

Chapter 27

Anja pushed open the heavy frosted-glass door to the master bathroom and stopped, her breath catching in her throat.

The room was a sanctuary of white marble and gold fixtures. In the center, a sunken oversized bathtub that could comfortably fit four people was filled to the brim with steaming, fragrant water. The surface was a carpet of vibrant, deep-red Damascus rose petals. The air was thick with their intoxicating scent.

A genuine appreciative smile touched her lips. He was good. Annoyingly dangerously good.

She reached for the door, ready to slide it shut and sink into the blissful solitude.

A hand, large and elegant, shot out and pressed flat against the glass, stopping it.

Enzo stood in the doorway, a dark silhouette against the warm light of the bedroom. He had shed his jacket and vest, and his white shirt was unbuttoned at the collar, revealing the strong column of his throat.

"As your Consort," he said, his voice a low, respectful murmur, "it is my duty, and my privilege to attend you."

Anja blinked. "Attend me?"

"To assist with your bath," he clarified, as if it were the most normal thing in the world. "To wash your hair. To ensure your every comfort is met."

A hot, fierce blush flooded her cheeks. She was from the 21st century. She was no prude. But the sheer, unabashed intimacy of his offer left her momentarily speechless.

"No," she managed to stammer, taking a step back. "No, thank you. I'm perfectly capable of bathing myself."

He didn't move. He didn't push. He simply let his shoulders slump, just slightly. He lowered his gaze, his long, dark lashes shadowing his cheeks. The arrogant predator was gone, replaced in an instant by a man burdened by a deep, profound sadness.

"Of course," he sighed, his voice laced with a heartbreaking note of self-



deprecation. "Forgive my presumption I am... not skilled in these matters. I have spent my life learning how to take things apart. How to break them. I have no idea how to... care for something precious."

He looked up at her, his dark eyes shimmering with an unshed tear. "I am only trying to learn. To be worthy."

It was a masterful performance. A symphony of emotional manipulation. And then he delivered the killing blow.

With a soft, almost imperceptible pop, his silver-gray wolf ears reappeared. And this time, they weren't perky and alert. They were flattened against his head, drooping with a look of utter, pathetic dejection.

As if that weren't enough, a huge, thick, impossibly fluffy wolf tail materialized behind him, its tip dragging mournfully on the plush carpet.

Anja's resolve, which had been a fortress of granite, crumbled into dust.

Her brain screamed TRAP! but her heart, the treacherous, stupid part of her that had a fatal weakness for all things fluffy, screamed POOR PUPPY!

Her hand moved of its own accord. She reached out, her fingers brushing against the tip of one of his drooping ears. The fur was like silk, thick and warm and unbelievably soft.

A full-body shiver went through her.

Enzo leaned into her touch, a soft, pathetic little whine escaping his throat. He tilted his head, offering her more access. "Please," he whispered, his voice a ragged plea. "Just let me stay. I'll be as quiet as a mouse. I'll just... hand you the towel. I swear it."

Her fingers curled, gently scratching behind his ear. He practically melted, his eyes fluttering shut in pleasure.

She was lost. Utterly and completely lost.

With a sigh that was one part exasperation and two parts surrender, she stepped back, letting the door swing open. "Fine," she muttered. "But you stay over there. And no funny business."

The speed with which he moved was startling. One moment he was a sad puppy in the doorway, the next he was inside the bathroom, the heavy glass door sliding shut behind him with a soft, final click. The lock engaged with an audible thud.

He had won.

In a guest room down the hall, Bradford was curled on his bed, a military-issue towel clenched between his teeth, his body wracked with the spasms of his suppressed Frenzy. His enhanced hearing had picked up every word, every sigh, every pathetic whine.

And then he heard the click of the lock.

A sound, a low, agonized growl, was ripped from his throat. It was the sound of a king watching a usurper storm his castle gates, and being powerless to stop him. He was trapped by his own discipline, by his own desperate need to protect her, even from himself. Tonight, the battlefield was lost.

Back in the steamy, rose-scented bathroom, Enzo stood by the tub, his demeanor once again transformed. He was the picture of quiet, reverent servitude.

He approached her slowly, his eyes fixed on the sash of her silk robe. He reached out a hand, his fingers trembling ever so slightly.

"May I?" he asked, his voice a breathy whisper.

Anja looked at the man before her, the man the galaxy knew as a cold-blooded killer, now trembling with anticipation at the thought of untying a ribbon. A heady, intoxicating sense of power washed over her.

She gave a slow, deliberate nod.

His fingers, surprisingly deft, found the knot. He didn't rush. He drew the process out, his knuckles brushing against her skin, each touch a tiny spark of fire. The silk slithered apart.

The robe fell open, pooling at her feet.

Enzo's breath hitched, a sharp, audible intake of air. His eyes, dark and bottomless, drank her in. The muscles in his jaw clenched, a desperate, losing battle for control.

But he didn't touch her. Instead, he grabbed a thick, warm towel and wrapped it around her, his movements swift and professional. He helped her step into the tub, his hands only touching the towel, his gaze fixed firmly on the wall behind her.

Anja sank into the hot, fragrant water with a sigh of pure bliss. She leaned her head back against the cool marble, watching him through half-lidded eyes. He stood by the tub, ramrod straight, his entire body humming with a tension so thick she could almost see it.

He was trying so hard to be good.

It was, she decided, adorable.

Our ads aim to provide better support for authors.

