

Chapter 35

Niklaus

The hum of the jet's engines still echoes in my ears as I step out onto the tarmac, but it's quickly drowned out by the sight that greets me.

There she is—Verena, standing just beyond the restricted area, her smile as bright as the midday sun. Her eyes light up when she sees me and it's a sight that makes my heart kick against my chest, a familiar rush of adrenaline and something softer, something deeper, pulsing through me.

As I descend the steps of my private jet, her smile widens, and she breaks into a sprint towards me, her dark curls billowing behind her. The world blurs around the edges; the only clear thing is her. My pace quickens to meet hers, and by the time I reach the bottom, she's already leaping into my arms.

I catch her effortlessly, the familiar feel of her body against mine knocking the breath from me. Without a second thought, I dip my head and kiss her, a fierce, claiming kiss that speaks of the weeks of separation, of the longing that's gnawed at me every day she's been away.

"Fuck, I've missed you, kitten," I murmur against her lips, barely pulling away to catch my breath. "More than I thought possible."

Her laughter, light and musical, fills the air around us. "I can tell," she teases, her fingers tracing the line of my jaw. "Did you miss me enough to behave while I was gone?"

"Now, when have I ever behaved?" I shoot back, my tone light, but my eyes serious as they search hers.

We linger in our embrace, reluctant to part even as the world resumes around us. Eventually, I let my gaze wander over her shoulder, spotting Axton a short distance away. His presence is imposing, even relaxed, with that characteristic smirk that knows too much. Reluctantly, I set Verena down, squeezing her hand reassuringly before I walk over to him, extending my hand.

Axton chuckles as he takes it, his grip firm. "I was wondering when you'd ignore my threat and show up," he says, an amused glint in his eyes.

I shrug, a half-smile playing on my lips. "For Verena, I'd do anything. Guess I'm predictable that way." I say, glancing at Verena with a look that I reserve only for her.

His smirk broadens. "I suppose, for the right reasons, we all are."

I nod at this, understanding it all too well. "I hope you don't mind, but I'd like to steal her away for the day."

Axton's nod is resigned but not unfriendly. "She has a training session in the morning, so she needs her sleep," he reminds me, the hint of a smirk suggesting he knows exactly what my idea of 'spending the day' with Verena entails.

My grin widens, appreciative of his understanding, or at least his resignation. "Understood. I'll make sure she's rested."

Turning back to Verena, I catch the mischievous sparkle in her eye, her excitement palpable. "You hear that? You're mine for the day," I

declare, a playful assertiveness in my tone.

She laughs, her free hand coming up to lightly touch my cheek. "I wouldn't have it any other way," she admits, and the simple honesty in her words tightens something in my chest.

We say our brief goodbyes to Axton, who retreats with a final nod, leaving us to our reclaimed privacy. As we walk towards the car I had waiting, Verena's hand in mine feels like the most natural thing in the world.

"So, Mr. High-and-Mighty Alpha, what grand plans do you have for us today?" she teases, her voice light but curious.

"I thought we'd start with lunch. There's a little place I know, not too far from here. Quiet, secluded... perfect for catching up," I suggest, watching her reaction closely.

"Catching up, huh?" she raises an eyebrow, her tone playful. "Is that what they're calling it these days?"

I laugh, the sound booming out freely. "It can involve whatever you want it to involve," I say, giving her hand a gentle squeeze.

The drive to the restaurant is filled with light conversation, laughter, and an ease that speaks of the deep connection we share. Once seated in the cozy, dimly lit corner I had reserved, we order our food, but it's clear that neither of us is particularly focused on eating.

"So, tell me everything," I urge her, eager to hear about her training, about the things she's learned. "How has it been, diving into all this... magic stuff?"

Verena takes a deep breath, her eyes alight with a mix of excitement

and trepidation. "Overwhelming at times, but Kris is amazing. She makes it feel less like a chore and more like I'm just tapping into something that's always been a part of me."

I nod, impressed despite myself. "And Axton? He's been treating you well?"

Her smile fades a bit. "He's... complicated. But yes, he's been a good teacher. Just a lot to process, you know?"

I reach across the table, covering her hand with mine. "I know. But remember, you're not alone in this. I'm here, no matter what."

She squeezes my hand, her smile returning. "I know. And that means more than you can imagine."

As the evening winds down, I can't help but feel a pang of regret that our time is coming to an end. We stand outside her place, the night quiet around us.

"Thank you, Niklaus," she says, her voice soft. "Today was... it was exactly what I needed."

I pull her into a hug, holding her close. "Anytime, Verena. Anytime you need an escape, I'm just a call away."

She nods against my chest, then looks up at me, her eyes shimmering under the streetlights. "I know. And it means the world to me."

"See you tomorrow again?"

"Please... I think I need it," she says, and I can't help but smile at her honesty.



