

## 14 | Are You Following Me?

ONYX

I gaped at him. Was he serious? Was Ruhn really thinking I was following him when all I did was try to avoid him as if he were the plague? How on earth did I give him a vibe that I was still after him? Was it the butt grasp last time? I explained that it was a pure accident! These things can happen, okay?!

I knew very well that the best course of action would have been to stay quiet, mumble an apology and leave. But something in me REALLY did not like this idea.

"Excuse me?" My tone did not sound anything near apologetic either. "I was here rst. How on earth would I be following you?"

Ruhn looked taken aback, but to his credit, he regrouped quickly.

"You could have found out where I was going," he said bluntly, and I gasped at that audacity of his.

"How would I do that exactly?" The question was reasonable, and we both knew it, but the corners of his lips' rose slightly upwards. As if he was mocking me. Was he?

"I wouldn't be doing your job for you, Onyx," he replied without actually replying. "The last thing I need is to give you ideas. You could have found out that I was looking for a present for my sister."

"That still doesn't explain anything. It would be very random of me to wait for you to appear here today out of all the other places in the city where one can buy a present for their sister." I had to restrain myself from telling him what I wanted to say. The guy had to dial down on that giant ego of his. I wasn't interested in him, and he could go and wait for Melody to appear. The wait was almost over anyway!

That thought prickled my mind slightly, but I chose to ignore that.

"You could have bribed one of my servants," the Prince suggested, and I gasped because I was appalled by his stubbornness in thinking so low of me.

I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and exhaled through my nostrils, counting to ten.

Remember, Onyx, that guy could kill you. Being rude to him now would defeat the purpose of avoiding him in the rst place.

I want to live. I want to live. I want to live.

I had to repeat this to myself way too many times. I did not want to get killed in the middle of this shop, in the sea of tacky dresses Conrad chose. No way. This wouldn't be my end.

"I—" it was extremely hard to squeeze the words out of myself because everything inside of me was screaming against it. "I apologise, your Highness Alpha Ruhn, for the inconvenience I have caused you again. I will try to make sure next time to hide when we are in the same building as soon as I am aware of it so as not to disturb you."

He frowned upon hearing my words as if he did not like what I had just proclaimed. I couldn't win with this guy, could I?

"Well, I'll be leaving since we are clear on where we stand. Good luck with choosing the present!" I whistled to Filin, and he ew on my shoulder like the good little spy he was.

My hand was already on the doorknob when I heard his voice.

"Wait!"

Damn it! So close again... I wanted to cry.

It was probably written all over me because when I turned to face the Lycan Prince, his frown deepened.

"I can use some help with the gift," he announced as if it had anything to do with me.

"Well, good luck to you and how about you call one of your friends to help you? Enzo, maybe?" I could tell that he did not like my suggestion. But in all honesty, it was a good one. If I remember the book correctly, Beta Enzo was gay and had impeccable taste. There even was a funny scene I wrote with him giving advice to Ruhn on how to dress for a date with Melody. Ruhn indeed needed all the help he could get. He would mostly ght rogues in the province his current pack was in and only had time to attend a few dates in his life, if any, before Melody. He was usually wearing pitch black from head to toe, and although it suited his personality and extremely hot body very well...

I lost my thought when I realised that I was staring at him, tracing the lines of his body with my gaze, as if he was a piece of meat and I was at the butcher's shop. Dang it.

"Enzo is busy." A smirk curved Ruhn's lips. "But you are here, so why not help me when I am asking."

"Hmm," I chewed on my lip, looking for an excuse to escape. "Maybe because you are not asking?"

"If I wasn't asking, I would just use an Alpha command on you," he brushed me off and pointed at the sofa. "Sit down and enjoy some of these... whatever they are."

"Pralines," I rolled my eyes but did as I was told. It was clear that he wasn't going to let me go. So, the best course of action would be to stay and be done here fast. "Start choosing!" I commanded and almost choked on the little chocolate when Ruhn's eyes darted back to me questioningly. He did not take orders. He liked to give them.

However, maybe it was my lucky day after all, and he did not comment on the matter further. Ruhn was walking between the mannequins in the VIP room that we were now sharing, but, of course, he had to stop in front of the rack with the tacky dresses. I wanted to hide my face, but that would have been too obvious, so I decided to help myself to some champagne instead.

"Drinking in the morning?" The Prince clicked his tongue without looking at me. Making people feel small and insignificant was his gift.

"It's ocially the afternoon," I mumbled and gulped the rest of the sparkling liquid. God knew I needed it.

"How about this one?" Ruhn got one of the dresses off the rack and showed it to me. It was basically a long transparent piece of lace with a few strings here and there, forming sparkling panties, but no bra was present.

"No," I said, without going into explanations.

"Why?" His brows were knitted in puzzlement. He really had no idea.

"Would you seriously like to see your sister wearing something like this?" I arched my brow. Targaryen much?

"Aren't these the dresses you have chosen?" Ruhn stared at me, still confused.

"No," I shook my head and stood up, striding towards him gracefully. "These are the dresses that were chosen for me by other people. There is a difference."

I took the hanger from his hands and placed it back on the rack.

"That's basically lingerie," I tried to explain, and he got another one, eyeing the construction curiously. He really wasn't good at this. This one was made out of sheer chiffon that was also completely see-through. Two thin strips were supposed to cover the chest and connected by a high-waist belt with a long transparent skirt with two long slits at each side. That one would be impossible to wear with any kind of underwear. Seriously, fake Dad?

Ruhn was looking at the dress, then at me, then at the dress again, and then at my frame. His eyes became a shade darker.

