

## Chapter 63

"What's the next class?" I asked, changing the subject. Darius eyed me suspiciously, and Kalen stared at me. His eyes were more around my body than on me, so I knew he was assessing my aura, making me nervous as to what he was seeing. I was careful not to let it touch my lighter side, but I wasn't sure exactly how auras worked. I could feel them but not see them the way he did.

"You have a theory class with Darius," Lycus said, oblivious to the strange questioning tension surrounding us.

"Come on, we will be late," Darius said though the look on his face never changed; I reluctantly followed him to the classroom.

When Kalen wandered into the room with me, I stopped and looked at him.

"Darius said I could join you," he smiled, bumping my shoulder and pointing to a desk by Darius's. With a sigh, I pulled the chair out and sat in it. Kalen sitting beside me.

The lecture was boring, and I felt extremely exhausted and heavy. Kalen nudged me halfway through. "You okay?" he whispered, and I nodded, feeling sluggish. Only a few minutes after he asked, my stomach cramped and twisted painfully. Forgetting about the shredding with my excitement of being trusted with magic earlier, it wasn't until I felt my underwear dampen that I gasped.

Moving my legs, I hoped I imagined it. When I did, horror washed over me, and I glanced down at my jeans to find a small red stain on my inner thigh. Glancing around the room, everyone was deep into discussing whatever the heck Darius was talking about. Sweat began to bead on the back of my neck as the cramping got worse, and I felt nauseous.

My chair screeched as I slid it back before running from the room.

"Aleera?" Darius snapped, but I didn't stop; instead, I took off, wanting to get back to my old room. Please, please, please, I prayed before I felt my pants become saturated. The sounds of people walking in my direction had me rush into the first bathroom I came across.

I bolted into the cubicle, locked the door, and dread filled me. How did I forget? Looking down, I felt the blood drain from my face when I found my pants completely soaked; I could feel blood trailing down my legs and filling my shoes.

6 years I had put off the shredding, and now I know why they say not to, but I had no choice. However, I was regretting that now, as my feet became slippery on the tiled floor, it was like 6 years of shredding came at once.

I looked like I was bleeding to death, my blue jeans now soaked red; frantically, I started ripping toilet paper out of the holder, trying to clean it up. It was no use, and I was mortified. How would I get back to my room, and what happens tomorrow when it's over, and I start

shredding my nonexistent power?

Trying to see through my blurred vision from the bloody tears I was shedding, I tried to clean the mess I was making, the tiles beneath me pooling with blood. My tears made the mess worse. It was another side-effect of shredding; our tear ducts changed. Our entire body changed for the shredding. Even my tears had turned to blood.

Giving up, I sat on the toilet, I had no idea how long I was in there, but I couldn't bring myself to open the door and have everyone see me like this. It wasn't bad enough that I was tormented daily and now had to be tortured over something I had no control over. Shame washed through me.

"She hasn't run, she wouldn't, Darius," I heard Kalen tell Darius as I heard everyone in the halls outside the bathroom searching for me. My face heated at the idea of them finding me in this state. Yet I was in too much pain and too embarrassed to ask for their help.

I wiped my bloody tears; I knew I was smearing blood over my face, but what else could I do? The tears wouldn't stop just like the damn shredding wouldn't. My stomach felt like it was twisting in knots. I would be stuck like this for at least the next 24 hours, although I wasn't sure since I had avoided this for 6 years on the run, and if this was anything to go off maybe, it would last longer.

"Fucking find her," I heard Darius scream angrily at someone before hearing Tobias's voice, and my stomach dropped. "Can anyone else smell blood?" he asked. Darius's yelling was cut off. I listened to the bathroom door jiggle. My heart beat frantically in my ears as it was pushed open.

I stood up trying to find an escape but found none when I heard it creak open all the way. I held my hand on the cubicle door.

Tobias growled, and the sound was more like a savage beast. "Get him out," Darius snapped at someone.

"Is she hurt?" I heard Kalen ask before my cheeks flamed when I heard one of them sniff the air.

