

Chapter 28

In the guest room, Bradford pressed his forehead against the cold wall, the one he shared with her. He could hear the faint splash of water, the murmur of Enzo's low voice. He focused on the pain in his own body, the fire of the Frenzy, using it as an anchor. As long as she is safe, he repeated to himself, a mantra against the green-eyed monster of jealousy that was eating him alive. As long as she is safe.

In the bathroom, Enzo picked up a large, natural sea sponge. He dipped it into the rose-scented water, his movements stiff and awkward. For a man whose hands were instruments of death, he looked utterly lost holding an object designed for care.

He wouldn't look at her. His gaze was fixed on a point on the ceiling, his ears a furious, burning red.

Anja watched him, a slow, amused smile spreading across her face. He really was a novice. The most dangerous man in the galaxy, and he was terrified of a naked woman.

The power dynamic, which had felt so precarious, shifted decisively. She was in control.

"You're doing it wrong," she said, her voice a soft, teasing purr.

He flinched, his eyes darting to her face before quickly looking away again. "My apologies, Mistress."

She reached out from under the water, her arm sleek and wet. She wrapped her fingers around his wrist. "Here," she said. "Let me show you."

He froze, a statue of tense muscle. She guided his hand, the one holding the sponge, to her shoulder.

"Slowly," she whispered, her voice dropping. "Like this."

She moved his hand for him, drawing the warm, wet sponge down the curve of her collarbone, over the swell of her breast. His fingers trembled under hers. She could feel the shudder that went through his entire body.

His breath, which had been shallow and controlled, became a ragged, desperate gasp. His gaze, no longer able to stay fixed on the ceiling, dropped. It snagged on the droplets of water clinging to her skin, on the rosy peak of her nipple, barely submerged beneath the swirling petals.

He was losing. Badly.

She saw the struggle in his face, the raw, primal war being waged behind his eyes. The sight of his control fraying, of this powerful predator being

brought to his knees by a simple touch, was a heady, intoxicating drug.

A wicked, playful impulse seized her.

She slid her foot through the water, her toes just brushing against the drenched fabric of his trousers.

"Much better," she purred, her voice dripping with a lazy, seductive satisfaction. "You're a fast learner."

That was it. The final straw.

A sound, a low, guttural growl, was ripped from his throat. His eyes, which had been dark and soulful, flashed with a dangerous, crimson light. The last vestiges of the timid servant vanished, burned away by a sudden, explosive wave of pure, predatory instinct.

He dropped the sponge. It landed in the water with a soft splash.

He slammed his hands down on either side of the tub, his arms locking, caging her in. He loomed over her, his shadow falling across her face, his body blocking out the light.

"If the Mistress is pleased with my service," he rasped, his voice a low, gravelly rumble that vibrated through the water, "then perhaps the servant is due a reward."

Anja's heart gave a single, hard thud against her ribs. The air crackled with a new, dangerous energy. The game had changed.

But she didn't shrink away. She met his burning gaze, a thrill of pure adrenaline shooting through her.

"And what reward," she whispered, "did you have in mind?"

For an answer, he didn't speak. He moved.

With a slow, deliberate motion, he ripped the remaining buttons from his shirt, the sound of tearing fabric sharp in the steamy air. He shrugged the ruined garment off, letting it fall to the floor.

He was a masterpiece. A living sculpture of corded muscle and battle-worn skin. A tapestry of old, faded scars crisscrossed his chest and abdomen, each one a testament to a battle won, a life taken. This was not the polished physique of a gym enthusiast. This was the body of a warrior, a hunter, a killer.

Anja's gaze drank him in, her eyes tracing the hard lines of his abs, the deep V that disappeared below the waistband of his trousers. All her earlier embarrassment was gone, replaced by a bold, shameless hunger.

She reached up, her fingers tracing the path of a long, jagged scar that ran across his ribs. "Tell me," she whispered.

He let out a hoarse, ragged sound, a mix between a groan and a roar. He couldn't take it anymore.

He swung one long leg over the side of the tub, stepping into the water. The displaced water sloshed over the side, but he didn't notice. The tub, which had seemed so enormous moments before, suddenly felt small, cramped.

He moved towards her, his presence overwhelming, his body heat turning the already hot water into a boiling cauldron. Her back was pressed against the cold marble of the tub, with nowhere to go.

He reached down, his hands clamping onto her waist. His grip was like iron. With an effortless display of strength, he lifted her from the water, her body slick and dripping.

She let out a startled gasp as he repositioned her, settling her onto his lap, her legs wrapped around his waist. They were skin to skin, the last boundaries erased.

She could feel the frantic, hammering beat of his heart against her chest, or maybe it was her own. She could no longer tell where she ended and he began.

He tilted her chin up, his thumb stroking her jaw. His face was inches from hers, his eyes dark, bottomless pools of pure, undiluted want.

He lowered his head, his gaze fixed on her lips.

The world narrowed to the space between them. The last, final, infinitesimal inch.



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