

The Cursed Alpha's Mate Chapter 41

“Happy birthday, Aysel!” Celeste brought me a cupcake with a candle on it, her face stretched wide from smiling. It was early, barely five, so my mind wasn't the sharpest.

“Thank you.” I kissed her cheek after blowing out the candle.

“Did you make a wish?” She asked, her eyes wide in my dark room.

“I did,” I lied through my teeth. I hadn't. All the wishes I'd made in the past ten years were unnecessary. I never got anything from wishing so I stopped wishing.

“Great. I knew you'd be in the kitchen soon before heading off to school. I wanted to make sure you got your gift.” She brandished a pink gift bag, waving it in my face excitedly. “Open it!” She shoved it into my hands. It was light and inside lay a beautiful butterfly necklace.

Wolves traditionally received wood carvings from their Alpha when they came of age but I didn't expect Alpha Zavier to waste his time carving me something symbolic or even wasting wood on me.

I didn't think I would receive anything else but a butterfly seemed a little weird to give to a wolf. She must have caught my confused look because she spoke.

“From caterpillar to butterfly. From ordinary human to wolf. It's the best I could do.” She looked embarrassed but

my heart warmed when she said that. It was more thoughtful than a pretty butterfly neck chain and it meant everything to me from that minute.

“Thank you. I love you so much, Celeste.” I hugged her tightly.

After that, she left to allow me to prepare for my morning duties after which I dressed and went to school.

Throughout the school day, I had mixed feelings of both excitement and dread. I felt warm and happy in one minute and the next, cold dread made my hands stiffen.

At closing, I watched Lucien’s car peel out of the driveway with Skylar and the feeling of dread and excitement finally made sense. Lucien was my mate but he loved Skylar.

I desperately wanted to visit him at home but I knew his parents would not welcome me so I went home, excited about my mate. Mates were rare and most people met their mates only after they shifted. I sensed Lucien before I even shifted which showed that we had a really strong bond.

I should give him something. Wouldn’t it be pretty if I did something grand for him? Lucien liked grand gestures. He liked being the centre of attention. I decided I would ask him out in front of the whole school. It would be weird asking someone’s boyfriend out in public but we were mates so his relationship with Skylar didn’t matter anymore.

Lucien was mine.

I planned it for a week. It was worrying that in that week he never approached me or showed any inclination that we were mates but I knew he knew. Or maybe he didn't. I still hadn't shifted after a week so maybe he couldn't sense our bond.

Weak! So weak! I cursed myself for not shifting but I refused to worry about that. Maybe I would shift when I got together with Lucien.

Goddess, it excited me a lot!

"What do you think Lucien would like?" I asked Celeste. She gave me a weird look because of my big and silly grin.

"Why? His birthday has passed," she handed me a hot cup of chocolate from their kitchen. Her parents weren't home so I could visit her.

"I know. I want to ask him out." Her eyes doubled in size, her spoon falling and mouth dropping open in shock.

"You have a crush on my brother?" Before I could speak, she grabbed my hands, squealing and jumping. "You guys would be so good together. Oh, it's time to put that little wench in her place. I'm so happy. Oh my god, I'm going to have my brother back after Skylar all but brainwashed him! We'll be the three musketeers again!" She kept squealing and jumping and hugging until I got too dizzy to keep up with her.

Celeste went through a long list of all the things she knew Lucien liked but the more things she mentioned, the more

money it seemed I would spend and as much as I wanted to buy him a nice gift, Skylar had raided my savings so I didn't have a lot of money.

"I'm not sure I can afford all these," I admitted when she continued to mention ridiculously expensive gifts. "I think I'll just take him on a date."

"Oh no. He should be the one taking you on a date." Her smile dimmed but then she frowned. "It may be a good idea but it's not the best. It might work though."

The idea was born from there. Celeste picked out the restaurant based on its menu and pricing. I got the flowers I knew he would like because he'd looked so awestruck the first time he saw them when we were kids. And everything was set.

I went to school that day with a bouquet of fresh flowers. My hands shook but I didn't entertain the thought of being rejected.

Thankfully, I bumped into him before classes started. He started to apologize but when he saw who he'd bumped into, he turned with speed. I stopped him from leaving by grabbing his sleeve.

