

Chapter 32: I Chose You

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The flames crackled softly in the silence, casting flickering shadows across the cave walls.

Darius didn't answer me.

He just stopped what he was doing and stared at me.

The firelight danced in his golden eyes, intense, unreadable, and sharp enough to make me forget how to breathe.

I swallowed hard.

Why wasn't he saying anything?

Right. Because that was an absurd question. Of course, we hadn't met before.

It was just a dream, Elira.

Still, he kept staring as if he, too, was lost in thought.

Why did it feel like the whole world stopped spinning under that gaze?

His presence was like gravity—heavy, consuming, impossible to ignore.

When he looked at me like that, it felt like he could see everything. Like he could tear the truth out of me without lifting a finger.

And still, I couldn't look away.

Then I remembered Sorin's words again.

Make him fall for you.

If I really was cursed, I'd be free if Darius became affected by it.

But just thinking it might happen... my stomach twisted, and it felt like something was squeezing my heart.

No. That won't happen, Elira.

He wouldn't fall for you.

Don't even think about that.

He's Darius Vane, the Lycan King. You're just a weak omega forced into his world.

He doesn't want you.

But...

Just to be safe.

For him to be safe...

Keep your distance. He's Queen Selene's son, who treated you like a daughter.

And despite every harsh word and action... he still came back for you.

He still saved you.

So... don't go near him. Not more than necessary.

But how can I?

How can I stay away when I can't even stop watching him when every move he makes draws me in like a magnet?

When I'm scared to be left alone? When holding him felt like salvation?

I barely noticed when he started walking toward me again.

He stopped in front of me.

And crouched.

His face was close now, lit by firelight and shadow. His brow was drawn, his expression unreadable. The scent of rain still clung to him.

He didn't look angry anymore.

He looked... curious.

His voice broke the silence.

Low. Calm. Dangerous.

"What did you ask?"

He was too close. Too close.

I bit my lip and finally found the strength to look away. "N-nothing."

"Repeat it."

His voice was firmer now, deeper.

"I said forget it—"

"Say it, Elira."

I snapped my head toward him, frustration bubbling in my throat

before I could stop it. "You already heard it! I'm sure of that! Why do you want me to repeat it?"

The words came out sharper than I intended.

Too sharp.

And the moment they echoed off the cave walls, I gasped—realizing what I'd done.

I screamed at Darius.

At him.

I stared at him, horrified, as the weight of my outburst sank in.

Mood swings. Irritability. Uncontrollable emotions.

Some of the side effects of the suppressant medicine Damon warned me about.

Why am I even surprised?

I'm unlucky. Of course, I'd be no exception to the side effects.

My hands trembled as I bit my lip and hugged myself tightly. The cold seeped deeper into my skin, or maybe it was just my body giving up.

I was shaking again.

"I-I'm sorry, I—"

But I never finished.

Because suddenly... Darius laughed.

I froze.

He laughed.

Not a scoff. Not a condescending smirk. Not that cold amusement I'd seen in him before.

But a genuine, unexpected laugh.

Low, husky, and almost... amused.

I blinked at him, my mind blank.

Was this another side effect?

Was I hallucinating?

Because Darius Vane, the ruthless Lycan King, was laughing. At me. Or

... maybe because of me.

And I had absolutely no idea what to do with that.

But... maybe I was just hallucinating.

Because the laugh was gone now. Like it never happened.

Darius had already straightened up, his expression unreadable again. He cleared his throat, brushing his wet hair back from his forehead.

"You have the guts to scream at me now, hmm?" he said, voice quiet but edged with something that sounded suspiciously like amusement.

I didn't answer.

Because right at that moment, my stomach growled.

Loudly.

I winced and wrapped my arms around my middle, trying to pretend it didn't just happen.

Great.

I was cold. I was injured. And now I was also starving.

Darius shifted, and I immediately tensed.

He moved closer, too close, and I gasped. "W-What are you going to do?"

My heart thundered in my chest.

He leaned in slightly, and the heat from his body cut through the cold like fire. My breath caught when his scent hit me.

I bit my lip hard.

Do not sniff him, Elira. Don't be weird.

He pulled back when I thought I might lose whatever self-control I had left.

And in his hand... was a chocolate bar. One he clearly pulled from inside his coat.

My eyes widened, focusing on it like a child spotting treasure.

He held it out casually. "Take it. Before you pass out and I'm forced to carry your sorry self all the way back."

I stared at it like it was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen.

I reached out and took the chocolate bar from his hand, but when my

fingers curled around it, a sharp sting sliced through my palm.

"Ah—!" I winced and dropped it instantly.

My hands.

The numbness was gone now, probably washed away by the cold rain ... and raw pain bloomed like fire in its place.

Tiny cuts, bruises, bark-scraped skin, my fingers were trembling again, and I couldn't stop them.

