

Chapter 28

It seemed that my initial perception of Keiko was not entirely correct. No matter where we went there was something about her that could only be described as regal despite the normal clothing she wore. But underneath all that she was surprisingly young and sweet. Maybe I had hated her because she had sided with Hades when I thought he was the scum of the earth, or maybe it was the tension that had caused her to act more like a queen.

But she certainly didn't behave that way when we got to the store.

"Here," she said, pulling out a wheelchair from the provided lot, "sit down."

"Um, no thank you," I denied. "I'd prefer if people didn't stare at me."

"People are going to stare at you a lot more when you break your leg again because you're being stubborn. Sit down or we are going back to the car and I'll call Hades to keep you on bed rest."

"Are you my mother?"

"Much worse, I'm your queen. Now sit," she ordered with a smirk.

I knew that she was joking and that she was enjoying the way my cheeks flamed red, but I also knew that she wasn't going to take no for an answer. With a dramatic roll of my eyes I flopped down in the wheel chair, list in hand. Besides, if I took it easy now then I wouldn't have to worry so much when I was working in the kitchen.

And people did stare, which I hated. I had never been one for the spotlight, coming from a small pack, having a normal background. But Keiko didn't seem to care in the slightest. She just pushed me around and collected anything that I had asked for. Soon enough my lap was full of everything from fresh pineapple to jalapenos.

I thought I was ready to go, but when we walked by the makeup aisle I asked if we could pick up a couple more things. I thought a woman like Keiko with all her money and power, would sco at drugstore makeup, but she was delighted. We swatched foundations on my hands until we found the right shade. She offered tons of suggestions on mascaras as if she had used them all. I even ended up with a nice blush and a highlighter. It was going to cost over a hundred dollars for the whole assortment, but I didn't think of where the funds were coming from in that moment.

When we got to the cashier she pulled out a card with Hades's name on it and I winced.

Keiko didn't confront me about it until we got back into her rental car.

"Are you one of those people who needs to split everything down the middle or can't stand people paying for them?" she asked.

"No," I replied. Sure, I would like to pull my own weight from time to time, but given the circumstance I wasn't too worried about it. It's not like I was even in a position to be making my own money.

"Then what is it?"

"Well, I just don't like the idea that he gets money from people he's killed," I confessed. "And I really don't like the idea of using it on frivolous stu like makeup."

"Did he tell you that?" Keiko demanded with wide eyes as we pulled onto the main road.

"No, I just assumed."

"We pay him, Charlotte. He doesn't pillage these awful people and take everything away from their families," she denied with a slight shake of her head. "Ajax and I started paying him as soon as we were able to understand what was really going on. It's a small price to pay for such a heavy task. We bought him a secluded house and he takes care of those who need to be removed from our society. Plus, his work makes him hated. It's the least we could do for him."

"Oh," I whispered, feeling foolish. It seemed that every time I placed judgement on Hades it came back to me and only made me feel awful for assuming things of a man who already had a challenging life.

"We offered to pay him more or announce that he was affiliated with the royals so he could live with us in Denver, but he denied it all, saying he didn't want to put us at risk. Not all of us were blessed with that strength and the ability to avoid death."

I didn't say much else for the rest of the ride and Keiko let me sit in silence. When we pulled up the the house Ajax was sitting on the porch with Ethel, two glasses of iced tea in their hands. Hades was nowhere in sight.

"How was your day?" Ajax asked, coming to his mate's side as we both got out of the vehicle. Seeing him like this, with his gaze so locked on Keiko, I felt like a fool for ever thinking that he could've been flirting with me for another other reason than upsetting Hades.

"Good, we picked up some groceries and extras," Keiko replied, kissing him on the cheek. Again, it was a stark contrast to how they had been before. Now, Ajax was being perfectly civil. But with Hades absent I couldn't help but wonder if it was all just a temporary farce. Were they always at each other's throat in an effort to prove dominance?

As if Ajax could sense my mind turning he shot me a small smile. "Hades and I discussed a member on the community who needed some extra guidance. Nothing gory or awful, just a scare to get him back in line. He should be back in a couple hours," he explained.

"Oh, okay," I whispered. Sure, I understood the situation better but I wasn't entirely sure how to handle these situations yet.

"I'll help you unload, but we have a flight to catch. Clementine has been driving my mother crazy for hours now so we need to get home," Keiko continued, still grinning.

We worked in silence and in a matter of minutes the groceries had been put away aside from what I needed. Keiko promised to visit soon and I didn't doubt that she would. Between their private jet and having frequent business with Hades I knew I would be seeing them soon.

Ethel stayed a little while longer, looking intrigued at my ingredients.

"It'll be for adobo," I hinted as I started working with the pork. "Pineapple to offset the soy sauce and vinegar and jalapenos because I like spice."

"It looks interesting," she replied, pushing a glass of her homemade iced tea towards me. "Have you always liked cooking?"

"I guess so. My mom is an incredible cook. I know that it's not good, but I was raised in a sexist house I suppose. My dad made the decisions and my mom made the meals. It's just how it was."

"There's nothing wrong with that. Women are allowed to be whatever they want to be. If you want to be a scientist you be one, but if you want to stay at home and cook then that's fine too. Feminism is about allowing women to be what they want to be and empowering each other, not bullying them into things they never wanted. Look at Keiko, she used to strip and now she runs a whole community. There was prejudice against her because people assumed that being attractive and having that kind of work meant she couldn't be smart or successful in leading."

"Right," I murmured, putting my cubed pork in a saucepan. "She is pretty remarkable."

"She's wonderful. I know that the two of you didn't have the best start, but she could be a good ally and a great friend."

I shot Ethel a smile and continued to prepare my dish. I invited her to stay if she wanted, but she told me her husband was waiting with dinner.

Now, there was no hiding what I was doing. I was cooking a dinner for my mate and it was the opposite of how I had imagined it.

~~~Distraction Section~~~

Hello everyone and welcome to update 2 of 12. I'm ready to be a super exhausted author. But it's all worth it because I'm thoroughly convinced that I have the best readers ever. You guys all supported me through getting the princess and the alpha published and I hope that I will get the same support when the next book gets published. Those of you who are new still vote and comment and that fuels me so much. So, writing a chapter a day doesn't seem to be payment enough but it's the best I can do for now.

Question of the Day: What are some names you find attractive?

If you couldn't tell from my writing I have quite the pattern: Ajax, Archer, Alistair. Orion, Ajax, Ares, Hades. I love strange and unusual names with meaning and a certain ruggedness to them. See you all tomorrow!