"What is it?" His words were harsh but my wolf was so excited to be so close to him that I could not hear anything louder than her excited yips.

"I - I got you this." I pushed the flowers towards him but he didn't take them. People started to point and stare the

longer we stood there with me holding flowers out to him. “Lucien –” I called, my voice getting shaky.

“It’s Beta Lucien to you!” He snapped and my wolf stopped and quietened. Everything went silent, including the hallway. Skylar walked over then and almost as if it was a natural thing to do, he put his hands around her shoulders while she grinned at me.

She’d already won before the game even began.

“Beta Lucien, can we – can we talk?” I heard a snicker behind me that made my eyes smart. I knew that things wouldn’t end well from that point. My hands were already shaking.

“We can talk here.” His eyes challenged me. What do you have to say? I dare you to tell them we’re mates and watch me deny you. Watch me make you a laughing stock, a bigger joke than you already are.

A tear rolled down my left cheek. He really hated me.

I continued to push the flowers towards him because my hands were starting to hurt but he wouldn’t take them. He recoiled from me as if I was a deadly disease.

“I love you.” It was a desperate attempt that failed. The whole hallway resonated with laughter after my foolish words. Even a teacher passing by laughed. Lucien joined in the laughter.

“Did you guys hear that? The little b!tch loves him.” Bethel guffawed. Celeste pushed through the crowds and grabbed my wrist, pulling me away on stiff legs and face stained with tears.

That night, he texted me on my battered phone.

“Meet me at the woods behind my house at nine. Don’t be late.”

The text was curt so I didn’t expect any k!sses and cuddles. I knew what was coming. Rejection. I braced myself for it. I wouldn’t accept his rejection. I couldn’t. It would kill me to give up my mate without a fight.

I dressed by eight and left by eight-thirty. The Beta’s home was close to the pack house. It wouldn’t take me up to ten minutes to get there but I wasn’t taking any chances. I rushed to the woods behind his home and waited a full hour before he arrived. I couldn’t be late but he could. My time didn’t matter but his did.

“I don’t want you,” he said before he even got to where I stood. “Of all the girls in the world, I got you?” He didn’t raise his voice because he didn’t want anyone to hear him even if the woods were quite far from his house.

“Am I so bad?” I didn’t want to be self-deprecating but the words fell out. “We were best friends once, Lucien. What makes me so repulsive that you can’t bear to be with me? Me, your chosen companion?”

“Oh, spare me the theatrics.” He hissed. “You’d be a stain on my reputation. A weakling. A f*cking omega!” He pushed his hand into his hair.

“But the goddess- Are you saying the goddess made a mistake pairing us together?”

“There has to have been a mix up because I deserve better than you. You’re a traitor. I’m not going to have pups with traitorous blood! Look, let’s just keep things simple.” He took a deep breath and my heart fell.

“I, Beta Lucien Strauss, Future Beta of Redville Pack, reject you as my mate. We share no bond now and forever.” Pain pierced every cell in my body.

My eyes rolled back in my head but I refused to faint. He would gloat if I did. My brain felt bigger than my head. Everything hurt. Even breathing.

“I can’t – I can’t accept your rejection.” Foolish words.

The memories were too bitter to be revisited.

He spat on me. Insulted me. Called me names and goaded me until I accepted his rejection.

The pain made me blackout.

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“I am sorry.” I waved off Celeste’s apologies.

She cried and cried and I felt there was more to her tears than she let me see but someone came to prepare my bath soon.

A small omega with kind eyes knocked on the door and when I opened up, she jumped back. Relief crossed her face when she didn't see Valens anywhere in the room.

"The alpha is scary. Oh lord." She fanned herself. "When he came with Astrid to my room, I thought I was about to be banished." The girl talked a lot and her voice was calming, helping me get my mind off the bad memories I had to revisit for Celeste.

"Umm, I think I'll go." Celeste picked up her purse with her red eyes and tears stained face.

"It's okay. I'm fine now." I hugged her. "Thank you for visiting. Maybe we can get something to eat tomorrow?"

"Thank you. That'll be nice." She squeezed me before she left with a watery smile.

"You smell fresh," the omega who prepared my bath said. She leaned into me, making a hand gesture as if blowing my scent into her nose. "What a pretty Luna." She beamed at me then surprisingly, she gave me a hug.

