

Chapter 33: His Warmth

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I didn't move.

I just watched Darius walk away.

His broad back disappeared into the shadows near the mouth of the cave.

The fire crackled behind me, but the warmth felt too far away.

This time, I didn't beg him not to leave me alone.

I only watched, unmoving, as the silence stretched between us.

And then, without meaning to... I smiled.

A bitter, hollow smile.

It didn't reach my eyes. It never does.

My vision turned blurry, the tears finally building behind my eyes again. I could taste them in my throat.

"This is better," I whispered, my voice barely a breath. "This is what I want. Thank you for saying that."

I brought my knees to my chest and wrapped my arms tightly around them, burying my face in the space between.

"Go on, Darius," I murmured, "don't dare fall for someone like me. Because I don't want anyone to get hurt because of me..."

I closed my eyes.

And everything just... ached.

It wasn't just my hands or my ankle anymore.

It was inside me. In places, I didn't even have names for.

I tried to breathe, but each breath felt heavier than the last.

Because I've seen it.

I've lived it.

Everyone who ever got too close to me either suffered... or disappeared.

My mother.

My brother.

My grandmother.

Gone.

So maybe it's better this way.

Let him hate me if that's what keeps him safe.

Because if he ever cared... truly cared...

I wouldn't know how to protect him from myself.

What?

A thought snuck in, one I didn't expect. One that made my chest clench tighter than any pain I'd endured in the last few days.

Do I care for him?

My eyes opened slowly, the firelight flickering across the cave walls, shadows dancing like they were mocking me.

I blinked.

I stared down at the dirt floor, and the echo of that question wouldn't leave me.

Do I care for Darius Vane?

Is Kael right in his accusation?

That I had fallen...

I felt my heart skip.

Is that what he saw in me when I was with Darius?

How?

How did that even happen?

Darius Vane insults me.

Punishes me.

Makes me cry.

But... then, he defended me from Lorelei.

He found me.

He saved me.

He gave me warmth.

He fed me.

And... even now, while the tears cling to the corners of my eyes and my hands are raw and burning, I feel safer because he's still near.

I pressed my forehead harder into my knees.

I hugged my body tighter, trembling with every breath I took.

My wet clothes clung to my skin like ice, and the chill had already sunk into my bones. My fingers were numb again. My lips were trembling.

I closed my eyes and tried to quiet my thoughts, but I heard it.

Footsteps.

Steady. Heavy. Familiar.

My head snapped up.

He was back. He didn't leave me.

Darius.

He stood just inside the cave's entrance, shoulders drenched from the rain, his coat still soaked, and eyes glowing like molten gold in the firelight.

"W-Why did you—" I started voice cracking.

"Strip."

I blinked. "W-What?"

He stepped closer, water dripping from his hair, his voice low and firm. "Strip off your clothes. You're freezing, Elira. You need to get warm before your body shuts down."

I stared at him, unsure if I heard him right. "But—"

"I told you, I won't let you escape from me."

I quickly looked away as he removed his shirt.

"I'm going to keep you alive."

His voice wasn't tender. It never was.

But it wasn't cruel either.

He knelt in front of me. "You're soaked through. Your body can't regulate its heat like this. Take it off. Now."

He removed the coat that was still draped over my shoulders. "What?"

Do you want me to strip those off myself?"

I shook my head. My hands trembled as I slowly removed my clothes. I averted my gaze, heat flooding my cheeks, not from embarrassment but from something else I couldn't name.

I managed to peel the fabric away, teeth chattering, my breath coming in shallow bursts.

Darius said nothing as he shrugged off the rest of his wet clothes. Then, without giving me a chance to hesitate further, he sat behind me, legs on either side of mine, and pulled me gently but firmly into his chest.

I froze.

His warmth hit me instantly like fire.

Skin to skin, his bare chest pressed against my back, his arms wrapping around me like iron.

I gasped—more from the shock of the sudden heat than anything else.

His voice, low and near my ear, "Breathe."

I tried.

I did.

And slowly... my shivering began to ease.

I didn't know how long we stayed like that.

But the shivering... had stopped.

Darius's warmth seeped into every inch of me, it made me feel alive. His bare chest pressed against my back, his strong arms locked around me with quiet force.

I stiffened, afraid to move.

Afraid he'd pull away if I did.

Or worse... get mad again.

He hadn't said anything since he told me to breathe.

Maybe he was still angry.

Right, he still is.

And he's only doing this for his punishment to me. To keep me alive.

Making sure I didn't die like some pathetic, cursed omega who couldn't even survive a storm.

Fine.

Let it be punishment, then.

Because it was the most comforting punishment I'd ever had.

My lashes fluttered shut as I let my weight settle against him. The fire still crackled a few feet away, but I no longer needed it. His body was enough to keep the cold away.

I felt like I could sleep.

