

To ruin an Omega

Chapter 277: St. Valentine

VALENTINE

The eggs were perfect. Sunny side up with the yolk still runny, exactly how I liked them. The bacon crisp but not burnt. Toast with just enough butter. My wife had been making my breakfast for many years and she knew every preference, every detail down to the temperature of the coffee.

I cut into the egg and watched the yolk bleed across the plate.

My phone chimed.

I ignored it. Breakfast was a ritual. The one meal of the day where I could sit in silence and eat without thinking about covens or politics or the weight of being head warlock. Just food and coffee and the morning light coming through the kitchen windows.

The phone however chimed again.

I sighed and picked it up. Because it could be important. The screen lit with several message notification. But at the top was Pauline Strati.

I frowned before I even opened it. This was all Aldric's fault. Pauline and I were supposed to just have a business arrangement that had concluded years ago. She gave me a few subjects for my experiments and I gave her discretion and results. It was supposed to be a clean transactions with no lingering attachments. But no. That fucking werewolf just had to dig his snout in my fucking business.

Now it was like we were Siamese twins. Interlocked for as long as he wanted and it was starting to seem like Aldric wanted forever.

I tapped the message open.

"I know I never really asked. But whatever happened to the Omega I gave you? I'm not sure if you still remember. Her name was Athena."

The fork paused halfway to my mouth.

Athena.

Of course I remembered Athena. You didn't forget subjects like that. The first ones and the ones who lasted longer than expected. The ones who screamed in new languages

when the pain reached new highs. The ones whose bodies rejected plenty spell and serum and still somehow kept breathing. Until they didn't.

She was my patient zero. So I could never forget her.

But why the hell was Pauline asking about her now?

Her talking about it reminded me of the incident. And I would rather much forget.

I set the phone face down on the table and went back to my eggs. The yolk had cooled slightly which ruined it. But I ate it anyway because wasting food was something my mother had beaten out of me young.

"Is something the matter, sweetheart?"

I looked up. My wife sat across from me with her own plate barely touched. She was watching me with that expression I'd learned to recognize over almost three decades. The one that said she'd already noticed something was wrong and was giving me the chance to tell her before she asked harder questions.

"No, honey. It's fine." I took another bite of toast. "Eat your food."

She didn't move. Her hands stayed folded in her lap. Her eyes stayed on my face.

Then she picked up her spoon and dropped it. The clatter against the plate made me flinch.

"You do know I am not blind, Valentine."

I kept chewing. The toast had gone dry in my mouth.

"I do try to be chill." Her voice stayed level. Controlled. The way it always did when she was trying very hard not to lose her temper. "Like I know you want me to be. But I cannot just pretend to be blind forever."

I swallowed and reached for my coffee.

"All these talks about abandoning our daughter Madeline. It is insane." She leaned forward. "What game or madness could this even be about? Madeline has kept me out of it just as you have for the longest time and I don't want to hear this is for the family's protection because I have thought and internalized this for the longest time and then you went ahead to involve our boy Wilhelm as well."

The coffee burned going down. I needed something to focus on besides the tightness building in my chest.

"So I know damn well it is not about protection." She wasn't yelling. That was almost worse. "So what the hell is it for? What is going on? Valentine, I am your wife. If both our children now know, I deserve to know as well."

I set the cup down carefully and made myself look at her.

She was beautiful still. Age had softened some of the sharp edges but her eyes were the same. Dark, intelligent and capable of seeing through every lie I'd ever tried to tell her.

"Then you do what?" The words came out harder than I meant them to. "You want to help us?"

"Yes." She didn't hesitate. "That is the basis of marriage. In every aspect of life, I am by your side."

"No you're not."

The silence that followed felt like falling.

"You will not be at my side if you know what I did."

She scoffed. Actually scoffed at me like I was a child saying something ridiculous.

"You are a Blossom. Your ancestors have never been good representation." She stood up and planted her hands on the table. "But I know you and I have loved you for a long time. I deserve your trust."

Trust.

The word sat between us like something physical. Something I could reach out and touch if I wanted to. If I was brave enough.

"Trust me." My voice had gone quiet. "This is for your own good."

Another scoff came from her. She was getting angry now. I could see it in the set of her shoulders. The way her magic had started to hum just under her skin.

"No it is not. Why can Wilhelm and Madeline know but not me?"

"Because—"

I stopped. The words were right there. Ready to come out and destroy whatever fragile peace we'd been maintaining. Because they were young and stupid and got themselves involved before I could stop them. Because they stood to inherit my sins whether I

wanted them to or not. Because telling her meant watching her look at me the way she was looking at me right now but worse. So much worse.

She waited. Her eyes bored into me.