"Are you from Redville?" Even before I asked, I already knew the answer. I knew most of the omegas in Redville and none of them liked me.

“No, I’m from the Nightingales. The prince conquered my pack and I tagged along. I’m Octavia.” She stretched out her hand and I had no choice but to take it.

“Nice to meet you, Octavia. I’m –” She cut me off with a giggle.

“I know who you are. You’re Luna Aysel. Everyone knows who you are now.” She exaggerated but it made me feel good to be recognized as somebody even if I didn’t feel worthy of the recognition yet.

“Don’t you miss your pack?” I changed the subject before my head got too big.

“No,” she said stiffly. All the humour in her wilted in a second. “They weren’t very good people.” She sighed. “But I left them behind so that’s their loss. I will leave you to do your thing. It was a pleasure meeting you, Luna Aysel. Now, I will go brag to the others that haven’t met you yet about how gentle you are.”

“Ah – okay –” She stole a quick hug before running off. I was too stunned to speak for a few seconds. Then I laughed. She was cute.

I spent the rest of the day eating and stressing over why Valens wanted me at his office. I still walked funny even if I tried to hide it. I would be happy to go out but going out to see Valens made me anxious.

I started dressing by three. I wasn’t putting on makeup or a fancy dress but I needed to keep busy. I tried on three

different jeans and a bunch of other tops, trying to choose a fitting look.

“Uggh!” I threw the baby pink shirt I was holding. I didn’t have this problem when I had only a handful of clothes to wear. Choosing clothes had to be a disaster and much of my clothes were to Clover’s taste and not mine.

The clothes were pretty and all that but I felt they weren’t practical and there were too many colours. I preferred dull colours because I didn’t want to stand out, but the clothes I had now would not help me blend in. They looked flashy and expensive.

I got to the Office with a few minutes to spare. The place was so busy, a boy almost ran into me carrying four hot cups of coffee.

“Sorry, Luna!” He exclaimed as he dodged and continued his speed walk down the lobby.

His words drew attention and I immediately felt numerous eyes on me. Before I knew it, three girls and one man had already approached me.

“Luna Aysel?” I recognized one of the girls from my high school. She topped every class and people were sure she’d do wonders in the real world.

“Uhh, I’m here to see Valens?” The way they surrounded me made me feel uncertain.

“Come, I can take you.” The man tried to grab me but I sidestepped him. “I work on the floor just beneath him.” He puffed out his chest.

He may be important enough to work just beneath the Alpha but I didn’t come here to be manhandled and I didn’t want another man’s scent on me before I saw my mate. I told him that and he looked embarrassed. Read more free novels at Jobnib.com

“I’ll take you, if you’ll follow me.” Two girls piped up at the same time. I didn’t tell them that I already knew his office. I didn’t want it to seem as if I used to sneak into his office to do dirty things so I followed the girls to the elevator.

“What’s that?” One of the girls asked, gesturing to the paper bag I was clutching.

“Oh, it’s uh – just a doughnut.” My skin heated.

“Wow, that’s so cute,” one girl whispered in awe.

Valens asked me to come with ‘an appetite’ but for some reason, it felt right to stop and get him something from the pastry store. He might hate it but at least I tried.

“I have never been this high up.” One of the girls squealed when the elevator stopped at the highest floor. The other girl agreed with her.

“Thank you,” I muttered to them, exiting the elevator.

“I’m Clarissa.” One girl shouted.

“Emma!” The other inputted as the elevator shut.

It was three minutes before four o'clock so I rushed to his door. The secretary's seat was empty as was the desk so I went straight into his office.

I closed the door behind me as he raised his head. His brows raised and I realized I hadn't knocked.

“I – uh –” He pushed out of his seat, his face impassive.

“You're two minutes early,” he said when he faced me.
“That's good.” He put a finger under my chin and tipped my face towards him. My eyes closed when he leaned in but after a second without a k!ss, they slowly opened to behold a smirking Valens.

“You're eager, aren't you?” His voice mocked me.

“Uggh –” L!ps pressed against mine before I found an excuse. My eyes closed in a second.

No matter how many times it happened, I always enjoyed k!ssing Valens. He tasted familiar now and I knew what to do. The k!ss ended way too soon and I suppressed a whine.

