

To ruin an Omega

Chapter 276: Weasels

PAULINE

The water ran hot enough to steam. I let it fill the tub while I stood at the sink, washing my face as I examined it in the mirror. The same ritual I performed every morning. Checking for new lines. New signs of age trying to creep in where they weren't welcome.

Behind me, beyond the bathroom door, I heard movement.

Number Four was still in my chambers. I wondered if she considered doing it again. Senselessly hurting herself.

But her self inflicted suffering seemed to have given her some sense.

She was doing something.

The sound was wet and rhythmic. Like cloth dragging across the floor. She was cleaning up her own blood. Good. At least she had that much sense left after her pathetic display.

I picked up my serum. The expensive one I'd ordered from overseas. I applied it in gentle upward strokes the way the facialist had instructed. Everything had to be upward. Fighting gravity. Fighting time.

A soft sob filtered through the door.

She was crying while she cleaned. How fucking typical. All that power Valentine had built into her body and she cried over spilled blood. Her own blood at that.

I moved on to the toner. Then the moisturizer. Each step deliberate and measured. My morning routine never changed. It was the one thing in my life that stayed consistent and controlled.

Another sob came out from outside. Louder this time.

I paused with the eye cream on my fingertip. Was she trying to make me feel guilty? Did she think her tears would reach through the door and touch something inside me?

They wouldn't.

I had cried too many times myself. Back when tears still meant something. Back when I thought they could change outcomes. They never did. All crying ever accomplished was making your eyes puffy and your nose red.

The wet dragging sound continued. She must have been on her hands and knees, scrubbing at the stains her body had left behind. Trying to erase the evidence of her failure and her rebellion.

The sound of movement stopped.

Footsteps crossed the room. Unsteady and stumbling. Then my chamber door opened and closed.

She was gone.

I finished my routine. Applied the final layer of sunscreen even though I rarely entered the sun. Better to be thorough than to let a single ray of damage through. When I was satisfied with my reflection, I turned off the taps and stepped into the bathroom to have my bath before stepping out.

The stronger morning light cut through the windows at sharp angles. It illuminated everything. Including the spot on the carpet where Number Four had bled.

I walked toward it slowly.

She had tried. I would give her that much credit. The carpet was damp where she had scrubbed. But blood was persistent. Especially when it soaked in deep. Dark stains still marked the fibers in irregular patches. The metallic smell also hung thick in the air. Pungent and unmistakable.

"Fucking imbecile."

The words came out quiet. But the anger behind them was real and sharp.

She couldn't even clean up after herself properly. Couldn't follow through on a simple task like wiping away her own mess. And I was still supposed to trust her with eliminating my enemies? With protecting my interests?

A knock echoed through the room.

I turned toward the door. Who the fuck was disturbing me now? I had dealt with enough incompetence for one morning.

"Who is it?"

"It's me, Mother."

Isobel's voice came in clear and repulsed me just as much.

My jaw clenched and I sighed. The sound came from somewhere deep in my chest. Long and heavy.

"I do not have time to deal with more imbeciles." The words were loud enough to carry through the door. "I have had the hardest day."

The door opened anyway.

Isobel stood in the doorway. Her hair was pulled back. Her dress was simple but expensive. And her eyes held that look. That contempt she always wore when she looked at me now. Like I was the one who had done something wrong.

"Imbecile?" She stepped inside and closed the door behind her. "Really?"

I crossed my arms. "Did I stutter?"

"This is the perfect time to mend our relationship." She moved further into the room. "But you are so obsessed with holding on to past grudges. It is sick to see."

A laugh bubbled up in my throat. Sharp and bitter.

"Fix what I didn't break?" I shook my head. "Miss me with that bullshit."

Isobel's expression didn't change. She just stood there. Waiting. Like she had all the patience in the world for this conversation.

"We had a great relationship," I continued. "We did. Then you went ahead and fucked it up."

"Mother—"

"You were supposed to be married to Alpha Wenzel." The words came out hard. Each one a reminder of everything that should have been. "You were supposed to be a Luna of Lily of the Valley. Then you proceeded to fuck it all up."

"You got what you wanted at the end of the day." Isobel's voice stayed level. Controlled. "The Lily of the Valley and Nocturne will be connected regardless."

She moved toward the seating area and sat down in one of the chairs like she owned the place. Like this was just a casual chat between a mother and daughter who actually liked each other.

"But I am not here to rehash this." She folded her hands in her lap. "It is clear you will never forgive or forget. I'm here to make sure your big dreams don't blow up in your face."

