

Chapter 41

I nod, "And that paper still bothers you huh? You know what I might even cling to this marriage just so you can never be his Luna." I sigh, "Maybe I will find the satisfaction you find in knowing you're all he cares about."

"I don't find any—"

"Cut the crap," I tsk. "And the next time you come to me with that nonsense? I'm telling Luna Estelle and having you thrown out of this house. In case you haven't noticed? She'd do pretty much anything for me so best hope I don't run out of patience."

"Aeliana!"

For goodness sake.

Just about my luck. Yeah, this definitely checks out, of course, Kingston would appear at the worst moment possible, and of course, Audrey gets to be the victim even now when she provoked me. "Fuck," I cuss underneath my breath, and I swear I see her smile.

I turn, my eyes meeting a very furious Kingston. "What do you think you're doing?" Kingston growls, his strides heavy towards us.

I don't speak.

What good is it when he has already forged his own understanding from the one per cent of our conversation that he overheard? He grabs my arm, fury dancing in his gaze. My stomach turns, I don't think I've ever been more appalled by something than I am by his ignorance in this moment. "What are you doing talking to Audrey that way?" He demands. "What has she done to you?"

"What hasn't she done?"

"I—I just came to invite her for lunch," Audrey stutters, her eyes watering. For a moment, even I begin to fall for it. "And she—"

"Oh please," I laugh. It's hard not to, she delivers a stellar performance. Audrey Cole would make it big on the TV screens but instead, she wastes her talent to wrap Kingston around her finger. Although, it's not much of a waste considering how very aesthetically pleasing his appearance is.

"You think it's funny?" He snaps, his grip around my arm tightening.

"A bit," I say with a laugh.

"You've finally shown your true colors huh?"

I frown, "I didn't know I had colours. What shade are they?"

Finally, his grip on my arm loosens. And I slip out, caressing the sore spot he just created. "How dare you threaten her with manipulating my mom?"

I shake my head, "Your mom would deeply be offended to learn you think so low of her and her intellect. Hmm, " I trail off, tapping my cheek. "Maybe I should tell her while I'm at it.."

"Leave Audrey alone," he snaps. He would do anything for her, and the non-existent threat I pose to her is making him lose it, and her sobbing isn't helping at all. "She has done nothing but try to be your friend since —"

"My friend?" I scoff. Is that how he sees it? Is that what everyone sees beneath all her hostility? "I don't want to be her friend, in case you haven't noticed, no woman is interested in rubbing elbows with the

woman her mate is rubbing genitals with."

"Aeliana," he warns, his voice loud, harsh, it almost startles but I don't lose composure. Not in front of him, and certainly not in front of Audrey. I can break down in five minutes, away from them and the satisfaction it would give them to see me break.

"What? Is that by chance untrue?" I gasp, feigning confusion.

Again, he grabs my arm, glaring daggers at me. "You will respect me," he says, his tone warning.

"I... already told you," I snap, pulling my arm away. "Earn it. You're so used to getting what you want that it's becoming a huge challenge to earn my respect?" I snicker. "Wow. Who knew you were such a....what is it called again?" I frown, "Right. A nepotism offspring?"

"Aeliana!" The victim gasps, "Kingston has worked hard to get to where he is."

"Maybe," I shrug. "But I bet he didn't lift a finger to get into your panties. No hard work there, just.."

I pause, my cheek with a force that rips the air from my lungs. He slapped me. The realisation cuts deeper than any blade my skin has ever come across. A familiar sting claws at my chest—betrayal, that's what it is. For years he has turned a blind eye to every little comment about me and today when I spoke against her he slapped me. Any and all hope that might have lingered about us and what we could be. 2

"That's rich, coming from you. You let strangers fuck you on camera and —" 1

"Enough," I command, swallowing the lump in my throat. Take your

girlfriend, leave. And keep her very far away from me or I will tell Luna Estelle that I want her gone from not only this house but the pack too."

"I'm sorry," she chokes out, eyes low, voice trembling.

"Don't apologise." He says, and as if to rub salt in my wounds, she runs, audibly sobbing. "Audrey," he calls after her, unmovingly. I find a small comfort in the fact that he doesn't run after her, a comfort that fades the second he opens his mouth again. "See what you've done?"

"I did nothing," I swallow. "She comes looking for me, she starts talking to you, she talks about me and I don't spare her a second glance until she comes to me and starts —"

"You really think im going to believe that Audrey starts anything?" He snarls.

"No, how could I? She's perfect, she's an angel, a godsend and me? Always wrong, always at fault, but have you ever stopped to think about how tired I am of wearing those labels you all throw at me? I'm fucking tired!" I scream, my chest heaving. "This place hasn't felt like home to me in years and now I am stuck here, I'm stuck with you, stuck with the pack that would rather eat shit than say one good thing about me." I snap, the tears coming in hot and heavy, despite my best efforts to stop them. Everything I've been holding in for weeks fights to spew and I let it win. "I am stuck with a woman you deem better than me and there's nothing I can do about that. Why does everyone take their anger out on me? I'm sick and tired of it all. I'm fucking tired!" I sob, "I miss my life before I was bound to you, I haven't been happier my whole life than I was in Clinshore. I didn't have much but that was okay, because that was my life! I built that life, I want it back, I hate this new life I was forced into, I hate you, I hate this bond that controls me, I hate your fucking girlfriend...I hate everything!"

His eyes soften, “Aeliana—”

I hate the way he is staring at me right now, as if he pities me. It's the same look he gave Audrey early, the same look that he would give a forgotten puppy by the roadside.

Pathetic, I fucking hate it. I step inside my room and shake my head. “Go away, and stay away!” I snap, slamming the door shut in his face.

“Aeliana,” he calls from outside, banging on the door. “Open the door.”

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