“How are you feeling?” I gawked at him when he asked that question.

He'd never asked me that before. He was acting weirder and weirder today. Too kind.

“I – Uh – I'm fine. How are you?”

“Good. I have something for you,” he said.

“I have something for you too.” I handed him the bag with the doughnuts as he made to turn. He took it from me, his fingers lingering on mine.

“You got me doughnuts.” I nodded. “Thanks. I like doughnuts.” He kissed my cheek before turning and dropping the bag on his desk. He went around it and pulled a square box from his drawer. He handed me the dark blue box.

“What’s this?” I was opening it as I spoke. “Oh, wow.” Inside lay a shiny necklace and earrings. My hands shook when I saw them.

There are expensive things and then there’s diamond jewellery.

“Ah is this – I mean –”

Flashy things never caught my attention but this was a love shaped diamond necklace with two sparkling earrings also shaped like hearts. They reflected every bit of light and they were absolutely stunning.

“Is there – is this for the mating ceremony?” It looked way better than the ones I’d been gifted which he returned. I made to close them but I was entranced.

“Do you want to put them on?” He smiled, looking very much pleased with himself. I nodded, eager to have them on me.

He went behind me, pushing my hair away as he placed the necklace around my neck. Then he carefully replaced the studs on my ears with diamond.

His hand caressed my neck and I felt his breath on my skin when he leaned forward, tucking my hair behind my ears.

“Happy birthday, Aysel.” Seduction dripped from his words and they muddled my brain. I didn’t immediately grasp the meaning of his words but when I did, I gasped.

“It’s my birthday!”

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Somehow, I’d forgotten my own birthday which wasn’t all that surprising because I always did. Celeste was the only person who always remembered but this year, she had too much burdening her.

“Oh – I didn’t know you knew,” I laughed, touching the chain around my neck. “Thank you.” Turning to him, I rose to my tiptoes. Supported by my hands on his shoulders, I placed a kiss on his chin.

“We have a dinner reservation for seven.” He offered me his open palm and I stared at it in confusion.

“So – uh why am I here so early then? You said to come with an appetite.” He dropped his hand, sticking them into his pockets.

“Let’s go.” He grabbed his key and proceeded to walk out the door.

“Oh okay.” It was only when we got to the elevator that it occurred to me that he may have wanted me to take his hand when he stretched it out to me.

Ah.

We rode the elevator down in silence. When we walked out, people automatically stepped out of our way. I wanted to take his hand then but I didn’t know how to because his hands were still stuck deeply into his pockets.

He opened the car door for me and I thanked him. The silence continued. He opened the door for me when he parked and I thanked him again when I got out of the car.

“Where are we?” I asked, staring at the building before me.

“We’ll see.” The building had glass windows through which I could see mannequins with pretty dresses so I knew what it was. I just didn’t understand what was going on yet.

He locked his car and before he could stick his hands into his pockets, I grabbed his left hand. I waited, breathing paused, for his reaction but he seemed to stiffen along with me. Then he laced our fingers and started forward. I let out a breath of relief.

“You don’t have to be so afraid of me,” he said to which my reply was a nod. “I could never hurt you.”

Yes, he'd said that numerous times. I knew that to an extent. His wolf would not allow him to hurt me physically but I feared there were other ways he could hurt me without even knowing it.

"Maybe you'll never hit me," I murmured. "But you can't say you'd never hurt me." I finished.

"I can tell you I would never hurt you on purpose."

"You don't trust me, Valens. It'll take little for you to hurt me."

I wished we could put the past behind us. We hadn't gotten off on a good foot but it had been weeks now yet I still felt a wedge between us. There was no love, barely any affection and I felt like any small move could snap the little bond we had managed to form.

I was walking on eggshells around my mate and it got tiring sometimes.

A man and woman walking out of the building stopped his response. They were flushed and fidgety and I didn't blame them. My remark had dropped the air around Valens and made himself even more threatening.

"Welcome, Alpha, Luna." They gave jerky bows.

"Is the dress ready?" He asked them and their heads bobbed almost in unison.

"And we have every other thing arranged," the woman added.

“Good.” He squeezed my hand and we walked ahead of the people, entering a grand building.

The place sparkled from top to bottom, made out of glass that glimmered. I could see my face reflected back at me from every angle.

