

## The Alpha CEO's Unloved Wife Chapter 20

### Bruises and Excuses

Jane slept restlessly and woke feeling groggy and dry eyed. She had a quick shower and dressed in her running gear, grimacing in the mirror when she saw that Alice had caused a bruise after all, just the faintest one where she had been wearing a ring. Jane would need to apply foundation, she decided, after her run. It was no use doing it before.

She snuck through the house like a thief, although the only noise came from the kitchen where the staff prepared Baron and Angelique's breakfast and hoped that she could return from her run before Baron and Angelique left the breakfast room. Once she was free of the house, she ran across the lawn at full speed, wanting to place as much distance between herself and the occupants of the house as she could. She ran past the guarded gates, and down the street with tears streaming down her face.

She ran to the town, glad that it was so early in the morning that traffic was light, and there were few pedestrians on the streets. As she approached the café where she had, oh so briefly, had a job, she saw the manager, Patrick, putting out the A-Frame sign. She was tempted to turn and run away, but he saw her, and she thought that it would be rude.

She slowed to a walk, hoping that he would mistake her tears for sweat.

"Hello," he said as she reached him.

"Hello," she was panting heavily. "I am so sorry... about the other day."

He was silent for a long moment a frown gathering between his brows. His eyes went to her arm, bare in her running top, to the bruises that

Baron had left there, and then to her cheek. "I know who you are," he said quietly. "Or more precisely, who you are married to. "It occurred to me, in the interim, that there is really only one reason a woman with such a wealthy husband would consider a job in a café for minimal wage plus tips," his eyes went back to her arm. "The same reason that woman might not be able to make it to every shift."

"Oh," she flushed, shame rising. "Baron doesn't hit me..." She said, her hand covering the bruises on her arm. "He just forgets how tightly he

grabs me, "Some one has hit you," his eyes went back to her cheek. "I have no right to pry into your domestic situation, but no one deserves to wear bruises placed by others.

"I can't afford to keep an employee even for minimal wage who cannot be reliable, for whatever reason. But," he hesitated.

"If someone wanted to earn some cash in hand when they could get away for a few hours, there are odd jobs in the kitchen that always need to be done. Kitchen hours run differently to opening hours, as well, as they need to prepare food and clean up after closing. It might be better for that sort of person, anyway, to be tucked away in a kitchen, rather than where she might be seen."

She felt her mouth pull down, and clapped a hand over it, fighting back tears. He let her have a moment to compose herself. "Thank you," she said when she could. "I don't think I can ever repay that kindness." "I believe in karma," he replied. "A good deed done to another will come back to me when I truly need it. If you go to the back door and knock, they will be expecting you, Jane." She ran back to the house with new hope. She eased open the front door and ran her eyes around the hall, finding it empty. She had one foot on the stair, her hand on the rail, when Baron said her name. She jumped like kicked cat, throwing a fleeting glance over her shoulder. He had come from his office and was fixing his tie as he crossed the marble tiles. She kept her face averted from him as she stepped back down. "Yes Baron?"

"You don't need to creep in and out of the house," he said to her. She looked up at him in surprise and then away. "Yes," he sounded amused. "I see you. You don't have to be frightened here, Jane. This is your home.." He caught her chin suddenly, his expression changing. "Who hit you?"

"It's nothing," she tried to pull away.

"I am ready," Angelique announced from the top of the stairs.

"Did you hit Jane?" He was furious, releasing Jane in order to round on Angelique as she made her way down the other curve of staircase.

"As per our agreement," Angelique sneered. "I have not laid a finger on your pet." His eyes narrowed as he considered her, but she met his eyes without flinching. "I am telling the truth," she rolled her eyes. "But whatever. We are going to be late."

Jane took advantage of his distraction to hurry up the stairs.

"Jane," he said, making to follow.

“Late,” Angelique reminded him.

He sighed heavily and stepped back off the staircase. Jane, her back pressed against the wall around the corner, just out of sight, released her own sigh when he led Angelique out onto the porch. As she stepped out the shower, she saw there was a message on her phone from Baron. She opened “Who hit you?” His message demanded.

She groaned. “It is nothing,” she replied.

“It is not nothing, Jane. Who hit you?”

She dressed, hoping that he would get distracted and forget, but the phone vibrated. “Jane. Answer me.” She closed her eyes. It did not vibrate again, and she released the breath she had not known she was holding. They must have arrived, she thought, wherever it was that they were going. Hopefully by the time they were done, the small bruise on her cheek would be forgotten. She used makeup to hide it, hoping to avoid a repeat of the conversation. As if reading her mind, the phone vibrated again, Baron’s name flashing onto the screen.

“We will be going for a run tonight with the pack. You and I will discuss this further before we go.” “Shit,” she whispered and gripped the edge of the vanity. She was not sure what was more frightening, the thought of telling her husband that her sister had hit her because she had pleaded with her father to let her leave him and return home, or a run with the pack that now included Baron and Angelique. As she tried to think of an excuse not to attend, the phone vibrated again, almost shaking itself into the sink.

“No excuses.”