

Chapter 24 Reactions To Assault

Liana POV

It is pitch dark when I wake up. My upper body is on re and my head is throbbing but strangely enough, I am calm. I groan as pain radiates through me as I sit up. Something heavy is on my waist and I scream as I touch the arm that is draped over me.

"Liana?" Axel says urgently. "It's me."

"Axel?" Surprised I turn on the bedside lamp and immediately regret it as the light intensifies my headache.

"How are you feeling?" His voice is thick with sleep as he sits up.

"Like s**t," I mumble as I close my eyes.

"Are you in pain?" He asks concerned.

"A lot," I whimper, pressing my ngers against my temples.

"I'll take care of it," he stands up and walks out of the room.

Involuntarily, I replay the previous night's events, but I cannot remember when Axel got into the picture. I should be mad at him for ignoring me for a week and then curling up to me during the night as if nothing has happened. But I am not, I am too grateful not to be alone right now.

Does he know what happened? The thought shoots panic through me. He is going to be so mad at me. He warned me to stay from other men and then Brad ... a sob bursts over my lips as the realization hits me. Of course, he knows. He asked me if I am in pain.

My heart is heavy with anxiety as I get out of bed and walk to the bathroom. I do not want to cry in front of him about this and maybe I can buy some time and delay the ght that is sure to come.

I turn on the bathroom light but when I see my reaction in the mirror, I start screaming.

"Liana?" Axel sounds unnerved but I cannot answer him.

I cannot stop staring at my hideous face. I look down at my hand that pierced Brad's eye and I start trembling.

"Liana," Axel is next to me and tries to pull me close, but I resist.

"Blood," I cry as I lift my hand. "His blood."

"It's okay," he says patiently as he takes my hands into his. "We can x that."

"It's so gross," I cry, and I cannot take my eyes off my hand. "His eye ... it ... it just popped and ..."

"Liana," Axel says urgently, and I look at him. "Let's wash your hand and eat something so that I can give you pain medication."

"No," I shake my head. "I need to shower. I need ..."

"Shower it is," he says patiently as he turns open the taps.

"What are you doing?" I ask as he takes off his shirt and pants.

"We're going to shower," he smiles as he walks to me and unbutton my pants.

"But I don't want to ... I mean, I should ..."

"Just relax," he pulls my pants and underwear off. "I'm only going to help you, okay? No funny business."

"I'm ... I'm sorry," I whimper. He has needs and I am contractually bound to full those needs. Now I am a bloody and crying mess.

"You shouldn't be," he looks at me with so much compassion that my heart aches. "You did nothing wrong."

"But ..."

"Are you ready for this?" He cuts me off as he tests the water's temperature. "It's going to hurt."

"Yes," I nod adamantly. I would endure this pain twice over if I can only get clean.

Axel smiles at me as he takes my hand and steps into the shower rst. He goes to stand under the stream of water so that it does not spray directly onto me.

"You're going to drown," I joke, but it is too painful to smile.

"It's okay, I can swim," he laughs.

I take the face wash and grind my teeth as I wash my face. I bite back the tears, but I cannot keep my moans of pain to myself.

"Did I get everything?" I turn to Axel.

"Everything," he grins. "You even washed off your freckles."

"I do not have freckles," I protest, and he laughs softly.

"I know," he chuckles as he takes the body wash and loofah.

I close my eyes as he spreads my legs to wash between my legs and inner thighs. In other circumstances, this could have been romantic. Now, it is just embarrassing.

"Lift your leg," he kneels in front of me. "And support yourself on my shoulders."

"Why?" I ask suspiciously but obey. The last thing I need is more injuries.

"So I can wash your feet and legs," he makes his eyes big at me.

"This part's going to hurt," I sigh and brace myself for what is to come when Axel rinses the loofah.

"I'm not going near your upper body with soap," he closes the tap. "It can irritate your wounds."

"But the blood ..."

"Is all gone," he cuts me off and helps me out of the shower. "I'll clean the wounds with sterile wipes if you want."

"I don't have sterile wipes," I argue stubbornly. I want the blood gone. Every speck of it.

"There is in the rst aid kit," he gently wraps a towel around my waist, leaving my chest bare. "And before you ask. Yes, you do have a rst aid kit in your kitchen. This is wolf territory. We ght and bite for fun. Every house is equipped with one."

Images of Brad attacking me when he uses the phrase 'ght and bite' bombard my mind and a shiver runs through me.

"Are you cold?" Axel asks concerned as he wraps a towel around himself.