Belle.

The establishment was named Belle and they had a makeup section which we came in through after we passed the reception and waiting area which were all empty.

“Did you ask them not to allow others in?” I whispered to him when we passed an empty waiting area.

The place was enormous. The waiting area was large and it made no sense for such a big place to be so empty. There wasn't a single person in here that wasn't staff.

I'd heard of Belle but I'd never thought I'd walk in here. They opened last year and took the pack by storm. They catered to anything that concerned female beauty and they were high-priced.

“Just for the afternoon.” He nodded at the man that approached us. “I do not like to wait so I made sure they would not keep us waiting.” He gave the man a pointed look.

“Good day, Alpha, Luna. If you'll come this way, we have the dress ready.” The man led the way to a room where a mannequin with a stunning red dress stood in the middle.

“Wow.”

It may be because it was placed strategically in the middle of the room, the only bright colour in a monochrome coloured room, or the fact that it was stoned and radiated all the lights around or it could be a combination of both. Whatever it was, it made my mouth fall open. The dress was dazzling. It was something I'd dreamt of wearing as a child but lost all hope of owning after what my parents did.

“Do you like it?” I registered Valens question from a distant part of my brain and I nodded. “Try it on.”

Two ladies led me to the changing room. They helped me out of my clothes and into the figure-hugging red dress. The cinched waist gave an illusion of fuller hips and a thinner waist.

I'd never been in love with a dress but I fell in love then.

When I stepped into the room with Valens and the designer, my eyes sought out Valens' first. His eyes were trained on me once the door opened and they flashed with satisfaction when I came in, then they darkened with possessiveness.

“You look good in red.” Memories of the last night made me shiver. He may have realized where my mind went to because he smirked.

I protested when I had to take off my dress but I had to have my hair and makeup done. We didn't have a lot of time because our reservation was in a few hours and the people knew. I felt bad for them when they had to work extra hard,

flitting around the place to get my hair done while someone did my pedicure and another did my manicure.

They had to be extra gentle too because the man doing my fingernails had filed my skin, making me hiss in pain. My head was up as my hair was being washed then so I couldn't see Valens. He didn't say anything either but we all felt the threat in the suddenly chilly air.

By six-thirty, while doing my makeup, Valens started to tap his feet. My hair shone now, better than it had ever been in all my life. The stylist tried her best to work fast but I was indecisive about what I wanted. The last time a professional did my hair, I was eight and my mother chose the hairstyle.

The feet tapping startled the makeup artist so she messed up my eyeliner.

"Calm down," I told her but my words had no effect on her.

I knew Valens could be intimidating. I had firsthand experience of that intimidation but he was merely sitting and saying nothing. He only commented when the hair or nail was done and he didn't even criticize their work but oh well. It wasn't every day a conqueror walked into a beauty shop and waited for their mate to get a makeover.

"Do you like bronzed looks?" She whispered as she dabbed foundation into my skin. I didn't know what a bronzed look meant so I refused it.

She spent a lot of time pushing different products into my skin. I got more amazed every time because the more she

went, the smoother my skin looked, my pores seeming to disappear. Then she was done with that part and my nose looked smaller.

“It’s seven o’clock.” The girl jumped at Valens’ sudden words.

“Oh – oh –” The girl looked at my unfinished makeup and I feared she would cry.

Goodness, this brought back too many bitter memories. I’d met a lot of intimidating people who liked to flex their authority on me and I’d just breakdown. It was awful and I didn’t want anyone to feel that way because of me.

“Eight is a better time for dinner,” I murmured but he heard me.

He gave me an uninterpretable look before he answered, “It is not.”

“It is,” I countered.

“Do you want to argue with me on that?” No. No, I didn’t. He didn’t like being argued with and I didn’t want to waste the time I was trying to buy so I didn’t say anything.

“Would you like a bold lip?” The girl muttered, holding up three shades of red lipstick. I shook my head.

I wasn’t used to makeup and although I could see the makeup she’d applied on my face and it looked soft, I still felt it was too much and I didn’t want to risk looking like a clown.

A nude lipstick later and everything was in place. I got into my dress and the shoes Valens personally picked out. They were beautiful heels and they were comfortable too – like four inches.

The hairstylist let my hair down, styled it and we were set to leave.

