

Chapter 21

Lily

My whole body was numb as I sat in the bathtub. The water was hot-too hot in fact, turning my skin red. But I didn't have the energy to call Thara in to let her know. Maybe it was a good thing though- maybe the temperature would aid in burning off his touch. I could feel it, still. His hand on my breast, caressing. His fist in my hair, pulling until it hurt. His excitement rubbing against my lower regions as he prepared to assault me.

The events in the gym replayed in my mind over and over and over again, like a horrible broken record. And the panic I'd felt then was only increasing every time the loop started again.

"He's gone Lily. He can't get to us again."

Aya had been repeating that for a while now, but it was like my brain wasn't connected to my body. I knew James was locked away now, but my body was still preparing for the fight. Trying to lock itself down. Slowly, I drew in a long deep breath, holding it for seven seconds. Then I released it just as slowly and attempted to relax my stiff muscles. Without thinking too much, I grabbed my loofa and soap and began to scrub my body. Something clicked as I washed myself, and I began to scrub harder. And harder. Harder until the roughness of the loofa grated against my bare skin, peeling layers off as it went back and forth.

Was there even soap anymore? I didn't care. All I wanted was for every cell of mine he touched to be wiped clean, erased, brand new.

"Hey, foods her- Oh my Goddess! Lily! Stop!"

Thara rushed towards me and yanked the loofa out of my hands, throwing it across the room. Her eyes went wide as she surveyed the damage I'd done.

"Christ Lily. You're bleeding!"

Huh. So, I was. Thara looked at my non-caring expression and frowned. Grasping under my arms, she lifted me out of the tub and sat me on the mat. She proceeded to dry me quickly and then tossed me a robe. Shakily, I got to my feet, avoiding her eyes.

"Food is here. Come eat."

"I'm not hungry."

"Too bad. You need to eat something."

"I'm not hungry."

"Lily-"

"I said I'm not eating! Okay?!" I yelled at her.

Thara dropped her head into her hands. "Lily, please don't make this hard. You need to eat."

"No." I grumbled.

"Fine!" She threw her hands up and stormed out of the bathroom. A second later, I heard the bedroom door open and slam shut.

Regret washed through me immediately. Goddess, I was a bitch. Thara had done nothing but help me, and I'd gone and freaked out for no reason. Sighing, I opened my robe and looked at my stomach and chest. The blood was already drying, the wounds already close to being healed. It stung, but oh well. I didn't have the energy to get dressed as I passed my closet on the way to my bed, and a tray with what looked like Gretas beef stew and dinner rolls sat atop it. I sat beside it with a sigh, picking up a roll and picking off tiny pieces.

A light knock sounded on my door. Part of me hoped it was Thara, so I could apologize. But when I called to come in, to my surprise it was Ben. He poked his head around the door and avoided looking at me.

"Are you, uh, decent?" He asked.

"More or less. You can come in."

"Yeah... I'm gonna need that to be more and not less before I do. Dimitri-"

"Okay." He didn't need to explain. Ben closed the door while I quickly walked to the closet and located a pair of pajamas, dressing silently. When I was done, I opened the door.

Ben gave me a small smile. "Hey."

"Hey."

"Thought I'd come check on you."

"Thara sent you up here?" I guessed.

"Well...okay, yeah she did."

I opened the door wider. "Come on in."

Ben eyed the tray on my bed. "Not hungry?"

"Not really." I shrugged.

"You need to eat munchkin. You could go into shock, food will help."

I rolled my eyes. "What makes Thara think you can get me to eat when she couldn't?"

He gave me a hard look and I felt his Beta aura. It wasn't anything like Dimitris, but still intimidating. However, I got the message. They weren't going to leave me alone until I ate the damn food, so I'd eat the damn food. I picked up a roll and dipped it in the stew, ripping off a big bite.

"Happy?" I said as I chewed.

Ben nodded. "I'll be happy when you finish it."

He sat on the end of the bed, watching me eat every bite. When I'd finally finished, he smiled.