"Aleera, I know you're in here. Open the fucking door; you don't just run out of my class," Darius growled.

"I said get him out!" Darius roared; I heard a struggle before Lycus growled, and I heard the door shut as Lycus, pushing who I am assuming is Tobias out the door,

My lip quivered, my vision blurred worse, and had tinged red. "Aleera, open the door," Darius snarled, pulling on the door handle. A sob tore out of me as I panicked, looking between the gap that went to the next cubicle over, but I was not going to fit through it.

Darius growled before kicking the door. It flew inwards, and I screamed at the bang before dropping down and trying to cover myself. Blood coated the floor and me, my hands covered in it from trying to clean it up, and Darius gasped. Yet I couldn't even look up to meet his gaze



far too embarrassed.

"Is she alright? What is it?" Kalen asked. I looked up to see Darius just staring at me before looking over his shoulder at Kalen, who I couldn't see.

"She is fine. Just go," Darius told him.

"What?" Kalen asked.

"I said go, go check on Tobias," Darius told him.

"What, no, Aleera?" Kalen stepped closer, coming into view. He gasped as he peered into the cubicle. Darius growled at him, but Kalen pushed past him before reaching for me. I pulled my bloody hand away from him when he tried to grab it. Kalen looked over his shoulder at Darius, and I swallowed at the pitiful look they both gave me.

"Find her some fresh clothes," Darius murmured, putting his hand on Kalen's shoulder, who didn't look like he knew what to do. Hell, I didn't even know, and it was my body. Kalen nodded before rushing off.

Darius crouched down, and I looked away from him. "This is why you wanted the devil's bane. You weren't running, were you?" Darius asked. I swallowed and nodded, and he sighed.

"Come on, let's get you cleaned up," he murmured, and I looked at him, horrified at the thought of stepping out of this cubicle.

"I am not going out there. They will see me," I panicked before pressing my face into my knees. However, the tears wouldn't stop making this already gory scene worse.

Darius moved beside me before I felt his hand smooth down the back of my hair. Never in all my life have I ever been so embarrassed. I am just glad this didn't happen in the mess hall; I thought that was the most embarrassing thing I would face, oh how wrong I was. Darius sighed when I felt arms go underneath my legs and behind my back, making me jump and try to move away from him.

"Stop, don't. I'm bleeding all over you," I cried, flustered. Darius ignored me and just scooped me up off the floor. "It's just blood; I'm not squeamish," Darius murmured, pressing his face into my neck.

I looked at the mess on the floor, knowing someone would see it when I felt his skin heat. He moved his fingers, the tiles catching on fire and the blood staining it evaporated and burning off the tiles before I felt the room shudder. He turned, stepping through a portal and into the bathroom attached to our rooms. He sat me on the edge of the bathtub before turning toward the shower, just as Kalen suddenly rushed in with towels and clothes before coming over to me. He cupped my face in his hands.

"It's fine, nothing to be embarrassed about," he whispered before kissing my forehead when I noticed Darius started stripping his clothes off. Kalen glanced out over to him, and he bit his lip.

"Find some feminine products. Surely we have something here she can use until I can take her in town," Darius said.

Though I doubted that. What purpose would an army of men have with feminine products? Kalen rushed out and shut the door while I peered over at Darius, who stood with his briefs drenched in my blood.

Darius tested the water temperature with his hand before walking over to me; he stopped in front of me before gripping my arms and pulling me to my feet. My face heated, my skin was prickling with heat, and my stomach cramped. I hunched forward slightly, the pain unbearable when Darius started undoing my pants' button and zip. I grabbed his hand.

"Don't, this is embarrassing enough," I muttered, but he shook my hand off his ignoring me, and I was forced to grab his shoulder when he shoved my pants down that were sticking to my skin. I hissed, feeling like I was suddenly waxed.

"Sorry," Darius murmured before gripping my panties and tugging them down. I stepped out of them, looking anywhere but at him, wishing the ground would open up and swallow me whole.

I removed my top coated in blood from crying when I felt Darius undo the zip in the middle of my sports bra, making me quickly clutch the front closed.