There were a few times when I felt beautiful but that day – that day I felt like a queen. Adorned with diamonds and my hands clasped in Valens' I grinned all the way to the restaurant.

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I was awestruck.

“How long have you planned this?” I asked, in awe of my surroundings. He'd put a lot of effort into this, I could tell.

The restaurant was empty. The inside was lit up and it displayed a happy birthday message to me with lights. My eyes stung a bit with tears that I held back.

“Quite a while.” His thumb stroked the back of my palm. “Are you happy?” I nodded.

Yes, I was happy. I didn't think I ever needed a grand gesture but it turned out I did. I felt special and cared for. Important. He'd taken his time to plan something this big just to surprise me and make me happy for my birthday.

My birthdays were never special after my parents died. Days were blurred into one and every day could have been yesterday because they were all the same, birthday or not. I didn't pay much attention to it because other things called for my attention but I realized then how I'd missed surprises. Good surprises. The only surprises I ever received from the pack were bad ones.

"Thank you," I whispered to Valens. His usual blank expression changed to a soft one.

"It's my pleasure." He looked like he meant that.

Soft music played in the background while we placed our orders. I'd never dined fancy so I ordered the safest option on the menu. We had wine while they prepared our food and I continually looked around me in awe.

"You must have spent a lot of money." I touched the neckpiece around my neck with a small smile. That alone must have cost a fortune.

"I searched for you for over a century. In those years, it was the thought of you that kept me going. I haven't spent a lot of money. Not when it comes to you." He smiled at me.

"My parents used to take me out on my birthdays just like this." I remembered it was a family tradition to go out for dinner for everyone's birthday. It was one of many memories that I had to force out of my mind so as not to be reminded of all that I lost because of my father's greed.

"You miss them, don't you?" It wasn't a question.

I missed my parents as a kid but with time, I stopped missing them and started hating them. Everything I suffered was a result of what they did. I was the scapegoat to receive their lifelong punishment.

I used to wonder if they ever thought of me while they plotted. Did they think of how their actions would affect me if they failed? Or did they think they could have given me a better life as the Alpha's daughter?

As an omega, I wasn't really worth much in the pack. No one said anything because my father was an alpha and although my mother was an ordinary delta, I remembered that she made people uncomfortable. Maybe her profound silence bothered them because people tended to stir clear of her.

"I can't -" I took a deep breath to admit something that bothered me for a while. "I can't remember what my mother looked like." There, I said it. It was something that bothered me a lot for a lot of years but I didn't say it to anything so they didn't look at me as if I was crazy.

My parents were killed when I was eight. It wasn't as if they died when I was an infant so I couldn't remember their faces. I remembered my father's face clear as day. I remembered my mother's voice, her skin colour, her quietness, her submission, but I could never picture her face.

"Were you that young when she died?" Valens asked. I shook my head.

"No, I was eight when my parents were killed. I can

remember everything about my father.” I could even remember what he was wearing when he was killed. “I just can’t remember what my mother looked like. I wasn’t young so it really bothers me.”

“Don’t you have any photographs of her?”

Oh no. I forget he didn’t know the despicable thing that made them kill my parents. He didn’t know they were traitors and their house was burnt down after their demise. The only thing of them that survived was me. Alpha Xavier would have killed me too if I was older and could be roped into my father’s crimes.

He didn’t want anything that reminded him of my father because it put him in a violent rage. Even my clothes and dolls were burnt down with the house. I wasn’t allowed to take out anything. I was immediately transported to the pack house after that so there was no way for me to find a picture of my mother.

“No, the house burnt down.” I didn’t tell him it wasn’t a mere accident but a planned gesture.

“Did your parents die in a house fire?” His brows furrowed.

I should not hide from my mate. I should let him know everything about me before someone else told him but I was too ashamed of my legacy. I didn’t want him to see me as a traitor the way everyone else saw me.

If he heard of what my parents did, there was no way he wouldn't hate me because I stood for everything he hated. Betrayal.

Who would want to have pups with traitorous blood? Lucien hadn't wanted that.

"No - I - I don't want to talk about them anymore." My voice was firm but my hands shook. I didn't want him to press forward. I wanted to enjoy this date to the fullest without a spat or reminder of my bitter past.

