

## Chapter 25

When I reported for duty at the kitchen the next morning, Astrid stiffly told me I wasn't allowed to work in the kitchen anymore.

"I'm sorry about your antiques. I had no –" I tried to apologize to her but she screamed before I completed my sentence.

"Get out of this kitchen, you incompetent fool! Your lackadaisical attitude has gotten to the prince and he doesn't want you anywhere near the food he eats. Go! Just go!" She bent forward as if to take off her shoe so I exited the kitchen at the speed of light before the shoe came flying at my head.

I pressed my back against the wall when I got out of the kitchen, tears stinging my eyes. I knew Valens wasn't bothered about the work I did in the kitchen but his mind still wasn't at peace with me working with the food he and his people ate.

How would I make him believe it wasn't my intention to poison him in the first place? If I came out now to say Skylar made me do it, he wouldn't believe me because my words weren't worth anything to him.

I'd tried to poison my mate. They say first impressions matter and I'd failed to make a favorable first impression with him. Would we live like this forever? It made my heart hurt to think of him being suspicious of me throughout our lifetime. Surely with time, he would see I wasn't the villain he thought I was?

"Good morning, Aysel." Pearly white teeth appeared in my line of vision; pearly white teeth that belonged to a goddess.

“Good morning, Clover.” I fought the instinct to bend my head in submission to her because I knew she was an omega. Over the years, the members of the Alpha Pack started to carry the power of an alpha because they were conquerors with their prince.

“Valens wants to see you.” Artemis snarled at the casual familiarity with which she called the alpha but I said nothing.

“What for?” I muttered to myself but she heard me and gave me a bright smile.

“I don’t know if this is too forward but I’d like to be your friend, Aysel. I know you’re the Luna and way above my status but –“

“He told you?” I asked in surprise. It shouldn’t have surprised me, really. She could have figured it out herself based on our scents.

“He tells me everything.” She grinned but whatever she saw on my face made her grin fade. “Does that offend you?” I shrugged rather than answer. “Valens is my best friend. I have known him since I was a child and you’re his mate. That makes us the two most important women in his life. I feel we should be friends.”

‘What gives this bitch the right to claim the same status as me in my mate’s life?’ Artemis snarled while pacing. She was unnecessarily possessive but I saw Clover’s point. A friendship of over a century wasn’t something to be taken lightly. In fact, I was happy that she took the initiative to reach out to me.

“Okay.” I shrugged as I spoke. Her eyes lit up but she quickly schooled her expression to her usual dignified one.

“It’s an honor to be your friend, Luna Aysel,” she said, barring her neck. My heart skipped a beat when she added that honorific to my name. Artemis stopped her snarling and pacing almost as if in a trance.

If anyone ever told me ‘Luna’ would ever be put before my name, I wouldn’t believe in this life or the next. If anyone told me I’d be the

Alpha Prince's Luna and that a woman as dignified as Clover would bar her neck to me in respect, I'd consider it painful ridicule.

The Alpha's office had undergone a drastic change since the last time I saw it. The door which once read 'Alpha Zavier, Alpha of Redville Pack' no longer had a name tag on the door as if Valens expected everyone to know just who to expect behind the doors, which, really, everyone should.

The interior was still as large as ever but it seemed even larger without the clutter of the frivolities Alpha Zavier once decorated it with. The office had only a large black mahogany desk with chairs. At a corner was a long seater opposite two smaller ones and a dark coffee table. The black blinds were drawn and the light was dimmed as if he was a vampire and not a werewolf.

He raised his head from his computer when we walked in but promptly went back to his work. It took Clover announcing our presence for him to acknowledge our existence.

She walked over to him with the confidence of the owner of the office and took a seat opposite him.

"I found her." She leaned into the seat while I stood at the entrance of the office, awkwardly wondering what to do with myself.

"Why are you standing so far away? Come over." Clover waved me forward. I caught Valens' eyes, waiting for him to tell me not to dare take a step but his expression remained blank as usual. I took a tentative step forward. When he didn't say anything to scold me, I walked forward and perched on the seat next to Clover.

I didn't know if his sudden intense look was supposed to mean something to me but it didn't.

"I don't like your clothes," he said after a long silence during which he scrutinized my appearance.

Ah.

“That’s not a nice thing to say to a lady,” Clover cut in with a frown. He turned to her with a look that made her sit upright and shut her mouth.

I wasn’t wearing anything fancy today although I suspected they would consider my fancy clothes shabby. I dressed for a normal morning of cooking and serving the pack their breakfast, not a morning to visit the alpha.

“Celeste.” I paused when he mentioned my friend.

I hadn’t seen Celeste since the day Clover arrived. We didn’t see each other often before the invasion but it felt like these days, I saw her less. I’d never gone more than two days without seeing Celeste. No, Celeste hadn’t gone more than two days without seeing me because she was the one who always came to see me. Then she hadn’t started volunteering at the hospital.

“She is your friend, isn’t she?” I nodded slowly to answer his question. He reached into a drawer and pulled out a black card. “Get her to get you a new wardrobe.” He stretched out the card to me. I looked at it as if it would bite me.

“You don’t have to – I can –“

“It wasn’t a suggestion. Don’t keep me waiting.” I snatched the card from his grip before he got further upset.

“I think I’ll go with her, Val. I’m her new friend.” Clover stood up, urging me out of my seat. “Come on, Luna Aysel, let’s get you some new clothes.”

“She doesn’t leave until I say so. You don’t either.” He turned to Clover with a piercing look. “It’s not something you should forget.”

“Sorry, alpha.” She bowed her head. I did too. My hands shook so I clasped them on my thighs. He really didn’t tolerate disrespect. It was

disrespectful for a person to leave a room before the Alpha or before he dismissed them. Alphas overlooked it a lot of times but not him.

I remembered then that I'd run out on him not once but twice. Who knows what he would have done to me if we weren't mated?

"Leave." He directed his words at Clover. She left the room without further ado, leaving me with the chilly alpha.

"Your body is suitable for me alone. Don't get anything revealing." I nodded at his stern words. He held my gaze and I forced myself not to look away. "Except you're wearing it for me." He paused in thought.

"Get some lingerie." My cheeks flamed.

"The most revealing ones you can find." I looked away in embarrassment. How could he say such words so shamelessly? "I like red." My eyes snapped to his and jumped away. I was as red as a tomato as he spoke. "And lace – that's what it's called, isn't it?" I nodded. "I have work to do." He turned back to his computer and I considered myself dismissed.

I rushed out of the room, feeling the heavy weight of his gaze on my back as I fled the large office.

"Aysel." I paused, turning to face him halfway to the door. "You – " He paused while I waited for him to finish so I could run to our suite and hide my face under the covers. "I need coffee. Try not to poison it." I felt – no, I knew that wasn't what he wanted to say to me but I nodded anyway and ran out of the office.