

Chapter 12: Elira's Mother

Chapter 12: Elira's Mother

I stared at my reflection in the mirror.

After Darius left me, I took a bath—wanting to erase the remnants of his scent on my skin. I wasn't comfortable with it.

I was no longer living in the attic, where the heat would make me sweat through my clothes, but that's exactly how I felt when Darius Vane left me crying—after I begged him to take my life. I was sweating, my body burning, like fire was crawling beneath my skin.

My eyes were swollen. I couldn't remember the last time I cried like this.

Even when Kael rejected me, I didn't cry like this.

I gently touched the marks on my neck—bruised, almost purple. I swallowed hard, my heart racing as the memory of Darius's hand on my throat resurfaced.

I had begged him to kill me.

Something I had never said to anyone. Not even to my father—the man who beat me, broke me. Even then, I fought. I fought hard to survive.

I was even terrified for my life when I first came here.

So what changed?

Maybe I was just tired.

I was tired of trying my best to survive, to prove I belonged, when I wasn't even sure if I wanted to exist anymore.

Or maybe... I was scared.

Selene Vane had been kind to me. Even the others didn't insult or treat me with cruelty. No sneers, no whispers behind my back. They looked at me as if I were... someone. As if I mattered.

And that terrified me.

Because kindness always came before the fall. It always came before everything burned.

What if the curse followed me here, too?

What if something bad happened to them—because of me?

What if Selene Vane fell ill?

What if someone else ended up in an accident?

And Darius... would he finally let go of me? Would he kill me, like I asked? Would that be enough?

But that's not what I wanted—not really. I didn't want people to suffer. I didn't want to be the reason behind their misfortune. I didn't want blood on my hands or fear in their eyes when they looked at me.

I just didn't want to hurt anymore.

The sound of a knock made me flinch. My breath caught, panic clawing at my ribs.

Darius? Was he back?

But no—Darius would never knock.

The door creaked open, and I stood up quickly, instinctively straightening myself like a child caught doing something wrong.

It was Queen Selene.

"G-Good evening, Queen Selene."

"Good evening, Elira. May I come in?"

My eyes widened—she was asking permission from someone like me.

"Of course, Queen Selene."

She smiled as she walked toward me.

"Please, stop calling me Queen Selene. You can call me Mama."

Mama?

I couldn't say a word. A lowly omega like me? To call her that?

"I-I don't think I have any right to call you that, Queen—"

"You're my son's wife, Elira. That makes you my daughter now. It's only right that you call me that."

She gently caressed my still-damp hair, her gaze shifting to the bruises on my neck. Her eyes darkened—but a warm smile quickly replaced the expression.

"Take a seat, honey. Let me help you with your hair."

Queen Selene sat behind me, gently lifting the towel from my shoulders

and picking up the brush from the vanity. She began to stroke it through my damp hair, slowly, carefully—as if I might shatter.

The bristles glided through the tangles, and for a moment, I forgot the bruises, the ache in my chest, and the cruelty of earlier. My heart stirred with something unfamiliar... something warm.

A memory flickered across my mind—hazy and distant—of my mother brushing my hair when I was a child. She hummed softly, her hands gentle like Queen Selene's now.

I blinked, the sting of tears rising suddenly. My throat tightened, and I looked down, trying to keep them from spilling.

"Sweetheart," Queen Selene said softly, brushing a strand behind my ear, "I want to apologize... for what happened earlier. I shouldn't have offered you that apple without knowing."

I quickly shook my head, guilt clawing its way into my chest.

"No, please don't apologize," I said, my voice thin. "It wasn't your fault. You didn't know... I should've said something. I... I made the decision to eat it. It's mine to carry."

Her fingers paused for a moment, then continued their soothing rhythm.

"You were being polite," she said kindly. "But next time, I want you to speak up, Elira. You don't have to accept everything just to be accepted. You're not here to prove yourself to anyone. You already belong with us."

No, I do not belong in this place.

I wanted to voice that out, but I kept it inside.

Queen Selene continued brushing my hair, her movements gentle and thoughtful. Then, as if recalling something distant, the queen's voice softened even further.

"I made a mistake earlier," Queen Selene said. "Your mother's favorite fruit was apple. I thought... it might've been yours too."

My heart stopped.

Wait.

My mother?

Before I could stop myself and remind myself it was rude to cut off someone like her, I turned my head, barely breathing.

"M-My mother?" I whispered. "You... you knew my mother?"

Queen Selene paused, then nodded, smiling. "We were classmates back in the Academy when we were both just teenagers. We were friends once... but life pulled us in different directions over the years. I lost contact with her, and I always regretted that."

A sharp ache bloomed in my chest.

My hands gripped the edge of the vanity, knuckles turning white. I was suddenly so full of questions I didn't know where to start. I wanted to ask so many things about my mother.

"What... was she like?"

"Eloisa was gentle," Queen Selene said. "Smart. Quiet, but not shy. When she spoke, people listened. And she had this... light. Something you never forget."

A lump formed in my throat.

I was so young when I lost her that as I got older, my memories with her slowly faded.

I blinked back, the sting in my eyes. "I barely remember her," I whispered. "As I got older, I tried hard to hold on, but it's like she's slipping away more each year."

They said I looked like her; I heard that from my packs.

But sometimes I doubt that because if I really looked like her, how could it have been so easy for my father to hurt me? To hit me, to sell me off like I was nothing? He loved her. He always said he did. So, if I was truly her reflection, wouldn't he have looked at me and seen a part of her?

So...maybe I didn't look like her at all...

As if Queen Selene could hear my thoughts, she spoke gently, "You looked like her, Elira. Whenever you missed her and you can't remember her face anymore, just look in the mirror and you'll see her."

Tears slipped down my cheeks before I could stop them.

Queen Selene moved behind me and wrapped her arms around my shoulders, her embrace gentle, like she was holding me together piece

by piece.

"You've been through more than any child ever should," she whispered, resting her chin lightly on my head. "But Elira... you are still here. That means something. You're meant to be here."

I shut my eyes, her voice wrapping around me like a blanket. Warm. Real.

"I don't know how," I croaked, voice hoarse. "I'm just so... tired. I don't even know who I am anymore. I've been called cursed, worthless, a burden. And maybe they're right. Maybe I ruin everything I touch."

"No," she said firmly, pulling back just enough to look at me. "Listen to me, Elira."

Her hands cupped my cheeks, thumbs wiping the tears that still fell.

"You are not a curse. Not to this world, and certainly not to your mother."

I looked at her, barely breathing.

"You were a gift to Eloisa," she said, her voice thick with emotion. "She always wanted a daughter—someone who looked just like her. She used to tell me that when we were girls. And you... you made that dream come true."

My lips trembled. The ache in my chest felt heavier—but somehow lighter at the same time. I didn't know I needed to hear those words until I did.

Queen Selene pressed a kiss to my forehead. "You don't have to be what others called you. You don't have to carry their labels. You can choose who you want to become. But you need to keep fighting. For your life, your future. For the people who see you now—not the ones who tried to bury you."

I let out a shaky breath. For the first time in a long while, it's like I'm seeing light.

"Find your purpose," she whispered. "Find your strength. Because it's there, Elira. I see it."