

## Chapter 52

I heard movement at the entrance and quickly scrambled up. I didn't know what to do or how to proceed. My first instinct was to hide.

To hide from Valens. To hide from the world. To hide from the reality setting in. I wanted to somehow hide from myself too. I wanted to hide from the disgust crawling on my skin. I wanted to hide from the anger consuming me. I just wanted to disappear.

I also wanted to sleep. I wanted to close my eyes and open them to see none of this actually happened. I wanted to sleep and wake up to see all of this had been a terrible nightmare and not the reality I was about to face.

Who would I tell? How would I bring it up?

I didn't even have the complete details. I could not say for certain how it happened or why it happened but it happened. Those pictures were proof of the violation. Proof of the lack of empathy, the wickedness, with which I'd been treated.

"Sagira?" I heard Valens' footstep approach and suddenly I was scared.

I wasn't properly dressed. I didn't want him to see my body. I felt dirty even though I knew I had done nothing wrong. I wasn't the dirty one; Lucien was. Lucien and Skylar and whoever else helped with their wicked scheme.

"I'm having a bath," I yelled as I scrambled about the bathroom.

Thankfully, my nose had stopped bleeding by now. I flushed the wad of tissue I'd used to catch the b\*\*\*d and then I took off the robe that had a bit of the black b\*\*\*d on it, burying it underneath the pile of dirty clothes. I wanted to hide every evidence of what happened.

I wanted to pretend.

The bathroom door's handle jiggled and a violent fear struck me. I flew at it and locked it from inside, preventing Valens from entering. From seeing me.

Bile rose in my throat when I thought of his eyes on me. Would he have looked at me the way Lucien looked at me in the pictures the unknown number sent me? Would he look at me like a piece of meat rather than as a human with feelings and emotions?

“What are you doing?” He sounded surprised that I wouldn't let him into the bathroom with me.

“I – I – “My voice cracked and tears stung my eyes. “I'll be right out.”

Memories of how he looked at me in the throes of passion arose then. I used to like it when Valens looked at me like that. I loved the look on his face when he was delirious with l\*\*t but when my mind pulled up these images now, my skin crawl. It made me feel filthy and I wished I wouldn't recall them at a time like this.

“What are you hiding?” His sounded the same but I couldn't help but hear suspicion in his voice and a violent shiver wracked down my spine.

Had they sent him the pictures? Was that why he was back earlier than usual?

“I'm not hiding anything.” I walked away from the door and turned on the water, pretending to start my bath.

I got under the shower before I realized I'd turned it on scalding hot. It didn't matter though. In fact, I loved the way it scalded my skin and took away the crawling sensation.

"Why won't you let me in?" I closed my eyes and ears against Valens' questions. I didn't want to hear the confusion in them. I didn't want to hear anything! "Aysel," he called and his voice had a familiar authority that I ignored.

He waited outside the door for a while but I said nothing, did nothing, merely standing underneath the spray of hot water. After a few minutes, I heard his footsteps patter away and I let out a breath that I didn't know I'd been holding. I sagged against a wall, letting the hot water mix with my tears.

Time became irrelevant then. I stayed under the shower until my skin wrinkled, forgetting that time was passing. Valens came back to knock on the bathroom door, drawing me to the present.

"You have been in there for over an hour, Sagira." His voice was soft and it made my heart break. "Did anything happen?" He asked but I hadn't the mind to reply him.

I couldn't tell him. He wouldn't believe me. He'd always been suspicious of my relationship with Lucien and now he had pictorial proof that I was unfaithful. It didn't matter that in the pictures, I looked loopy as hell. No, an outsider would look at them and think I was delirious from pleasure. That was the angle the picture captured.

Lucien had his hands all over me and I was in nothing but my underwear, my eyes droopy because I had been drugged. It looked that way to me because I knew that was what happened but it would look like a really passionate picture to someone else.

“I’m fine,” I called back, desperate for him not to notice anything was off but he must have noticed already. “I’m coming out now.” I turned off the shower but I didn’t have the zeal to get out of the bathroom.

My phone lay discarded on the bathroom floor and I remembered the day Valens and I went to get it. How he had smiled, how he held my hands and how perfect the day felt. It was as if – we were like a couple in love that day. I took the phone and dropped it into the toilet.

“I am giving you one-minute, little wolf,” Valens’ voice called me back to the present. “You have one minute to get out here or else I will break down this door.” His words were calm but I knew he wasn’t joking. There was an undercurrent of frustration in his words that made me move into action.

I grabbed a towel and wrapped it securely around my chest. It was the biggest towel we owned and it fell mid-calves but it still felt too small. I opened the door before Valens had reason to break it.

He took one look at me and asked, “What’s wrong?”

I didn’t know what gave me away. It could be my puffy eyes or reddened skin or maybe it was the way I curved into myself to avoid his gaze, but he could tell that something was wrong. It could also be the fact that I’d spent over an hour in the bathroom and refused to greet him with enthusiasm like I did these days.

“Nothing is wrong. I’m just tired.” I wished he wouldn’t look at me but he kept his gaze fixed on me as I emerged from the bathroom. I made to sidestep him but he grabbed my bicep and my heart lurched to the bottom of my stomach.

“Calm down. What is it!?” He let me go after my violent reaction to his touch.

“I’m just tired.” I walked towards the bed with him following behind me. “I’m fine really.” I turned to give him a smile but it made him recoil. The smile fell from my lips.

“Did I do anything wrong?” He asked in a soft voice. My eyes stung at the way he spoke.

No, he hadn’t done anything wrong but everything was wrong and I needed to get dressed without his eyes on me. I took out clothes from the closet we shared. A big jogger and an oversized hoodie.

“You’re going to wear that in this weather?” He asked me but I only shrugged. “Where are you going?” He asked, exasperation leaking into his tone when I took the clothes and proceeded back into the bathroom to get changed.

“I want to get dressed.” I closed the bathroom door and locked it behind me. My hands shook as I dressed and a lone tear fell from my eye.

When I emerged, he had a foreign look on his face and his hands on his waist.

“I – “ He paused, his lips pursing. “I am sorry.” My eyes widened at the unexpectedness of his apology. I’d never heard him apologize before and I knew it wasn’t something he did often considering how his face contorted when he apologized.

“For what?” I asked.

“For whatever thing I have done that’s making you avoid me.”

“I’m not avoiding you.” I was avoiding having to face the reality of what happened to me.

“I tried to reach you countless times today but you ignored my calls and texts. Now, you cannot bear to look at me. I am uncertain of what I have done but whatever it is, I apologize.”

“I am just tired,” I brushed off his apology. Did he owe me an apology or did I owe him one? “I misplaced my phone again so I did not get any of your messages.”

“Aysel – “

“Goodnight, Valens.” I turned my back on him as I went to bed.

In bed, I lay as still as possible, pretending to be asleep as he went about his night time activities. I was awake while he showered. I was awake when he ordered his dinner and I was awake when it arrived and he ate it. I was awake when he powered up his system and I was awake while he worked. I was awake when he got into bed and tried to cuddle me.

“I know you are awake, little moon.” He put his hand around my waist and I froze.

“Please – please don’t touch me.”