"Seriously, I have already seen them, just like the rest of you," he says. I sighed before turning and tugging my arms out of it. Darius moved toward the shower and motioned for me to get in.

I stepped into the shower, the warm water helped, and the floor turned red as my humiliation washed down the drain along with any dignity I had left. Darius stepped in behind me and moved the shower head higher, so it sprayed toward the wall near the seating piece before sitting down on the shower recess.

He gripped my wrist, tugging me onto his lap. I tried to get off him, but he wrapped his arm around my waist, holding me in place before reaching for the soap. My stomach cramping made me squirm when I felt his hand heat against my stomach. The extra heat helped, and I leaned against him.

"You should have reminded us of the shredding. Why didn't you say anything? I would have made sure we had feminine products."

"I was going to stop it; that's why I wanted the devil's bane,"

"That's how you managed while running?" I nodded, and my body tensed as pain rippled through me, and he pushed harder on my stomach, his hand heating more.

"I will take you in town once we find something to tide you over," Darius murmurs behind me. Blood trailed down his legs from me sitting on his lap, my eyes moving to the steady stream, and I tried to wash it off when he grabbed my hand, tugging it back onto my lap.

"It's fine Aleera, it's not the first time I have been covered in blood," I shuddered at the



memory of the exploded demons and gory bloody limbs from the mess hall when he tore apart Zac and his friends for their wandering hands. The door opens up and Lycus and Kalen come in holding fistfuls full of cotton buds and medical supplies.

“Really Kalen, a band-aid?” Darius asked, and Lycus nudged him.

“I found a wound dressing?” Lycus said, holding it up and Darius growled at him while shaking his head.

“Find a face washer or something. What the heck is she going to do with a band-aid?” Darius said while I was too busy staring at the wall. It was sweet that they were trying to help, but they just made an already awkward situation more embarrassing.

“Out, you are both bloody useless. Where is Tobias?”

“In the room, trying not to come in here and gobble her up,” Kalen snickered.

“Out, both of you, and get my car ready,” Darius told Lycus, who nodded.

“You’re driving into the town?”

“Yes, now go,” Darius hissed them, and they both left.

“Do you want to come with me? I am not really sure about buying tampons, wait do you use tampons or,” he shakes his head, obviously finding this topic of conversation just as awkward.

“Ah, no, I have never shredded before,” I tell him, my face heating at this discussion.

“Well, we can both be as clueless together then,”

## Chapter 64

Eventually, the pain rippling through me eased enough that I could stand without wanting to double over. Darius quickly washed while I grabbed my towel. Despite being mortified at the situation I found myself in, Darius didn't seem horrified like I would have expected.

He wrapped a towel around his waist before removing his briefs underneath and tossing them in the washing hamper. Kalen had set out some clothes for me on the counter, and I moved toward them while Darius looked below the counter. Rummaging around before pulling out a face washer. He tore it in half before folding it.

"Not ideal, but will do until I can get you in town. Or maybe rolled up toilet paper?" He said, holding up the torn face washer. I nodded, my cheeks flaming. But hey, at least he is resourceful.

"Get changed; I will meet you in the room," he said before walking out.

It felt like I was wearing a diaper. I was paranoid that I looked like I was walking like a cowboy who spent the last week riding bareback across the country. Yet it worked and held in place, but I definitely wouldn't be doing any strenuous exercise with this thing stuck between my legs.

Opening the door, I froze. Tobias was sitting in the armchair by the fireplace. Ryze was on his chest, lying on his back while Tobias stroked his tummy feathers. His long tail feathers ran down his legs to the floor. <sup>5</sup>

"I'm fine, Aleera; you just caught me off guard. I won't hurt you," Tobias said. Ryze hearing him speak, rolled onto his tummy.

"I swear he thinks he is a lap cat," Tobias chuckled, and Ryze puffed out his feather before flying over to me and perching on my shoulder. He played with my hair using his beak and made a cooing noise. Lycus and Kalen were sitting on the bed just staring at Ryze while I scratched his feathers, and Darius walked out of the closet dressed in jeans and a black shirt. Ryze hissed at him as he drew closer, and Tobias chucked Darius a set of car keys.

