

Chapter 20: Late

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The car ride home was silent—heavy, thick, and filled with the echo of Dianne’s words.

“For the omega he couldn’t protect in the end...”

That line kept playing over and over in my mind like a haunting lullaby.

I wanted to ask.

I wanted to know who she was... what had happened... but I knew better than to pry, especially not through Dianne. If Cassiel ever wanted me to know, he’d tell me himself.

I leaned my head against the window and let my eyes shut, only for my thoughts to spin more wildly.

Until the car slowed down.

My heart jumped.

We were home.

The golden horizon had faded, replaced by the deep shadows of evening. The lights from the estate flickered in the distance, and a pit formed in my stomach.

I was late.

Very late.

The sun had already set, and I was sure Darius was angry by now.

My hands started to tremble as the realization sank in.

“Elira,” Dianne said softly, placing a hand over mine. “Let me help you. I’ll talk to the King and say we had an extended activity at school—”

I quickly shook my head, cutting her off before she could finish. “No. J—just go, Dianne. I’ll be the one to explain.”

She looked at me, unconvinced, her brows pulled together in quiet protest. But before she could say another word, the car stopped.

The driver stepped out and opened the door.

A rush of cold air hit my face.

Dianne gave my hand a final squeeze before letting go. I took a deep breath, held it in, and stepped out.

Each step felt heavier than the last.

I swallowed hard, bracing myself—not just for his wrath, but for whatever punishment he decided I deserved tonight.

I didn't even bother going upstairs to change when I stepped inside.

I ran.

My shoes pounded against the marble floors and the gravel path, my skirt tugging at my legs with every rushed step. I didn't care. My lungs burned, and my knees ached with every movement, but I kept going.

Toward the training grounds.

The place that had become the witness of my nightmares this past week. It had seen the sweat and the bruises and heard the broken sobs from me.

By the time I reached it, I was gasping. I bent over, gripping my knees, trying to catch my breath as the cold air bit into my skin.

My eyes scanned the grounds, expecting to see him—to hear his voice, sharp and biting, to feel the weight of his fury.

But the place was empty.

My trainer was gone.

There was no sign of Darius Vane.

I straightened slowly, my heart still pounding, the silence pressing on my ears.

He wasn't here.

Was I too late?

Of course, I was. I knew that.

I swallowed and took a shaky step forward, the gravel crunching beneath my feet. There wasn't even a trace left from today's training.

Would they have already left... or maybe they never came at all?

Maybe there was no training today.

For a brief moment, I let myself breathe. My shoulders loosened.

But just before I could let out a sigh of relief—

I felt it.

His presence.

The wind stirred softly, brushing through my hair like fingers.

And then—

I saw him.

He was walking toward me from the shadows, calm and measured like he had all the time in the world.

Darius Vane.

His steps made no sound against the ground, his expression blank—too blank.

He stopped a few feet before me, lips curling into something sharp.

"Well," he said, voice dry with mockery. "Don't you think you're a little too early for tomorrow's training?"

My stomach dropped.

My hand began to tremble again, and I quickly hid it behind my back. Still, I forced myself to stand straight.

I gathered what little courage I had left and opened my mouth. "I'm sorry," I whispered, "for being late. It won't happen again. I—"

"Why?" he cut in, tilting his head ever so slightly. "Did you have an activity at school? Is that why you're late?"

I froze.

The words caught in my throat. I could feel the trap, but my body betrayed me. My head nodded slowly, stupidly.

"Yes..."

It slipped out too quietly.

And then his expression changed.

His mouth twisted into a smile—no warmth, no humor. Just menace.

He already knew.

He was baiting me.

He'd known from the start, and I walked right into it.

My chest tightened as fear slid into my veins. I stepped back just once, but it was enough to show him I wanted to run.

I could see it in his eyes—the satisfaction.

Like a hunter, when the prey realizes too late, they've been caught.

Before I could take another step back—before I could even breathe—

It happened.

I didn't see him move.

One moment, there was distance between us... and the next, I was trapped.

His arms braced on either side of me, his body closing in until my back hit something solid.

Cold.

The wall behind the storage shed.

My breath caught.

He was too close.

His scent hit me first—dark, sharp, like pine and smoke—and it clung to the air, wrapping around my senses until I couldn't think.

Darius Vane didn't even speak.

I couldn't move. I couldn't look up at him.

Until I felt it.

The slow build.

The rush beneath my skin.

The way my heart pounded harder—but not because I was scared of what he might do to me.

The lecture our Moon Biology teacher discussed echoed in my ears.

The...heat.

And then he touched me.

Fingers brushing against my chin.

And then gripping it.

He forced my gaze upward.

His eyes were sharper than blades, glowing faintly under the evening light.

Unreadable. Unforgiving.

I couldn't breathe.

I couldn't hide.

He smirked.

"Oh really?" he said, voice low and cruel. "An activity, you say? The kind where you wait outside a door... pacing, trembling, biting your nails—worried for that alpha boy?"



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