"Because?"

"Because they stand to inherit what I am and will be."

The truth and not the truth all at once. They would inherit the coven. The responsibilities. The debts I'd accumulated over decades of making choices that kept us powerful, protected and prosperous.

And the stains that came with all of it.

I pushed my chair back. The legs scraped against the floor. "I've lost my appetite."

I made it three steps before I heard it. The click of the lock. Magic sealing the door so thoroughly that I felt it like a physical barrier.

I turned around slowly.

My wife stood by the table with her hand raised. Her magic crackled in the air between us.

"No." Her voice had gone steel. "Sit right back and finish your food."

"Sweetheart." I kept my own magic carefully contained. "I do not want to fight."

"Well I don't want to either." She took a step toward me. "So sit the heck down and eat while we finish having this conversation."

I reached for the door with my magic and found hers wrapped around it like chains. I pushed. Gentle at first. Then harder. My power met hers and crushed it. Dominated it with the ease of someone who'd been head warlock for twenty years and had broken stronger spells than this.

The lock clicked open.

I made an attempt to grab at the handle and that was when the door slammed shut so hard the frame cracked.

I spun around and stared at my wife. She was breathing hard. Her hand was still raised. Her magic flooding the room now with an intensity I hadn't felt from her in years.

"Don't start."

"Watch me." She raised her other hand.

The chair I had left hit me in the backs of my knees and I went down hard. My ass slammed into the seat. Magic wrapped around my wrists and ankles and held me there.

"I do not want to fight you." I kept my voice level and reasonable. The way you talk to someone holding a weapon they might actually use.

"Too bad, Val. I. want to fight." She was shaking now. With pure unbridled rage. "I am so angry and there is nowhere for this pent up rage to go."

Two forks lifted from the table. They spun in the air. The tines caught the light as they oriented themselves toward me.

"Baby—"

The forks shot forward.

I threw up a shield on instinct. The forks stopped inches from my throat. Hovering there and trembling with the force of her magic pushing against mine.

"I don't want to hurt you!"

"Is that why you won't tell me shit?" She pushed harder. The fork tines pressed against my shield. "You've forgotten who you married and think I am just some delicate little flower?"

Sweat broke out on my forehead. She was strong. Stronger than I'd given her credit for. Stronger than she'd been in years.

"Let me remind you that I was a Killmartin before I became a Blossom."

Killmartin.

Fuck.

I'd forgotten. Or maybe I'd let myself forget. That her family name carried weight. That she came from a bloodline just as old and just as stained as mine. That she'd chosen to be soft with me. Chosen to step back and let me lead.

It was her choice. Not weakness.

I saw it in her eyes then. The same look I'd seen years ago when some fool had tried to challenge her in the coven square. Right before she'd turned his bones to powder without breaking a sweat.

Bloodlust.

I shattered every piece of ceramic on the table. Plates and cups. They exploded into thousands of sharp fragments. I caught them with my magic and shaped them. Controlled them. Turned them into a cloud of blades that hung in the air around her.

"One stupid move and I promise you, I will not hesitate."

She pushed the forks forward. They broke through my shield. The tines touched my throat. Pricked the skin. I felt blood, hot and wet, start to trickle down my neck.

Her eyes never left mine.

"Do it."

We stayed like that. Frozen. Her forks at my throat. My ceramic blades surrounding her head and heart and every vital organ. One move from either of us and this stopped being a fight and became a murder.

The air crackled with our combined magic. The walls groaned. The floor beneath us had started to crack.

My heart hammered in my chest. She was serious. She would actually do this. She would actually push those forks through my throat if I didn't give her what she wanted.

And it was starting to feel like the only move she left me was to kill her for it.

That could only mean she was at wits end with me.

The thought made me sick and almost laugh.

"This is giving me flashbacks," I said. "to the first time we kissed."

"Oh, shut up."

"You don't remember?" I smiled.

That was when the door opened.

"What the fuck." Wilhelm's voice cut through the magic like a knife through butter.

Everything stopped. The forks clattered to the ground. The ceramic shards fell and scattered across the floor in a sound like rain.

My son stood in the doorway, staring at us. At me pinned in the chair with blood on my neck. At his mother with her hands still raised and shaking.

The shame hit me like a fist to the gut.

We were supposed to be better than this. We were supposed to be the stable ones. The parents who had their shit together. Who didn't try to kill each other over breakfast.

Wilhelm just stood there. His bag still on his shoulder. His face cycling through shock and horror.

My wife lowered her hands slowly. The magic drained from the room and left us all standing in the wreckage of our kitchen with nothing but silence and broken ceramics.

"Son—" I started.

But I had no idea what to say after that.