tried to look in his eyes, but he averted my gaze.

"I have a funny birdie inside," I grinned at him, feeling like a proper predator making the kid follow me into the unknown with bribes. Filin flew to my shoulder to aid me.

"Yes, talking bird!" the boy's eyes snapped to Filin, and the two of us coughed uncomfortably from the shock.

"What?" my voice was incredibly high-pitched now, "No! Of course he is not a talking bird. Just a regular owl. But he is cute!"

"And he talks," the boy nodded his head as if he was stating the obvious.

"Well, sh*t!" Filin muttered in my ear. "Should we... dispose of him carefully?"

"Are you nuts?!" I gritted my teeth, still trying to smile at the child.

"The Shadows code says—" Filin wanted to inform me what his criminal organisation did in cases like this, and I knew it was better not to know.

"Don't you dare!" I warned him with a glare.

"I didn't even say anything!" the owl nugget groaned, and the boy let out a little laugh.

"Talking. Bird," he repeated, and I knew that we had lost this battle.

"Okay, fine!" I agreed and pulled him in the direction of the entrance to my house. "But it's a secret. We don't tell anyone about it, okay?"

Oh, God. Now I was making an unfamiliar child keep secrets from his parents. What was wrong with me?

He did not say anything, though, and it occurred to me that, quite possibly, this was the one and only kid in the whole damn world who would not spill the beans, after all.

We went up the stairs, and I pushed the door open, worried how easy it was to lure him in. Someone his age shouldn't be wandering the palace grounds alone this

late. It wasn't safe. Not everyone here was a good man. Or woman, to be fair.

"You are back early!" Silver jumped from the sofa she was reading a book on, and her eyes immediately went to my dress. "Oh," she gave me a sad, understanding smile. Something like this wasn't new to Onyx.

"Yeah," I sighed. "We have a guest. Silvy; point me in the direction of the kitchen, and then, please, go find one of the palace guards to let them know we found a child who is alone and doesn't speak much. Someone is probably already looking for him."

"Sure," the omega nodded and waved her hand to my right. "It's right there, but all the staff have already gone for the night. You never eat this late at night, so—"

"It's fine," I reassured her. "We can manage on our own just fine. Right?"

I looked at the kid, but, as always, he was staring elsewhere. Gosh, this day had

already been already too long.

"What is your name, by the way?" I asked him on our way to the kitchen. "You never introduced yourself, you know. I am Onyx, in case you forgot."

The silence was my reply, and the only sound he made was the clicking of his fingers.

Just. Great.

I decided not to push it and helped him up into one of the high stools next to the kitchen aisle.

"So, let me find where they hide hot chocolate in here," I giggled, realising that we could simply have none. This was a guest house, after all.

"Pancakes," the boys said all of a sudden, and a nervous chuckle escaped me.

"There, there," I darted my reproachful gaze at him. "We agreed on hot chocolate,

remember?"

But his belly rumbled loudly, and I felt slightly guilty. He was probably hungry. Who knows how long he had walked around the palace, lost and alone?

I opened the fridge, and, luckily, we had everything that was required for great, fluffy pancakes. Even honey and some berries to top them off.

"Fine," I sighed. "You win, but only because I am starving too. You are going to help me, though. I am not slaving in the kitchen alone."

"Make me one too," Filin added. "Silver thinks I eat mice and hunt for them myself. I haven't had a proper meal in ages."

"You eat pancakes?" I quirked my brow up while washing my hands.

"I don't eat mice," the bird scoffed, and, for the first time ever, the boy giggled.

"I think he likes you," I pointed out and started preparing everything, still in my gown. It was ruined anyway, and I did not want to leave the boy alone.

I made him wash his hands and face and then sat him back on the stool, letting him mix the ingredients in one big bowl. I couldn't say that he was particularly good at it, but he seemed to enjoy it, and that was good enough for me. However, it was unlikely that his parents worked in the kitchen. If they did, he'd definitely know how to mix.

"And now prepare for some magic!" I told him when I poured the batter onto the hot pan. He watched me, mesmerized by everything in front of him, and yes, there was no chance in hell he had spent much time in a busy kitchen. This was new to him.

I placed a plate with two perfect pancakes before him and also moved the toppings that were on a separate plate. I had a

cousin with four kids, and I knew better than to assume what any child liked. I was not wrong since he did not touch anything else and just started gobbling his pancakes dry.

I heard some noises coming from the corridor and hoped that it was Silver with some news about my little guest's parents.

The omega walked in with her face pale, and I had a very bad feeling.

"What happened now?" I bit my lip nervously, but she did not even get to reply as a tall, dark figure appeared right behind her back.

"Onyx Tynan, what do you think you are doing, holding the thirteenth prince hostage in your house?" Ruhn glared at me, taking in the picture before him.

I almost dropped the spatula, realising who I was feeding with pancakes.

The thirteenth prince. The special prince.

The little insignificant side character whose death at the hunt made Ruhn sad for one whole chapter and let Melody heal his soul with love.

Sh*t. I really hated myself now.



Marion Artwood

“

I managed to finish the chapter today after all. It's possible that you will find a few typos here and there now as I was typing and editing in my car. But I will fix it all once I get to my laptop.

Sorry again, Christmas is crazy time.

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