

Chapter 78

“It wasn’t supposed to be like this,” he said, his head hanging to the side and his voice cracked. “I swear to you, it wasn’t supposed to be like this. I never meant to hurt you.” He raised his head and looked at me.

When I didn’t say anything, Lucien turned to Valens. “Alpha, it was all Skylar’s idea-“

“I am not your Alpha,” Valens cut him off, his voice hard.

“Can you give us a minute?” I turned to Valens.

“No,” he answered without missing a beat.

“Please,” I begged him with my eyes to understand.

I needed to talk to Lucien. Only then would I get the closure my heart desperately craved. Despite how much he had hurt me and how much I hated him, I could never forget we had been best friends. I needed to know when he became comfortable with hurting me the way he did. I wanted to know what happened.

“Aysel, I’m sorry, but I cannot.” He looked solemn. His eyes also begged me to understand. “I cannot leave you with him. My wolf will not allow it.”

“Very well.” I turned back to Lucien who already had his eyes on me. “What did I ever do to you? When did we fall off?” It was something I used to ponder in the early days of the end of our friendship.

We’d been so close. Lucien was everything to me. Why did I suddenly stop being important? When did he start to hate me?

“I was stupid. I’m sorry. I never meant – it was never to be like this, I promise. I – I – “ He looked at Valens and decided Valens shouldn’t hear what it was that he had to say.

“You can’t tell me you never expected this,” my heart raced as I spoke, beating fast for reasons I couldn’t pinpoint.

I wasn’t scared of Lucien. Now anymore. His hands were chained and Valens’ presence beside me calmed me but my heart still raced. I chalked it up to anger. I was angry at him. He’d ruined me in a way I never expected to be ruined; done something to me that I never expected from anyone, least of all him.

“What did you think would happen when you lured me there? You said you loved me but you – how could you do that to me?” My voice cracked on that statement. Valens put his hands around my shoulders.

“It wasn’t supposed to be like this.” His eyes looked redder than they did when he first looked at me. “I love you, Aysel. You were mine before he came along!” Even with his weakened state, he could still muster up a look of fierce hatred for Valens.

“The goddess gave you to me and I know I messed up.” He sounded defeated. “I only wanted to fix things.” His head bent. I felt maniacal laughter building in my guts but I held it back, pressing my lips together firmly.

“You rejected me,” I felt the need to remind him. “You said I wasn’t worth it. You spit in my face and forced me to accept your rejection.” Valens’ hand went stiff around me. “You broke me but that wasn’t enough for you, was it?” Some of the laughter spilt from my lips.

“I know I messed up. I’ve known that for a long time but you know me, Aysel. You know I cannot leave a mess I created. I was desperate to fix things and Skylar took advantage of that desperation –“

“I don’t know you,” I cut him off. “You stopped being my friend and you changed but even then, I never expected you would do something like that to me.”

“It was not supposed to be like that! You were never supposed to be hurt. They were just pictures, I swear, I never – I never did that to you. They were just pictures and Skylar swore you would never see them. We knew Valens would leave once he saw them. I knew you would be hurt but I planned to comfort you. I am sorry, Aysel. It was never supposed to be like that. I am sorry,” he ranted.

“Am I that predictable?” Valens asked, his voice grave.

“It is what I would have done,” Lucien said.

“I am nothing like you,” he snarled.

“It’s pride, isn’t it? Whether or not you are like me, it’s pride that drove you away,” Lucien said, confident.

“It wasn’t pride,” Valens turned me to face him. “Pride had nothing to do with it. I was stupid not to trust you but it had nothing to do with pride.”

“I understand,” I smiled at him though my lips had trouble stretching. “Your wolf’s anger frightened you.”

“Thank you.” He squeezed my shoulder. “Are you not done with him yet?” He asked. I looked at Lucien.

It was never my fault. I knew that and I told myself that every time but there was always a part of me that wondered if I ever gave him the wrong signs, if I led him in any way to believe that I wanted to be with him. I used to wonder if I ever gave him the impression that if he tried harder, we could be together. I never gave him such an impression. He deluded himself and that was all on him. I was just the unfortunate object of his attention.

“I never wanted you. I told you all the time but it didn’t matter, did it? What I want never matters because you’re nothing but a selfish person.” It took too long for me to see how self-absorbed he was. “And you don’t love me, Lucien. You only want me because you can’t have me. Somehow, you created an image of me in your head, one in which I am your property, but I am not.” I had said these words to him multiple times but it was the first time he actually listened to them.

“When I say I hate you, Lucien, I mean it with every fiber of my being.” I looked him in the eye and I was satisfied to see the shock deep within his eyes.

“You – “ He stuttered, his mouth agape.

“Yes, I was never pretending. I was never playing hard to get. I hate you and wish you the worst possible luck.”

“You – you are – your hands are on fire!” He exclaimed, horror on his face. I looked down at my hands, startled by the startling fear in his voice. My hands were really on fire and the fire was spreading, inching up my forearm. I shook out my hands while Lucien panicked and Valens tried to stop the fire on my left by suffocating it with his jacket.

It caused a racket that drew more people than I would have liked. A guard rushed in with a fire extinguisher but before he could use it, the flames died down. No, as I watched, the flames seemed to sink back into my skin. The three men who had rushed in to help me looked on with horror painted their faces.

“Are you – are you a witch?” The man holding the extinguisher, still poised to blast the fire, asked, his mouth opened in what could have been a comical way if I hadn’t just been exposed.

“You are a witch!” Another of the men said and there was no missing the accusation in his voice as he took a step back. He reached for his holster but he wasn’t armed.

“Get out. All of you,” Valens barked at the men who were frozen, looking at my arm which had been on fire a few seconds ago. Valens grabbed said arm and laced our fingers together. “Come on, Sagira.” He started to pull me out after the men scrambling out of Lucien’s cell.

“Wait, please. Wait!” The force of Lucien’s yell stopped us in our tracks. “I will do everything to make amends. I can’t be in your life. I understand you hate me but I would like – let me make it up to you, Aysel. I don’t deserve it but – but for the sake of the friendship we once had – please – “

“We lost our child because of you,” I turned to him. “We never got to meet them because of you and your little friends.”

“I – You – You were pregnant?” He looked wrecked. Utterly destroyed by that single news.

“You are on death row, Lucien. Make amends with the goddess.” We left his cell with whispers trailing after us from the guards in the dungeons.

“How do you feel?” Valens asked, his grip firm on mine as we walked out.

“Strong enough to see Alpha Zavier.” He almost stumbled with the abruptness with which he stopped walking.

“No.”

“We are here already. I might as well see him. He knows where his daughter is,” I said with a shrug that I hoped hid my shiver.

“Aysel –“

“After all this is over, I want him publicly hanged the same way he did my parents.”