"I don't get it. You have been our keeper for years and never went through a shredding." Kalen murmured. Darius stopped in his tracks and blinked at him before raising an eyebrow at him.

"I am male and technically not your keeper; she is," Darius said, pointing to me. Ryze snapped at his pointed finger and hissed at him while I tried not to giggle at Kalen's question.

"I'm checking," Lycus says, pulling out his phone while Kalen looks over his shoulder.

"You can't be that stupid. How many times in the last 6 years have you seen me bleeding every six months?" Darius said with a shake of his head.

"Well, it's roughly every six months when you lock us in the room and fuck us every which way from Sunday," Lycus said. <sup>1</sup>



"Ah, yeah, last time, I couldn't sit properly for a week," Kalen mumbled, earning a laugh from me. Tobias sniggered before appearing thoughtful.

"Huh, that is true; he does have a point," Tobias laughed. Darius shakes his head when Kalen pouts, looking over his shoulder, reading whatever Lycus is looking at.

"So it should only last a day, then you shred power, hmm. Did you know during the shredding power-shared can last a year and is at its strongest for the mates; it amplifies threefold?" Lycus tells us. I chewed the inside of my lip when Kalen spoke.

"Shouldn't you have been keeping track of that sort of stuff?" Kalen asked, and my face heated.

"She has never gone through it before. I was wrong the other day when I said she ran. Aleera was trying to find some devil's bane," Darius admitted rubbing his thumb across his lip and looking at me. Lycus nods before looking up at him. "Yes, it says here, the root, if brewed and ingested, will stop the shredding." His brows furrow before he continues. "Aleera, that stuff is still poisonous. It could have killed you if you drank too much and has severe side effects, like delirium, vomiting, hallucinations, and an entire list of them," Lycus says.

"Wait, she was looking for the devil's bane? Did we hear that right? Did Darius just admit he was wrong? Shit, get your phones. We need him to repeat that so we have evidence," Lycus taunted. Darius growled before walking over to me and stopping in front of me. Ryze hissed at him.

"Stop it; I am not hurting her. Now off so I can take her into town," Darius said, holding his arm out for Ryze to climb off. Ryze hisses, his long tongue snaking out and flicking at Darius's face, but I caress his tummy feathers. He turns his head, pressing his beak to my lips before climbing onto Darius's arm, which surprised me.

Darius gulped and walked very stiffly toward Tobias, where Ryze jumped off him and back onto Tobias's chest. Tobias huffed at his weight landing on him. At the same time, Ryze shook himself before rubbing his feathery head all over Tobias's shirt. When Tobias didn't scratch his feathers, he bit him, making Tobias hiss.

"Ok. bloody bird, I will scratch your damn tummy, roll over," Tobias hissed, rubbing the spot Ryze bit him. Darius shakes his head at Ryze before walking toward me.

"Even the bloody bird gets kissed before me," Lycus mumbles, making me look over at him. Darius growls at him before his eyes move to mine.

"Can you just kiss that idiot, so he stops pouting and getting jealous of a damn bird?" Darius growled.

"I don't want no sympathy kiss, Darius, fuck off," Lycus snarled at him, and Darius shrugged, unperturbed by Lycus' whining.

"Come on," Darius said, coming to take my elbow when Ryze shrieked, flying over to me

again.

"Bird, you can't come," Darius snapped at him.

"How come we don't just portal? Wouldn't it be quicker?" I asked him, trying to get Ryze to go back to Tobias.

"Quicker, yes, but we also need to grab a few things, and I am not a pack mule. Besides, we will need to try to keep our reserves strong for when you shred tomorrow," Darius answered. I gasped and took a step back.

"Pardon?" I asked, and Darius stopped looking over at me.

"You will need our power to shred, Aleera,"

"You will give me power?" I asked, and everyone stared at Darius, shocked. Darius said nothing, just looked between us all before raking his hand down his face.