With one last kiss, a promise of more to come, I watch her walk inside, the door closing softly behind her.

As I drive back to my hotel, my thoughts are a tangled mess of hope and fear, of plans and dreams. Being a leader, being an Alpha, means making tough calls, but today reminded me that it also means finding time for the people who make all the struggles worthwhile.

And whatever the future holds, whatever challenges we face, I know that together, Verena and I can face them all. Because in her smile, in her laughter, I've found a reason to fight harder, to be better. And I wouldn't have it any other way.

As I unlock the door to my hotel room and step inside, the quiet of the space envelops me like a cold blanket. It's too still, too silent after the day filled with Verena's laughter and light.

Dropping my keys on the small table near the entrance, I toss my jacket over a chair and pick up my cell phone.

I dial Verena's number, knowing that even though the day is over, I'm not ready to let go of her presence just yet. The phone rings, cutting through the silence of my room, and after a couple of tones, she picks up.

It only rings once before she picks up. "Missing me already, Alpha?" Her voice is teasing, light, and it pulls a grin onto my face.

"You have no fucking idea," I reply, flopping onto the bed and staring up at the ceiling. "I'm in this big, luxurious hotel room, and all I can think is how it's missing its most important guest."

"Is that so?" Her laughter is a melody that eases the tightness in my

chest. "And who might that be?"

"Well, she's incredibly beautiful, smart, has a fiery spirit, and she just spent the whole day putting up with me. Ring any bells?"

"Sounds vaguely familiar," she plays along, her tone mock-thoughtful. "She must be a saint to put up with you all day."

"Absolutely, a saint, but I would love to see her sinful side someday," I agree wholeheartedly. "She's also got this laugh that sounds a bit like music, and damn, she makes being stuck in traffic feel like an adventure."

Verena chuckles, and I can picture her shaking her head. "You're laying it on thick tonight, Niklaus. What's got you in such a good mood?"

"Just being with you does it," I confess, letting my sincerity bleed through the flirtation. "Makes me realize how much I miss you when you're not around."

There's a brief pause, and when she speaks again, her voice is softer. "I miss you too. Today was... it was really nice."

"Yeah, it was," I say, the memory of the day warming me. I lean back, picturing her in her room, maybe curled up or pacing like she often does when on the phone.

"So, what are you up to now? Already in your pajamas and ready for bed, or are you secretly a night owl pretending to need sleep?"

She giggles, and I can almost see the roll of her eyes. "I might be in my pajamas, but who says I'm heading to bed? Maybe I'm planning a midnight snack raid on Axton's kitchen."

"That so?" I chuckle, running a hand through my hair. "Be careful, or I might have to come over and save you from a night of culinary misadventures."

"Oh, my hero," she teases, her tone playful. "What would I do without you?"

"Starve, obviously," I quip back, my mood lifting just from hearing her voice. "Or worse, eat something healthy."

"Hey!" she protests, laughing. "I'll have you know I can make a mean grilled cheese sandwich."

"I stand corrected. The epitome of culinary excellence," I say, grinning even though she can't see it. "Seriously, though, you should get some rest. Big day tomorrow?"

"Yeah, more training with Kris. It's getting intense, but I'm actually starting to enjoy it," she admits, a hint of pride in her voice. "She's pushing me hard, but I feel like I'm really making progress."

"I'm proud of you, kitten," I say earnestly, leaning back against the headboard. "You're handling all this crazy shit like a champ."

"It helps having a supportive, albeit incredibly flirty, Alpha in my corner," she replies, her tone warm.

"Only the best for you," I assure her. "Just remember, if you need anything—anything at all—I'm just a call away. Night or day."

"Thank you, Niklaus," she says softly. "That means a lot to me."

There's a brief pause, a comfortable silence as we both linger on the

line, neither ready to end the call just yet. Finally, I break the silence, my voice lowering a bit. "Verena?"

"Yeah?"

"I just... fuck, I've really missed you. These days feel like they're missing the best part when I'm not with you."

Her breath catches, and when she speaks again, her voice is tinged with emotion. "I miss you too, Niklaus. More than I thought I would if I'm being honest."

"I'll see you soon, I promise. I'm not leaving here until you tell me to," I say, and now it's my turn to smile, bittersweet and aching. "Sleep well, beautiful. And dream of me, if you want."

"Oh, I will," she replies, a smile evident in her voice. "Goodnight, Niklaus."

"Goodnight, Verena."

I end the call and toss my phone beside me on the bed. Lying back, I stare at the ceiling, her laughter echoing in my ears, her smile imprinted behind my closed eyelids.

The room feels even emptier now, colder. But there's a fire kindled deep within me, one that Verena stokes with just a few words, a simple laugh.

I'm a fucking goner for that kitten and I wouldn't have it any other way.