"No!" I said rmly. If he brought something like this to the Princess, and then people found out that I was helping him, I would end up as the bad guy again. No way!

Surprisingly, he obeyed.

"Onyx, listen," he cleared his throat and was about to say something when the door burst open, and the manager rolled in a new rack with gowns. This time, there were a variety of colours and designs.

"I apologise for the delay, Your Highness!" the woman chirped but froze when she saw me. "Miss Tynan? You are still here? I sent Allison to ask you to come another time, as you can see—" She stopped talking, but I knew what she wanted to say. They had a more important guest than me now.

And that Allison girl tried to set me up and anger the brutal Prince. Well played, Allison.

"Oh, I was about to leave!" I smiled, grabbing my chance, but Ruhn brushed his palm over my arm, preventing me from escaping and creating goosebumps all over my body. The last time he touched me like that, we were both naked in his bedroom... The room got unexpectedly hotter, and I swallowed uncontrollably.

"But then she decided to stay and help me," Ruhn interjected, and I let out a small sigh of defeat.

"Sure!" I decided that whatever did not kill me made me stronger, and Ruhn wasn't in the mood for a murder today, so I marched to the rack and started picking gowns that I liked one by one. "This one is good, and this one is great, this one is great, that one, and one more!"

I was throwing the dresses at the Crown Prince, and the lycan caught them all on time. I was about to announce that I was done when I saw it...

A part of me still couldn't believe it. I recognised it at once and almost teared up. It was exactly like the one I saw in my dreams while I was writing the book. I remember describing the blush pink colour and the fabric that owed like rose petals in the air. The subtle shine of the tiniest sequins, and the intricate draping of the skirt cascading to the ground. The corset was adorned with glimmering embroidery and off-shoulder sheer sleeves. It was as innocent and beautiful as I had imagined. Maybe even better.

Melody's Moon Goddess Gala dress. The one a secret helper gifted to her and the one that made everyone turn their heads at the ball. It was a gown t for the main character, and I loved it.

I took it into my hands to feel the delicate fabric that looked as if it was made by the fairies. It was stunning, but I knew I had to return it.

Melody had to wear it. The main character.

Not Onyx. Not the villainess...

That dress made some noise, and thanks to that...

A sudden selsh thought occurred to me, and I bit my lip almost to the point of bleeding.

The dress was a big success, and it earned Melody her rst bits of fame. Actually, it was such a stunner that jealous Onyx tried to spill red wine on her, and end up pouring it on herself.

What if I talked Ruhn into giving it to his sister, and then she would be the one to enjoy the perks of wearing this gown and getting all the attention? Would that give me some extra bonus points with Ruhn?

I felt slightly bad for Melody. I loved her as if she was my baby, but... she wasn't my child for real, and in all honesty, luck would be on her side either way. She'd meet Ruhn before she would wear the dress. He would recognise her as his mate and...

Another prick of pain inside, and the decision was made.

Melody was Ruhn's mate. Nothing would happen to her. Dress or no dress. And I needed those bonus points to survive.

"This," I handed it to the Lycan Prince, and our ngers accidentally brushed over each other. He was watching me intently, and I tried to smile even though I had images of him kissing Melody in the little secret Crescent Garden going through my mind. "Give this to the Princess. She will be the most beautiful girl wherever she goes in this."

"Are you sure?" Ruhn tried to catch my arm, but I manoeuvred myself out of it.

"Yes," I conrmed and was already at the exit, turning quickly to give him a farewell wave. "My job here is done, and I need to go and nd my friend."

Filin ew back to my shoulder, and my eyes locked with the garnet ones of the Lycan royally.

"Good luck at the Gala, Ruhn," I smiled at him sincerely, knowing we won't see each other after that. I would do everything to achieve that. All our interactions were done today. For good.

I ran down the stairs before he managed to respond. Tears were stinging my eyes, and I tried to blink them away, hoping they would not ruin my mascara. I did not know why they formed in the rst place. Surely, not because Ruhn was about to meet Melody. I was happy for them!

They were my creations.

I wish them well. I really did...

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I spent the remaining time pretending to be preparing for the Moon Goddess Gala when in fact, I was trying to nd out which things out of Onyx's closet I could have sold and for how much. Somewhere after the Gala, the Tynans would start their moves on the chessboard, trying to gain inuence. The actions would cause their demise. And by then, I wanted to be far away from here.

I started writing a new novel but quickly realised it wasn't a good option. For some reason, I couldn't form a normal sentence on paper anymore, let alone a beautiful one. Everything I created felt at. Writing really wasn't going to save me this time. I needed a plan B, and I didn't have one.

"You can always work for Zion," Filin really was not helping me either. "Trust me, if I speak to him, he will hire you on the spot."

"Gee, thanks," I threw the last crumpled piece of paper at him and groaned. "I'm desperate, but I'm still not at the point of becoming a criminal. I should stay away from your boss as well. Not to mention that I can't imagine what I can possibly do for his organisation other than the things he already signed me up for."

"I can think of a few things," the owl muttered, but I ignored him. We both knew that tonight was the time to take the potion the Scorpion gave me. The one that would help me fake colloidal silver poisoning. I was already playing with the bottle in my hands.

"It's going to be nasty," I said to myself, and the owl nodded quietly. To his credit, he wasn't lying to me about that. Although it was still a long journey until I could trust him.

Not thinking twice, I removed the lid that kept the bitter liquid, closing my eyes.

I waited for a few good minutes, but nothing was happening. I was ready to call it a day, sigh in relief, and try to come up with a new plan for the Gala when I felt it... the life draining out of me. And a pain so excruciating that I wanted to scream.

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