

## #Chapter 14 You and your wife

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The entire cafeteria went silent. Linda shrieked and struggled, but I held her in place, glaring at Bella who had gone pale looking between the two of us.

"You fucking bitch. You're insane! Let go!" Linda pushed at my hand but I ignored her.

I was furious enough that there was nothing she could do to get free. She was lucky I hadn't crushed her head the way I could. Bella's lips trembled.

"Apologize," I said calmly. My voice sounded cold. It reminded me a bit of Candido when he was furious. "Or I'm going to break your face."

He'd rubbed off on me more than I thought.

"I dare you to try—" She shrieked as I pushed her head harder into the plate, staring at Bella.

"Apologize," I said. "If that plate breaks, you're going to lose your eye."

Bella gasped; her eyes darted down to where Linda's face was pressed into the plate.



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"I'm not—" Linda went quiet as I pressed harder and the plate cracked. "I'm sorry! I'm sorry! Let me go, you crazy bitch!"

"Now," I said, narrowing my eyes at Bella. "You."

Bella sneered and stood. "Why would I ever apologize to you? You're the reason—"

The mother's necklace shimmered in the light and I waited.

"Shouldn't people who lie apologize?"

Bella sneered at me and turned away, leaving Linda at my mercy. "That only applies to pathetic people like you."

Bella flounced away, cutting through the crowd, and escaping quickly. Claire turned to go after her but I shook my head and released Linda. She reared back snarling. The plate had cut her cheek just below her eye. Blood flowed down her cheek. Pasta sauce clung to her hair and there were bits of fish stuck to her cheek.

Claire snickered. "I guess that's punishment enough."

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Linda growled.

"You should probably follow your master," I said, nodding towards the direction Bella had escaped. "It's safer that way."

She growled at me. "I'm not going to let you get away with this."

I gave her an almost bored look as she stomped off. Linda's family considered itself closer to nobility than the small pack grasping for power that they were. Her parents had connections with a lot of wealthy and influential people in the mid-sized packs, so she tended to bully anyone she thought she could get away with harassing.

That usually amounted to new students who she thought were prettier than her, poorer than her, or easy to push around. She and Bella weren't friends. They were just the same kinds of people who saw in each other something they could use. People murmured around us and I turned away from the table heading to the serving line. People moved aside almost fearfully, but the jeering that usually would have been there and the blame wasn't there.

Whether they knew the whole story or not didn't



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matter.

"It was about time someone stood up to Linda," someone said and scoffed. "She needed to be knocked down a peg or two."

Someone else laughed. "I bet she never imagined the day Hedy of all people stood up to her."

"Did you hear what Bella said?" Someone whispered. "I thought she was nice, but now I'm not so sure... spreading rumors like that. What do you think is the truth?"

"Hey," Claire called, coming up behind me and joining me as I gathered lunch. "Are you okay?"

"Why wouldn't I be?"

Claire winced. "That wasn't really like you... I mean Linda and Bella definitely deserved it but..."

She sighed. "I guess I'm just worried about you... The Alpha King is..."

I snorted at her concern and grabbed a served myself some pasta.

"Candido is not going to be upset with me."

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"If you're sure... what about Linda?" Claire asked. "She's... a real piece of work, and she definitely means what she said."

I shrugged. "There are plenty of other plates to break with her face if she crosses a line."

People like Linda weren't deterred by one confrontation, but they tended not to repeat the same offenses. So long as she and Bella didn't spread any more rumors about my mother, I was fine.

I paused and looked at Claire, who still seemed worried.

Was I okay? Would it be okay? I didn't care, but what about Claire? Linda and Bella were cruel, petty, and stubborn. They might try to make my life hard by spreading other rumors, but eventually, they'd go after Claire because they figured she was safer.

Being low-key allowed me to keep attention off me so I could carry out my duties to Moon Shadow, but the Academy had been infiltrated. The attacker might now be here, but someone affiliated with them, or affiliated with vampires, certainly was.

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I needed to have more access to the students and staff than just going to classes. I needed a more high-profile appearance to keep Claire out of trouble, but also to get a better feel for who it might be. I wanted to narrow down potential suspects to people of smaller packs as they would have more reason to be disgruntled with the current hierarchy.

At the same time, it was often the people closer to the top who had the most issues. I couldn't suss any of that out without interacting with those people. Those people tended to only mingle with people they thought were important enough.

It was a risk. To some degree, once I stepped into the spotlight, there was no going back, but if I played it right I could move easily between all the social levels in the Academy and get a good feel for what could be going on behind the scenes.

"Claire," I said as we reached the end of the line. "I think it's time."

Her eyes widened. Then she grinned.

"Tell me how I can help."

The plan Claire and I came up with over lunch





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needed a lot more refinement, but it was a good start. We decided that athletics was probably the best way to go in terms of broadening our social reach. The Noble Academy had a lot of sports teams, so I had several to choose from.

"Miss Hedy," Allen called as I entered the door.

"Hi, Allen."

"His Majesty would like you to join him for dinner out tonight. He's sent something appropriate to wear upstairs."

I winced. "This isn't another random small pack event that he plans to turn into chaos?"

He chuckled. "I assure you; you'll be going to a normal restaurant."

I eyed him suspiciously even as I smiled. "I'm trusting you."

He waved me upstairs with a laugh. I showered and changed into the beautiful cocktail dress that was hanging up in my room. It had a soft purple lace overlay over electric blue fabric and flared out. Most importantly, it had pockets.

I slipped into a pair of flats and stopped.



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Flats were comfortable, but they weren't adult enough. They weren't date worthy if I was going out with Candido. If I had any chance to change his view of me, I had to start as quickly as possible. My birthday was just around the corner.

I crossed the room and pulled out one of the only pairs of heels I owned. I'd bought them with Claire but had never worn them. They were black and strappy. They were a little high, but they looked good with the dress. I grabbed a clutch and tucked everything I needed inside it. Quickly, I put on just enough make-up to be noticeable but not annoying.

I remembered Candido grumbling about Sibyl's make-up at some point.

I walked downstairs, and a member of Team Gamma met me at the stairs to escort me outside to the car. Candido turned, and his eyes widened. He seemed surprised as if he didn't recognize me. I smiled and got into the car. He was in an all-black

His nostrils flared and he took a deep breath before turning away. He seemed almost agitated.

"You're wearing perfume."



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"I am. Claire helped me pick it out." My stomach turned with nervousness. "You don't think it suits me?"

"... Do you wear it to classes?"

"No," I shook my head. "This is the first time I've worn it."

He nodded and said nothing else.

The ride to the restaurant was quiet, but Candido kept glancing towards me and shifting in his seat as if every time he saw me, he grew more agitated. I wasn't sure if it was a good thing, and I was a bundle of nerves.

I couldn't ask him what was wrong.

Candido got out of the car and helped me out before ushering me into the restaurant. The host led us to a private room overlooking the city.

"Good evening, I'll be your waiter. You and your wife make such a lovely couple!"