

Chapter 17: Just One Hit

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I was never meant for this.

The thought repeated like a pulse as I staggered to my feet, only to collapse again in the dirt. My knees screamed every time I bent them, the bruise from earlier burning under each movement.

I wasn't a fighter. I never had the strength—not of body, not of will. Omegas like me were trained to survive quietly, not to resist. Not to strike.

And yet, here I was.

I was dragged into combat training like it was some rite of passage as if the pain was something I was supposed to get used to.

My breaths came in sharp, shallow gasps, sweat dripping into my eyes, stinging.

My shirt clung to my skin, soaked through. I could barely keep my arms steady. They trembled at my sides like they wanted to give up before I did.

I didn't know how many hours it had been. One? Two? The sun was gone now.

And he was still there.

Watching.

I heard the sound of his footsteps before I saw him.

Darius Vane.

The King.

My husband.

He stopped beside me, his presence a shadow that felt colder than the night air.

"Is that all you've got?" His voice was laced with disgust, with that mocking smirk I didn't need to see to feel. "Don't you even want to eat?"

My stomach twisted.

He said if I didn't finish this... no dinner.

Not that I could eat with how sick I felt.

I wanted to cry, scream at him, and ask why he was doing this, though I already knew the answer.

He was true to his words.

This was his punishment.

I was nothing but a lesson. A broken thing to break again. Something to prove that omegas like me had no place pretending they belonged in his world.

"Again," he ordered coldly.

I didn't move.

I couldn't.

My arms wouldn't lift. My legs refused.

Alexis, the combat instructor, stepped forward.

"King Darius, it's her first day," she said, her tone respectful but firm. "And it's clear she's never trained a day in her life. She's reaching her limit."

Limit?

I passed that an hour ago.

Darius didn't respond to Alexis. Instead, he crouched in front of me and grabbed my shirt collar.

"Stand up," he snarled.

When I didn't—couldn't—he yanked me to my feet like I weighed nothing, forcing me to stand even though my legs buckled beneath me.

I clung to his grip just to stay upright.

His golden eyes bore into me.

"You're pathetic," he hissed. "No strength, no skills, not even the guts to try."

Tears pricked my eyes. I bit my lip hard, trying not to let them fall, but they did anyway.

"I'll make it easier for you," he said, releasing my collar with a shove. "One hit. Just one. If you manage even a weak, pathetic strike against your opponent... I'll let you go for the night."

I couldn't respond.

The ground spun beneath me.

I wanted to sleep.

I wanted to vanish.

But Darius wasn't finished.

He leaned down again, his voice colder now. Crueler.

"Why did your mother even give birth to someone like you?"

Something snapped.

It was like a flame igniting inside me—sudden, violent, blinding. Rage boiled up from where pain and fear used to live.

I screamed.

And before I knew it—

My hand flew.

And struck him.

Hard.

Across his cheek.

The sound cracked through the air, louder than it should've been, louder than my breathing, louder than the silence that followed.

He didn't move.

Neither did I.

For a long moment, the world held its breath.

And I stood there, hand still trembling midair, my heart pounding in my ears, realizing what I'd done.

Realizing that I had hit the King.

Hit Darius Vane.

And I didn't know what scared me more—

The act itself.

Or the fact that, for the first time...

I didn't feel weak.

I stared at my trembling hand, then looked at Darius. He's still not

moving or saying a word. He just had that unreadable expression again.

The silence around us was deafening.

The stinging in my palm was real. The heat behind my eyes was real. My heart, thundering in my chest like it was trying to escape, was painfully real.

I swallowed hard, my knees threatening to buckle again.

"I didn't mean—" I began to whisper, but I stopped myself.

No.

No, I did mean it.

I may not have planned to hit him, but I meant every bit of that slap.

I clenched my jaw, keeping my chin high as my shoulders trembled. I wouldn't look down. I wouldn't cry again. I wouldn't give him the satisfaction.

Still, the terror crept slowly, like cold water soaking through my skin.

What would he do now?

I know he wouldn't kill me. Would he lock me up somewhere dark in his kingdom?

Would he hit me, too?

I flinched when Darius finally moved. His fingers touched the side of his cheek where I had hit him.

He didn't even wince. Instead, he looked at his hand like it surprised him to feel anything.

And then—

He laughed.

The sound of it made every hair on my neck stand up.

"That's more like it," he murmured.

He turned to Alexis with a smirk, tugging at the edge of his mouth. "You saw that?"

Alexis nodded, stunned. "Yes, King. I... did."

"Good." He looked back at me, golden eyes sharp and glinting with something strange. Something unreadable. "Let her eat. She earned it."

The moment Darius disappeared from view, my legs gave out beneath me.

I collapsed onto the ground, my palms scraping against the rough stone as I braced myself.

My knees throbbed, and my breath came out in shallow, ragged gasps.

I stared at my right hand. It still stung.

Still red.

Still shaking.

A reminder of what I just did.

I slapped the Lycan King.

I slapped my husband.

And I can't believe that saved me from torture for this night.

"Elira!"

The voice was distant, yet somehow close. I blinked through the dizziness as a pair of arms suddenly lifted me from the floor.

I tensed.

It wasn't Darius. Of course, it wouldn't be him.

"S-Sorin?" My voice was barely audible, hoarse.

"I can walk," I added quickly, even if my limbs were clearly not cooperating.

"Yeah, right. You can walk for what? Seconds?" Sorin replied flatly but not unkindly.

I didn't argue because he was right.

I could walk—maybe. But I'd collapse again just like before. My body was past its limit.

Still, his kindness unsettled me.

He wasn't supposed to be kind.

Not to me.

"I told you not to be nice to me," I whispered, not meeting his eyes as I leaned against his shoulder.

His grip didn't loosen. If anything, it became steadier and more secure.

I looked down, ashamed.

Why am I always this weak?

My head began to swim again. Darkness nipped at the edges of my vision. I could feel myself slipping, my body too tired to stay alert.

But Sorin didn't stop walking.

He carried me through the halls like I weighed nothing. I was too far gone to care who saw us.

When we reached my room, I heard Dianne's voice.

"Is her bath prepared?"

"Yes, Sorin. It's warm, just like you asked."

"Good," he replied. "Help her clean herself, Dianne. I'll bring her to the tub. Prepare her clothes first."

The warmth of the water cradled my aching body as Sorin slowly lowered me into the tub.

I let out a quiet breath as the heat soaked into my bruised skin, dulling the pain just enough to make me realize how much it hurt in the first place.

I rested my head on the tub's edge, eyes fluttering half-shut.

"Do you see that?" I whispered, unsure if I was speaking to Sorin... or to myself. "He's that cruel to me. How could someone like him ever fall for someone like me?"

My voice cracked. My body sank deeper into the warmth as if I could hide from the world beneath the surface.

"I could never escape this place... or taste the freedom I want." My lips trembled, and the words came out like a vow wrapped in exhaustion. "But I'll survive, Sorin."

My eyes fluttered shut. The edges of the world began to blur into nothing.

I barely heard what he said next, just the faint murmur of a voice that followed me into the dark.

"You're not sure of that, Elira... He has emotions when it comes to you... only to you."

And then everything went silent.

Commented [Ma1]:

Finally, a rest.