Embarrassed, I was about to reach for the chocolate again when Darius knelt beside me and picked it up first.

He raised an eyebrow, unwrapping the bar slowly like I was some pathetic creature who couldn't even manage that simple task.

"Tch," he scoffed under his breath, inspecting the chocolate.

"You're unbelievable," he muttered, peeling the wrapper with sharp, annoyed fingers. "Why did you even push yourself into this test like you're some warrior?"

He glanced at me, cold and irritated. "Now look at you. Pathetic. Injured. Freezing. Shaking."

"Why?" he pressed. "You know your limits. You should know when to stop."

"B-but... isn't this what you want?" I said quietly, unable to stop the words. "To make me suffer?"

He froze for a second, then exhaled a sharp breath. But he didn't argue. He just went back to unwrapping the chocolate.

"Right," he muttered.

And then, to my surprise, he held the chocolate to my lips.

I blinked at him.

"Eat," he said flatly, not even meeting my eyes, like feeding me was just another chore he had no patience for.

When I didn't move, his eyes narrowed. "Don't make me repeat myself, Elira."

I swallowed and leaned forward, biting off a piece. The warmth and sweetness almost made me sigh in relief.

He kept feeding me in silence.

"What did you even gain from this test?" he asked, voice low.

"The f-flag," I murmured after swallowing. "I made it. But... I still failed. I didn't make it back before sunset."

He didn't respond, just broke off another piece and brought it to my mouth.

"Though I didn't get there alone," I admitted, my voice small. "Lucan helped me. I was supposed to—"

"A help from what?" he snapped, his tone suddenly sharp.

I froze, my heart thudding as I met his gaze.

His eyes were burning again, just like when he accused me of being involved with Cassiel, or when I stood between him and Kael.

"I'm asking you, Elira."

"L-Lucan," I whispered. "He found me at the falls. He... he carried me across. That's how I got the flag."

Darius's hand froze mid-air with the last piece of chocolate.

Then, without warning, he tossed it aside. The half-wrapped bar landed near the fire with a soft thud against stone.

I blinked, staring at it.

I'd eaten almost all of it... but I still wanted the last bite. I shifted forward, reaching out with my sore hand—

Pain shot up my arm.

I gasped.

Darius had grabbed my wrist roughly and tightly, his fingers wrapped around the bruised skin like iron.

"D-Darius... it hurts," I whispered, flinching.

His grip didn't loosen.

He wasn't looking at my hand.

He was looking at me.

Or, more specifically—through me.

His golden eyes were storming now, darker than they'd been even

during the rain and colder than anything I'd felt tonight.

"You let him touch you?" His voice was quiet, low and edged like a blade barely pressed against the skin.

"H-he carried me all of a sudden—"

His jaw tightened, silencing me instantly, the muscles twitching as if holding back something sharper, worse than words.

His gaze dropped to where his hand held my wrist, and he suddenly let go as if the contact disgusted him.

"Tch. I should've known," he muttered, standing up, towering above me now. "Of course you'd just let the first wolf who shows you a little mercy carry you around like you're his mate."

"That's not what happened—"

"Spare me. I know who you are," he cut in coldly. "You're a liability. Weak. Broken."

His words landed like rocks—hard, fast, and unfair.

But I didn't speak.

I couldn't speak.

Because deep down... a part of me believed him.

"Next time you feel like being a damsel in distress," he added, turning slightly toward the shadows beyond the fire, "at least choose someone who isn't my brother."

His voice dropped lower. Colder.

"Someone not from my pack. Someone I could k*ll without hesitation. Because a cursed omega like you..."

He paused, glaring down at me.

"...isn't even worth spilling the blood of my own people."

Just like me.

His words struck deeper than any wound I carried.

Not even worth spilling blood for.

I stared at him, frozen.

The warmth of the fire didn't reach me anymore. It was like ice filled my

lungs, pressing against my chest, making it hard to breathe.

I slowly looked down, blinking rapidly.

"You're right. I'm cursed. A liability, weak... so why don't you just let go of me, Darius? You hate my existence. You despise me. So why don't you just—"

"You don't order me."

His voice cracked through the cave like thunder.

Sharp. Final.

I flinched as he crouched down and grabbed my chin.

His grip tightened for a second before he forced himself to let go, fingers curling into a fist at his side.

"I still chose you, Elira," he said through clenched teeth, his jaw tight and restrained. "Not because I wanted to. But because I had no other choice."

He looked away, but his following words hit harder than anything else.

"You were the safest option."

My breath caught.

He turned his eyes back to mine. There was something bitter in them.

Not anger. Not hate.

Something worse.

"You're the one I wouldn't dare fall for."

"B-because I'm cursed? A cursed omega who's perfect to use... p-perfect to break?"

He didn't say a word.

He just looked at me with that cold expression still carved into his face.

Then, he turned his back to me.

Leaving me alone.