

Chapter 38: The One That Burns

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DARIUS

The cold water hit me like ice knives.

I stood, head bowed, under the shower, letting it crash against my skin. It did little to numb the heat crawling beneath it.

But I needed to feel something else. Anything else.

I dragged a hand down my face, water dripping from my hair, clinging to my lashes, tracing every scar on my body. My jaw clenched hard.

That wasn't pain earlier.

Not sickness.

I was just in heat.

And gods, the moment she touched me... that was enough to wake it fully.

I bit down a quiet laugh—a harsh sound caught between bitterness and amusement.

She really was something else.

That omega—Elira.

So fragile. So soft. So stupidly kind.

And yet, her scent didn't overwhelm me the way others did. It didn't drive me to madness the way it should have. No. It pulled me in slowly. Methodically. Like it knew I'd come willingly, without force.

A perfect fit.

Not a fated mate.

But a perfect tool.

And in the cave...

My fingers curled against the cool tile.

I remembered the way she gasped beneath me, the way her body responded—hot, pliant, desperate. And I hadn't even marked her. Hadn't claimed her. Hadn't taken her.

Still... she brought me release.

Without giving everything.

Without binding herself to me.

My head dropped back against the cold wall. Steam was already rising in the space, fogging the mirror, but I didn't turn off the freezing water. I needed the chill. I needed to think.

But the memory of her—pressed against me, whispering my name, looking at me with those wide, hurt eyes—flooded back too fast, too strong.

I gritted my teeth.

Dammit.

That girl was dangerous in a way no enemy had ever been.

Not because of power.

Because of how she looked at me like I was still something good.

I exhaled sharply.

I'm not.

And she'll learn that.

They all do.

But not yet.

For now... she stays.

Because my instincts were quiet around her for the first time in years. No burning rage. No urge to lash out or tear apart. Only this unbearable, coiling need I could still control.

Barely.

She'll help me maintain that control.

Even if she doesn't know it.

Even if it kills her kindness in the process.

My hand moved down my chest, slow and purposeful.

Lower.

Until I wrapped it around the source of all this f*cking frustration.

I bit down a growl as I started to stroke, the images of her writhing in my lap playing behind my eyelids like a cruel movie.

Her thighs were trembling.

Her lips were swollen.

Her breath broke on my name.

"Elira," I hissed, breath sharp.

Pleasure built fast.

Hot. Blinding. Just enough to tear the edge off.

I came with a snarl, forehead pressed to the cold tile, my body shuddering as the water washed it all away.

But even after it was over—

I still felt it.

The hunger.

The pull.

The f*cking fire that wouldn't go out.

I couldn't believe that I would resort to touching myself.

But at least I wasn't burning that much.

I stepped out of the bathroom, water still dripping from my hair, a black robe slung over my body—half-tied, loose. My skin steamed against the air of the room, but it wasn't the temperature that made me pause.

It was the girl sleeping in my bed.

Elira.

She lay curled beneath the sheets I'd dragged over her earlier. Chest rising and falling in that slow, trusting rhythm only the deeply exhausted—or the deeply foolish—could manage in a place like this.

In my room.

And still, she slept.

You even had the guts to sleep here after I released my scent on you?
You're really something else, Elira.

I stood there, arms crossed, watching her.

My mother was right.

She's beautiful.

Not in the way most nobles are, polished and sharp-edged. Elira was raw softness—natural, unguarded. Even in her sleep, there was something striking about her. Lips slightly parted. Hair splayed like a dark halo on my pillow.

She looked like someone who didn't belong in this world.

Especially not in mine.

I took a step forward.

Then another.

The closer I got, the more I felt it again—that quiet hum deep in my chest. It wasn't pain. Not like before.

It was warmth.

And when I pressed a hand lightly against my chest—over my heart—I let out a quiet, almost disbelieving laugh.

Still no ache.

Just her.

She doesn't hurt me.

I knew it. I knew she wouldn't be the one to break me. That even if I took her—used her—my heart wouldn't shatter like it did before.

She's not capable of making me fall.

Of making this Kingdom fall.

A perfect omega.

Predictable. Safe.

I reached out, fingers brushing a strand of hair from her cheek. Her skin was warm. Soft. Too soft for this cruel place.

My hand hovered, about to touch her face again, to trace the shape of her mouth—but then—

I stopped.

Because I felt it.

A shift in the air.

The weight of someone approaching.

Uninvited.

Unwanted.

I turned sharply, eyes narrowing, and my growl rolled through the room like thunder. Low. Dangerous. A warning.

Lucan.

Of course, it's him.

That bastard and his damn timing.

I straightened, jaw clenched, stepping away from the bed and toward the door, my body blocking Elira from view.

The door hadn't opened yet, but I could hear his footsteps.

Too loud.

Too smug.

He was too curious for his own good.

I didn't care what excuse he had this time.

I would tear it apart.

And if he so much as looked at the omega sleeping in my bed—

He'd quickly learn that my restraint only extended so far.

I opened the door before Lucan had the chance to knock.

There he stood, grinning like the damn idiot he always was, holding up a tray with one hand—a dark bottle of aged liquor and two glasses clinking faintly with ice.

"Figures you'd be needing this—"

"Get out."

I didn't yell.

I didn't need to.

My voice was low, sharp, and edged with enough warning to make most people freeze on the spot.

But this was Lucan.

Lucan, who barely flinched.

He raised his hands in mock surrender and set the tray on the console

beside the door. "I'm already out, brother. See?" He gestured to the hallway with a smirk. "Standing right here. Outside. Completely innocent."

He was about to lean in—his eyes flickering past me, no doubt trying to get a glimpse of the bed behind me.

I moved without hesitation, blocking the doorway with my body.

"Don't you dare."

Lucan blinked, then laughed under his breath. "Woah. I don't remember you being this possessive before. Especially not over an omega you were forced to marry."

My jaw locked.

He always did know how to twist words, but this wasn't a joke. Not tonight.

I stepped closer, enough for him to see the tension in my shoulders, the threat in my eyes.

"Shut up and go," I said, voice quieter now, deadlier, "before I do something I won't regret."

Lucan paused.

That grin of his faltered for just a breath.

Then he held up both hands again, backing off a step.

"Alright, alright," he said. "Message received, Your Majesty."

He turned, started walking, then tossed a glance over his shoulder. "But for the record... if she ends up being the one who kills you, I'll be the first to say 'I told you so.'"

He took two more steps, then stopped, adding with a smug tilt of his head, "You don't even see it, do you?"

I didn't answer, just narrowed my eyes at him.

"She's crashing through your walls, Darius. The ones you've spent years building after that...incident. And the worst part?" He chuckled softly. "You're letting her. You think you're in control, but you're not. She'll ruin you, piece by piece."

My grip on the doorknob tightened.

"It won't happen," I said flatly.

"Oh really?" Lucan arched a brow. "Says the Alpha who released his scent on her like a warning to every male in the building."

I said nothing, my jaw clenched.

Lucan stepped back, smirking. "You're being possessive—and you can't even stand the idea that someone else might like her. That someone else might take her."

"You think she's just a tool," he added, turning fully now, "but you forgot the danger of using fire to keep warm. Sooner or later, you will get burned, brother."



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