I studied her. Trying to figure out what angle she was playing. Isobel never came to me without an agenda. She had learned that much from me at least.

"What does that mean?"

She straightened her back. The movement was subtle but deliberate. Like she was preparing for a fight.

"I want you to call the Lily of the Valley." Her eyes met mine without flinching. "And I want you to tell them that Lysander's betrothed will be staying with him in time for the marriage."

I blinked. Of all the things I expected her to say, that wasn't it.

"Why the rush?"

Isobel's mouth tightened. A muscle in her jaw twitched.

"Because my daughter is dumb." The admission came out flat. Like she was commenting on the weather. "She will fuck this over before it has time to bloom."

I waited. There was more. There was always more with Isobel.

"I'm sure you will hear soon enough so I will not bother hiding it." She looked away and stared at some point beyond my shoulder. "The brother of the boy she was accused of killing was right under our nose and we weren't thorough enough to smoke him out."

My eyebrows rose.

"And he got under her skin and used her." Isobel's voice went quiet. "He was even the reason the case got that far and he helped Joseph's bastard."

Silence filled the space between us. I let it stretch while I processed this new information.

"Interesting." I walked toward my vanity. Picked up a brush and ran it through my hair with slow, deliberate strokes. "Seems like I praised your daughter far too early."

The brush moved through the strands in a smooth and effortless fashion.

"She is just as disappointing as you." I met Isobel's reflection in the mirror. "But I can't blame her. Learned behavior is learned behavior."

Isobel didn't flinch. She never did anymore. That was something else that had changed between us. The time when my words could actually wound her.

"You can insult me all you want." She stood. "But you cannot tell me you do not see reason to the things I am saying."

I rolled my eyes and set the brush down with more force than necessary.

"I hate looking desperate."

"Mother—"

"And know that I am not doing this for you." I turned to face her properly. "I am doing this for mostly myself and the fact that Nocturne could be in danger if your daughter isn't saved. I hate liabilities and both you and your daughter are starting to show me why I didn't reach out."

The words hung in the air. Heavy and final.

Isobel stood very still. Her hands clenched at her sides. When she spoke, her voice came out soft and almost broken.

"No. You didn't reach out because you are heartless like that."

I chuckled. The sound was dry and humorless.

"And you are what?" I stepped toward her. "Snow White and the epitome of a pure heart?"

She didn't answer. She just stood there with her mouth pressed into a thin line. Like she wanted to say something but couldn't quite form the words.

The silence stretched. Uncomfortable and thick.

"I wanted you at my wedding, you know."

The admission came out of nowhere. Quiet and small. Like she was confessing something shameful.

My chest tightened. Just for a second. Then I shoved the feeling down where it belonged with all the other useless emotions.

"Not badly enough." The words came out sharp. "Because you would have been a filial daughter in that case."

Isobel nodded. The movement was slow, and defeated. She turned toward the door.

Then she stopped.

Her head tilted as her nostrils flaring slightly.

"I did catch the scent of blood..." Her eyes dropped to the floor. To the stains Number Four had left behind. "Why the hell is blood on the floor?"

"Mind your business please and leave." I crossed my arms. "Seeing you here will only make groveling to the likes of Wenzel very difficult."

For a moment I thought she might push and demand answers. But Isobel knew when to retreat. She had learned that lesson well over the years.

She left without another word.

The door closed behind her with a soft click.

I stood alone in my chambers. Surrounded by bloodstains and the lingering smell of metal. The morning had been a fucking disaster from start to finish.

I walked to my phone. Picked it up and scrolled through my messages. Valentine Blossom still hadn't replied. His silence was starting to irritate me. We were too fucking intertwined now for him to ignore my messages.

I went back to my contacts and scrolled until I found Wenzel's name.

My finger hovered over the call button.

This was going to be humiliating. Calling him. Asking for a favor. Admitting that Nocturne needed the Lily of the Valley more than they needed us.

But Isobel was right. For once in her disappointing life, she was actually right.

She would know better than me that Hazel was a liability. The girl had shown promise at first. Sharp and ruthless in ways that reminded me of myself at that age. But now? Now she was compromised. Manipulated by some nobody with a grudge.

If the alliance fell apart because of her stupidity, everything I had worked for would collapse. All my careful planning. All the sacrifices I had made. Gone.

I pressed the call button.

The phone rang once. Twice. Three times.

Then Wenzel's voice came through. Smooth and confident in that way that always grated on my nerves.

"Pauline. This is unexpected."

I forced a smile. Even though he couldn't see it. The smile bled into the voice and made everything sound pleasant and friendly.

"Wenzel. I hope I'm not catching you at a bad time."