"Better?"

"I guess so." I replied.

Taking the tray and setting it aside, Ben let out a huge sigh, his eyebrows creased. "I know you don't want to talk about it-"

"I don't." I interrupted.

"But you need to. We can't just pretend that this didn't happen to Lily. And James will have to stand trial. I don't know if you know what that means?"

I shook my head.

"It means that when that happens, you will need to stand and give your account of what happened. So, you can't just shut it out."

I paled. "But- you were there. You saw it. Why can't you just tell everyone what happened?"

Ben shook his head. "We'll need to know what led to it, what was said. And James will get to have his say too. Though it's not like he can deny it, because we were there for that."

"I don't know if I can do that." I whispered.

"You can. You're stronger than you think, munchkin."

"Can you stop calling me that?" I scowled.

"Sorry, would you prefer Lillian instead?"

"Goddess, no!"

Ben laughed and I cracked a small smile. He stood and stretched.

"Get some sleep. You might feel better in the morning." Giving me another smile he headed out.

"Ben?" I called before he shut the door.

"Yeah?"

"Can you tell Thara I'm sorry? Please?"

"I will. And she knows. But I'll tell her all the same, no worries."

"Thanks."

He nodded, and finally left me to rest. I was tired; exhausted actually. Turning off the light beside the bed, I curled up on my side, grabbing my pillow and hugging it to my chest. Surprisingly, my mind shut off and pulled me into sleep. Perhaps I dreamed, but maybe I didn't, because the next thing I knew, it was morning and I was wide awake. And Ben was right- I felt different today. I got up and showered, dressed. And all I could think about was that I was strong enough to handle the trial. James needed to pay for what he did, and measures needed to be taken to ensure he never did it again. I could do this. I needed to do this.

With a firm handle on my feelings, I went to breakfast. I expected everyone to know about last night's happenings, but nobody blinked at my entrance. It was the same usual morning banter, and Hazel and Clint were sitting at our usual table waving at me. Filling up my plate, I joined them.

"Hey." I said.

"How are you?" Hazel asked. She scrutinized my expression carefully.

"Fine." I replied.

"You sure?" Clint asked.

"Let me guess- Thara told you guys what happened?"

"Yeah." They nodded.

"Did you tell anyone else?"

"No."

"Good. Please don't. And really, I am fine. Okay, I wasn't last night, but I'm fine today. Promise." I gave them a reassuring smile.

They glanced at each other but nodded. We ate in silence for a while until I noticed Thara enter the cafeteria. Telling my friends I'd be right back, I wound through the tables until I reached her.

"Thara?"

She looked at me over her shoulder, giving me her usual smile. There was no hint of anger in her eyes.

"Hey. How are you today?" She asked as she put a stack on pancakes on her plate.

"Good. Uhm, listen, I'm really sor-"

Thara held up her hand. "It's fine. I understand you weren't in a good frame of mind last night, and you vented some of your feelings onto me. If I had a dollar for every time someone did that, I'd be a millionaire."

"Okay, but that doesn't make it right. Just say you forgive me?" I pleaded.

"I forgive you. If it makes you feel better, you are the only person to apologize." She laughed.

"It does, oddly. Thanks." I pulled her into a hug and she chuckled.

"Good morning."

I released Thara, turning to look at her brother. Dimitri stood to the side of us, hands in pockets. My breath caught in my throat when I looked at him- he had bags under his eyes and his hair was a mess. Was he wearing the same clothes as last night too? Did he even sleep?

"Morning big bro. You look like shit." Thara said.

Dimitri scowled in her direction before turning back to me. "Can we talk in my office?"

"Uh, yeah sure."

"See you later Lily." Thara waved.

I followed my mate out of the cafeteria and up the stairs to his office. He gestured for me to go in first, so I went to the sofa and flopped down. Dimitri sat heavily behind his desk, running his hands over his face.

"I really don't want to be the one to tell you this." He groaned.

Fuck. What now?