

Chapter 36

AELIANA

When the door shuts behind Kingston, I scream, not out loud, yet it's the loudest I've ever screamed. The tears come quick, hot and heavy. I should go after him, tell him it isn't his fault, and tell him I wanted him so badly that my heart aches. 1

Despite everything, every moment I'm in Kingston's arms feels like home but my body failing me came off as rejection.

I cry even harder, quietly sobbing while my fingers clench around the sheets as the memory creeps into my brain.

I don't let it settle, but that one split second in which it flashes through my mind is enough to unsettle me. For a second, I forgot where I was, who I was with—and Kingston happened to catch on before I could reel reality back in.

It takes me a few minutes to gather myself but when I do, I slip my robe on and start looking for him. I don't know why but I feel like I owe him an explanation, something better than the apology I gave.

Kingston is by the porch steps, shirtless and right beside him is his girlfriend. My heart tightens painfully, and I instantly regret coming here. He ran from me—to her. They don't even notice me, they're too lost in each other.

Audrey has her head on his shoulder while they stare up at the sky like they're staring in some movie. I'm about to leave when I hear her speak, "I already told you, she's not ready for this, Kingston. She wasn't built for it, she's too young," Audrey sighs. "And not only that but she's been



gone for years, you can't expect her to change for you."

"I didn't ask for this bond, Drey."

"I know," she sighs again, this time like she's tired yet empathetic. "But you need to understand that Aeliana has always been different, and years without supervision probably turned her into something more...

different," she sighs again. Her use of the word different makes my skin crawl. One fucking video ruined my life. Someone filmed the most vulnerable moment of my life and now the pack uses it to tear me down at every corner. "I bet she has a lover or two in Clinshore who are waiting for her to get bored with playing house with you. Everyone knows Aeliana doesn't care about you or this pack, she simply stayed because Gamma Hartley threatened her."

My heart drops.

I wait for him to argue. To say something, anything—that proves he doesn't believe any of it but he doesn't. He believes every single word, he thinks it too.

I turn away, leaving them to their conversation.

I should have stayed in my room, I should have cried myself to sleep but no, I had the bright idea of going to help him and it just ruined my night. When that video began to circulate, I had no one to cling to, no one to fight for me, no one to dispute any of it. I always thought Kingston would believe me, I had so much faith in the bond we spent years fostering but when he returned he believed it all. 1

Ninety nine percent of those sex videos were fake, the naked pictures? Also fake, but my face was on them, the pack started talking and within twenty-four hours it became my reality, I was getting shunned for



something I didn't ask for. I didn't even know there was a camera, I wasn't lucid enough for anything the moment my body hit that mattress.

God, just thinking of it makes my skin crawl.

I drag myself to the kitchen for some camomile tea, it always helps me sleep better and boy do I need it now. I don't expect to see anyone in the kitchen considering the time but Lexie, one of the maids Luna Estelle brought is here.

"Luna Aeliana," Lexie gasps, wiping her hands on her apron. "I was just—are you okay?"

I just saw my mate discussing me with his girlfriend and agreeing to every horrid thing she had to say about me. My heart is a little more shattered than it was this morning but still, I force a smile and nod. "Great," I tell her. "Is the dishwasher broken?"

"The other omegas told me to handwash these dishes before I go to bed, I'm almost done."

I pause, scanning the multitude of dishes they have this poor girl washing. They're everywhere, sink, counter top...way too many for just her and I know exactly why they're picking on her. It's because she's here for me.

Luna Estelle brought her specifically for me so the staff are extending their disdain for me towards her.

"Lexie, leave that," I command. "Those are way too many, you shouldn't be doing that alone."

"It's fine, Luna. I'm almost done." She says, offering a small smile—tired smile.

"You're barely halfway done," I sigh. "As your Luna, I forbid you from accepting demeaning treatment of any sort, do you hear me?"

"Yes, Luna." She nods, immediately returning to the dishes.

"Lexie," I warn. "I said to stop washing those dishes. Go upstairs, go to bed or whatever it is you do when you're not working. I don't care what you do but do not touch those dishes again. Tell the house manager to draft a chore chart, an unbiased chore chart before they work you to your death."

Lexie nods, her gaze low. "It's really no trouble, Luna Aeliana. Luna Estelle pays me generously, I can—"

"I'm going to fire you if you don't listen to me."

That gets her to move.

She finally listens, "Good, and if anyone assigns you an unfair amount of work, come to me."

"That's very kind, Luna." She says, surprised—almost. "But I don't want to cause any trouble, it's really nothing. I can handle the work, I—"

"It isn't about handling the work, Lexie. It's about fairness, this isn't fair to you." I snap, "They can't decide for you that dishes are all you're good for, they can't believe you wash a lot of dishes just because someone made videos of with your face washing several dishes, they can't replace you with another dishwasher they think is better. I mean how well do they even know her, they don't know her history or the—" I pause, catching myself mid-rant. I've lost it, I've lost the plot and Lexie is staring at me with disbelief and a hint of fear. "Forget it, just go to bed."

Lexie nods, "Yes Luna."

What was that loon show I just put on?

Audrey and Kingston are getting to me.

Despite my best efforts, seeing them together still has the same effect on me. I know we'll never be close again but it still makes my heart ache in ways I never knew were possible still.

I was always the one he'd run to when his heart was heavy, I was the one whose bedroom he snuck into to cuddle at night but now I'm the reason his heart is heavy. And Audrey? She's his angel. She does no wrong. She didn't have any sex scandals. She is the one he runs to because she stayed when I left.



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