"Unpleasant memories," I mumble and turn to the basin to pick up my hairbrush, but my eye catches the wounds on my chest. I was so appalled by my face. I never bothered to look down.

I trace the long, red line across my chest where Brad clawed me.

"What the f**k?" I murmur and frown as I look at the mark on my breast.

"What is this?" I go stand in front of the mirror to get a better look.

"Oh, dear goddess," I gulp as I stare at the teeth marks on my chest. Vigorously I rub it, but it does not want to come off.

"Liana, don't," Axel's voice is soft as he grabs my wrists from behind and pulls my back to his chest. "It's okay, it will go away."

"It's not okay!" I snap and shout furiously as I jerk free from his hold. This is too much. "How can you stand there all serene and calm? Why aren't you mad? Look at me! Look at what he's done!"

"I am!" Axel bellows with eyes blazing. "I'm enraged, Liana, but how is that going to help either of us? But if that's what you need, I'll be angry. If you want me to be happy and cheerful, I'll be happy and cheerful. Whatever you need, that's what I'll be."

"I don't know what I need," I shout as start rubbing the mark again.

"I want this off," I cry hopelessly as Brad's sadistic face pops up in my head. "I want this gone."

"It will go away," he says desperately as he grabs my wrists. "It's not permanent. It will go away."

"Axel," my voice is hoarse as warm tears stream down my cheeks. "How can you look at me when I cannot stand the sight of myself?"

"You survived," he whispers as he presses his lips against my knuckles. "You're more than your looks, Liana. You're an astonishing woman. How can I not look at you and see that?"

"I hate what he did to me," I say urgently. "I never wanted him to touch me, you must believe me."

"I never doubted that," he says seriously. "In fact, that thought hasn't even crossed my mind."

I nod and bow my head as fresh tears well in my eyes. I am so incredibly confused and overwhelmed with emotions. Looking at my wounds makes me anxious and brings back memories of those horrible moments in Brad's oce that felt like an eternity.

I feel so unbelievably guilty. If I did not agree to play that stupid game, Brad would not have the chance to attack me. If I only sucked up to him as the other did, he would have paid me, and I would go home untouched.

But mostly, I am angry. I am angry at Brad for doing this to me. I am angry because it is not fair and stuff like this should not happen. And I am furious at myself for playing the game and taking it out on Axel.

I hate that I am taking it out on him. He did not do anything wrong. On the contrary, he has been nothing but patient and supportive. He denitely deserves someone that will treat him with the same amount of respect and compassion. And that someone is not me. I am not worthy of him.

"Dammit," I break down crying as my last thought strikes me in my heart. I am not worthy. If I am not good enough for Wyatt, why the hell would I be good enough for Axel? He is ten times the man Wyatt can ever hope to be.

"I'm so, so sorry," I cry as I look at Axel. "You deserve better. I ..."

"Hey," Axel cuts me off gently as he lays his palm against my cheek. "Give yourself time and space to recover. What you are experiencing are normal responses to an awful thing."

"I'm so sorry," I keep on crying even as he picks me up and places me down on the bed. I curl into a ball as the tears keep on ooding. I am in so much pain physically and emotionally and I cannot control it.

After a while, Axel pulls me onto his lap, and I cling to him for all that I am worth.

"Take a deep breath," his voice is rm, and I obey. I continue to inhale deeply until I have control over myself.

"I'm sor ..."

"Please don't say you're sorry again," Axel interrupts me with a voice lled with anguish. "You'll dehydrate before the doctor arrives."

"Fine," I sniff. "Then I'm apologetic."

"Yeah, you're feeling better if you can talk back," he snorts as he picks me off his lap.

"I made you a sandwich earlier," he says as he stands up and gets the plate that was standing on my dresser.

"Thanks," I croak as I accept it and take a bite. I am not even remotely hungry, but I will not tell him that. This man is a god and has most likely never even made himself a sandwich, let alone for someone else.

"Once you're done, you can have these," he hands me two capsules. "It will help for the pain."

"You're a god," I sigh gratefully.

"I know, right?" He gives me a wicked grin as he climbs butt-naked into bed.

I nish the sandwich and swallow the pills before I stand up.

"Where are you going?" He frowns.

"Getting pyjamas," I reply as I place the plate down.

"No, you're not," he grunts and pulls away the covers. "Get in."

"But ..."

"No buts," he glares at me, and I roll my eyes theatrically at him before I climb into bed.

"That's better," he sighs I lay down in his arms. "Now close your eyes and go to sleep. I'm tired."

"Yes, Alpha," I laugh.

"I like that," he kisses me on my neck and for the rst time in a week, I go to sleep at ease.