But then—

A breath.

Deep.

Inhale.

His scent.

And something inside me... shifted.

The warmth that had filled my body began to change.

It deepened.

A slow ache bloomed in my stomach and spread tight, hot, and desperate through my limbs. My breath hitched before I could stop it.

No.

Not now.

I felt it.

The one Damon warned me about.

The craving. The feeling of wanting someone to touch me.

I clenched my fists, digging my nails into my thighs.

No. No. Not now. Please.

I bit my lip hard, willing the sensation to go away. But it didn't.

It pulsed through me, growing stronger with each passing second, fed by his warmth, closeness, and the way his skin touched mine.

I squeezed my eyes shut and tried to focus on anything else.

And then, I remembered.

My medicines.

It's time for me to take it.

My jacket.

Where is my jacket?

I'd shoved the bottle in the inner pocket, I remember.

I need it now.

I need to stop this before it—

My body betrayed me again, arching slightly toward the warmth behind me.

No.

I shut my eyes tighter, jaw clenched. My breathing quickened, but I stayed still, fighting the urge to lean into him further, to ask for something I didn't even want to admit I needed.

I need that bottle.

Now.

Without a word, I reached one trembling arm toward my jacket that I had removed.

"Elira?" came Darius's low voice behind me, heavy with something unreadable.

I froze mid-reach.

My hand inches from the fabric.

"I... I need my jacket," I whispered, voice cracking with effort.

He didn't move.

I didn't say anything at first.

Then, finally, he asked, "Why?"

"I-it's time," I said, barely audible. "For my... medicine."

I turned slightly, trying not to move too much against him. "My jacket," I mumbled. "I—I put it in the pocket."

Darius let out a low growl behind me, and I stiffened.

Something hard pressed against my back.

He felt it, too.

And... he was being affected.

"Your scent," he muttered, voice ragged and guttural. "F*ck."

He moved fast, reaching past me to grab the damp jacket. His hands tore through the pockets.

"Where is it?" he snapped.

"In the pocket, r-right inside!" I stuttered.

But there was nothing.

No bottle.

Only soaked fabric and scattered leaves.

Darius cursed, tossing the jacket aside. "It's not here."

Panic clawed up my throat.

"It must've fallen... on the way—"

"This is f*cking dangerous," he growled.

He stood and took a few steps away, dragging a hand through his wet hair, every muscle in his back tense.

"It's okay. Just go," I whispered, trying to breathe, gripping my knees tightly. "Leave me here. I'll be fine—"

"Shut up."

His voice cracked like a whip.

I flinched.

He turned fast and stalked back to me, eyes burning molten gold, his breath heavy.

"This is your fault," he hissed. "For being careless."

I know, so leave now, Darius.

But before I could say those words...

In one swift motion, he grabbed me, pulled me up, and onto his lap, my legs straddling him before I could protest.

"D-Darius—"

His mouth crashed into mine.

Hard. Desperate. Consuming.

I gasped into the kiss, my fingers fisting into his shoulders, my mind blank from the overwhelming rush of heat, scent, and need.

This wasn't my first kiss.

Kael had already claimed long ago when I believed affection could be safe.

Back when I thought someone like me could belong somewhere.

But this—

This kiss with Darius?

It was nothing like that.

His lips were fierce, hot, commanding, raw with restrained desire, and something deeper I couldn't name. There was no hesitation. No gentleness.

Just fire.

Burning. Consuming.

He kissed me like he was furious.

Like he hated me for making him feel anything at all.

And...

I kissed him back.

My fingers curled against his bare chest, nails digging slightly into his skin as I tried to ground myself. But there was no ground.

Only him. Only this.

The heat between us roared louder than the storm outside.

When his tongue slid against mine, I gasped, a sound he swallowed eagerly, one hand tangling in my hair while the other gripped my waist, keeping me pressed tight against him.

I could feel everything.

Every taut muscle. Every breath. Every tremble he tried so hard to hide.

His scent was everywhere.

Inside me.

Around me.

Sinking into my skin.

The ache twisted deep in my stomach, the craving burning brighter than ever. My head spun. My lips burned.

I wanted him.

I craved him.

His touch. His heat. His body.

His kisses traveled down to my neck, his grip tightening on my waist like he was trying to control himself from doing more than kissing and licking my skin.

He sucked my neck, and I cried out when the heat spiked again, it was sharp, searing, desperate.

"D-Darius..." I whimpered, begging for something I couldn't name.

He growled when I moved on top of him, and I felt the hard length of him press between my thighs.

"F*ck, Elira!"

I flinched when his hands grabbed my waist. I thought he'd stop me—stop me from moving, from grinding on him.

But instead... he guided me.

His mouth returned to my skin, kissing down my neck to the edge of my chest, and all I could do was hold on, melting, trembling, burning under his touch.



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