"My mother used to do something similar." He had a small smile on his face when he mentioned his mother and I could feel from that smile alone that his memories of her were fond memories.

"She used to take you out to dinner?" I asked, eager to hear about his past which he never mentioned.

"No, of course not." He chuckled then. "She used to have a small dinner prepared that only the three of us could enjoy. We never had less than twenty people at our table unless it was my birthday."

"That sounds nice." I smiled as his smile grew.

How could I forget that he was a prince from a time other than mine? We had no royalty left, just books on them and I'd never been interested much about their lives.

"It was. My parents led busy lives. We lived in the same house but we didn't run into each other often but they took

time off every year for my birthday.” He came alive when he spoke of his parents. They’d had a close bond, I could tell.

We had such different lives. We were so different yet we were mates. What criteria did the goddess use in determining mates? We came from different worlds, different backgrounds and different times.

We shared no similarities and contrasted in every way. He’d been close to his parents and while mine loved me, I never had a close-knit family like his. His parents were betrayed while my parents were betrayers. He was a prince and I was nobody. An alpha and an omega. Why would the goddess choose me for him?

“You’re frowning,” he said. “Do you not like the food?” He asked.

The food was good. Great, actually. They’d taken their time to cook and season the meat. It was soft and soaked up with mouthwatering spices.

“It’s nice.” I took a big spoon of my food to prove my point.

“Do you want to try mine?” I looked at his plate to see it was still almost full.

The dish caught my eyes and tickled my nostrils when it first came so I was eager to have a taste of it. But I was concerned that he didn’t seem interested in the food.

“Do you not like it? You’ve not been eating.”

“I don’t have most of my appetite yet. It’s a gradual process.” His voice was calm.

“What? You lost your appetite before?”

“Something like that.” He waved away my question. “Here, have a taste,” he held up his fork to me to taste his food and that was how I was deceived into eating my food and half of his.

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“I look pregnant.” I looked down at my tummy which my figure-hugging dress could not hide.

Despite knowing I was overeating, I continued to eat because the food was just too good. Valens, rather than caution me, encouraged me to eat and eat until I became too full to even have a sip of water.

“You will look good with my pups.” His eyes fell to my stomach and a spark of possessiveness lit his eyes but they faded fast. “I am not certain I can have kids.” He looked away from me, pain in his voice.

“Why not?” I took his hand in mine. We sat in his car, still in the restaurant’s driveway.

“It is a part of my curse. My lineage ends with me.” He shook his head and my heart fell to my stomach but I refused to believe that. I knew it deep in my heart that we would start a family together.

“You told me you’d give me twins. A boy and a girl,” I reminded him. It was meant to be reassuring but it failed. It seemed as if I’d reminded him that he could not always carry through with all his promises.

His expression closed off and his eyes became hard as granite. He pulled his hand from mine and started the car. I stopped him, placing my hands on his.

“Let’s walk.” He looked at me as if I was crazy. It was a crazy idea because the pack house was on the other side of the town we were at. It wasn’t a walkable distance but I didn’t want the night to end yet. I especially didn’t want it to end on a sour note.

“Please, I’m not ready for tonight to end yet.” His expression thawed a bit. “I desperately need some exercise.” He sighed and I did a little victory dance in my mind because I knew he had relented.

“Fine.” He got out of the car and came over to my side to open my door. He’d opened every door I walked through today and it was a big deal. It was an omega’s place to serve an alpha but tonight, he served me.

I gathered courage and laced our fingers together as we walked back to the pack house.

“It’s a pleasant night,” I said, to which his answer was a grunt. “Have you ever gone stargazing?” I probed again but he shook his head. “Do you want to?”

“Not tonight.” Stars lit up the night. It was a perfect night for stargazing, but he was, as usual, in a bad mood. Frankly, I was getting tired of his mood swings.

“Why are you pouting?” His eyes were fixed on the road ahead. I caught myself pouting and I wondered how he saw me.

“Will you ever love me?” I asked tatter than answer. The question came out of nowhere, surprising us both.

He’d never mentioned anything about liking me. Tonight was the most affectionate I’d ever seen him. The only times aside today, when I felt he might not hate me for trying to poison him and k!ssing my ex-mate, were the times after he released in me and pulled me close to him. Every time, I got to listen to his heartbeat return to normal before he fell asleep or picked up work to do.

