

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 center 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 bitch 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 kisses 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 fucking 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 b***d! 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.