“Why do you ask that?” My heart fell.

I knew not to expect a straightforward answer from him but I wished he would say yes. I’d hoped he’d say yes. That he could love me. That he didn’t love me now but saw himself feeling that way soon. Because I did.

“I apologized for what happened in the past. I explained it to you but sometimes- sometimes it feels as if you still hold that against me. It feels as if you look at me and see someone about to betray you. Someone you could never love.”

“You know better than to betray me.” Calmly spoken words that pricked my skin.

Why did I have to try so hard to get crumbs of emotions from him?

“Do you trust me?” I asked.

“No.” The answer came naturally. I laughed but not because I was happy.

“It has nothing to do with your past behaviour. I know you didn’t try poisoning me of your own volition even if you are yet to tell me the person who sent you. I know that you’re not in love with that boy because you have given yourself to me.

I have claimed you, owned you and marked you in a way no one else can and I’m confident you will never find satisfaction outside of my arms.” I gaped at the raw possessiveness of his tone.

“My lack of trust in you has nothing to do with you. There are only two people in this world that I trust and that is because I have known them since my boyhood. They have laid down their lives for me countless times without thought. They will never betray me and I know that because they have had over a hundred years to prove themselves. You, I have known for seven weeks.”

“Will it take me a hundred years and multiple attempts to die in your stead for you to trust me?” I couldn’t help the annoyance in my voice.

Sure, he'd been with Jabari and Clover for many years and they must have been through a lot together. I could not begrudge them their place in his life because they'd earned it but it was unfair that I couldn't even compete.

He stirred me by my shoulder to face him. "It will not." Tipping my chin up, he made sure I held his gaze. "And you are never to attempt dying in my stead. I forbid it."

"Of course, I can't go against your wishes." I turned away from him but he brought my face back into position.

"Do not cry." He wiped underneath my eyes and I realized tears had gathered in my eyes and started to spill.

"I am not crying." I pulled away from him.

"You are." He pulled me back. "You are everything to me, little wolf. The things you want, I will try to give," he vowed.

He would not lie to me but I wished he would sugarcoat the truth a bit. I wished he would tell me what I wanted to hear rather than what I already knew. I wanted him to make me believe that my wishes had already come true.

"It's okay." I gave a shaky, watery smile. "It's my birthday. I want to be happy."

"I want you to be happy whether it is your birthday or not." I nodded at him, wiping my eyes as he let me go.

Once again, the side of me that was a crybaby made an embarrassing appearance. Why did I get so worked up

because he told me he didn't trust me yet? As if I didn't know that already!

"Can we go there?" I pointed at an alley that led to the woods closest to us.

He gave me a strange look as he no doubt wondered what I wanted to do in the woods after asking him to walk such a long distance. I thought he would question me but he shrugged and obliged.

Hundred steps in and he still didn't ask what we were doing traipsing through the woods at night. He followed me quietly, his eyes scanning the dark forest until I stopped.

"Help me with my zipper." I took my hands from his and pulled off my jewellery with my back to him.

"What are you doing?" The question on the tip of his tongue finally fell.

"I want to shift but I love this dress too much to rip it." My meaning clicked in his head. "Artemis has been dying to meet Zino."

"And he has been dying to meet her but perhaps a more private woods would be better?" His hand paused on my zipper.

"No, here is fine. No one will dare come in here when they perceive your scent."

I think he promised himself to give me everything I wanted because it was my birthday. He didn't protest, rather he

helped me out of my dress. Then he got out of his suit – and then his underwear.

My skin heated and I looked away. Artemis was already pushing to the fore while I wondered if it was necessary for me to take off my underwear. I was wearing one of the red lingerie he requested and it would r!p easily.

“I love those panties too much for you to r!p them.” My skin heated further and I knew he wasn’t joking. I stepped out of my underwear and let Artemis take over before he got other ideas.

Shifting still hurt as I hadn’t done it often enough to get used to it. Pain exploded around me as I shifted for the fourth time in my life.

When it ended, I was staring at a black wolf twice my size. Artemis howled in joy and her mate replied with a howl of his.

When I suggested shifting, I expected our wolves to spend time together, maybe run around. I should have known Artemis was too perverted for that.