"Can we just go?" Darius said. However, I now had something else to worry about. If Darius allowed me to shred. There was no way I would be able to hide what I am. That scared me the most. My mother always told me to keep what I am hidden, and shredding would be doing the opposite.

"Ryze, you can't come," Darius told him, and Ryze hissed at him, refusing to get off. I tried passing him to one of the others, but Lycus and Kalen nearly jumped out of their skin when I offered Ryze to them. Darius shook his head, and Tobias got up and walked over to me.

"Come, I will take him downstairs. He probably wants to go fly," Tobias said, following us out. Kalen and Lycus also followed but kept their distance from Ryze, who was quite antsy inside the castle. He flew off my shoulder and out of a window, and I sighed.

We made our way downstairs when I heard screeching, and my eyes widened. I took off running for the doors, missing a few steps in my haste as I raced down them.



## Chapter 65

Rushing through the doors, I could see Ryze perched in a tree, and two men stood below it trying to hit him with a fireball. I gasped in horror and went running over to stop them when Tobias came up behind me.

"You touch that fucking bird, and it will be the last thing you ever do," Tobias yelled to them, and they both stopped and looked over their shoulders at him. Tobias looked furious, and Darius wandered out.

"But it's a phoenix," one said.

"That bird is off-limits, now go," Darius snapped, coming up behind me while I raced over to the tree and looked up to see not only one but another higher up. It looked older, and I was surprised they didn't notice it amongst the orange-red leaves of the tree as it tried to blend in. Darius talked to the men, and Ryze flew down before Darius yelled out to me.

"Aleera, no!" he said, making me look over at him. Ryze dropped onto my shoulder, his weight knocking me forward onto my knees. My eyes went to my mates, who were all frozen. Ryze rubbed his head and beak onto the back of my head, checking to see if I was alright when suddenly the tree came to life.

What I thought were leaves were actually feathers when around 10 huge phoenix's suddenly dropped on the ground around me. Towering over me, and these weren't juvenile ones, they had the power to rip me to shreds and tear me apart if they chose to. Everyone froze as the birds surrounded me, and even I shook terrified when I saw all four of my mate's hands begin to glow. My eyes widened when I saw they were about to attack the birds. Horror washed over me at the danger I was in but also fear for these beautiful creatures.

Ryze playing with my hair squawked, and the birds backed up a little; I threw my hand up. "Stop!" I screamed to Darius as he went to blast them with magic. My heart beat like a drum in my ears, pounding loudly as I moved slowly.

"They won't hurt me," I called to them before slowly standing up, so I didn't spook the birds and make them attack me. I hoped what I said was true because I could see their curious gazes watching me. Phoenix's were lethal birds, and even standing one was nearly taller than me. The recruits that watched grew closer, and I could see the hunger on their faces to rip the birds apart and absorb their power. 2

"Don't let them hurt them," I murmured, watching the recruits grow nearer, and Darius glanced around, also noticing we had drawn a crowd. One of the Phoenix's turned its head, observing Ryze perched on my shoulder, his feathery tail wrapping around my body like a snake, and Ryze hissed at them.

I scratched his tummy feathers, and my breathing became ragged when one hopped closer, and Lycus moved when Kalén's head tilted to the side, observing me. His hand smacked into Lycus's chest. My hand shook as I held it out toward the phoenix, and the other ones drew

nearer.

The Pheonix tongue flicked out. I felt a jolt sliver up my arm making me jerk my hand back to realize it gave me power, a small jolt of its energy. My eyes widened, and I had never seen so many phoenixes in one place before when Kalen gasped. I could feel the bird's magic writhe through me and mingle with my white magic.

"They won't hurt her," Kalen murmured, his head tilting from one side to the other. Darius, Tobias, and Lycus looked at him as if he was insane. While my heart pounded, wondering what he saw when the Pheonix power exchanged with me. I swallowed, hoping he wouldn't out me to the rest of our mates who didn't notice the small exchange, but Kalen, I knew, would have seen it in my aura.

"Call them off, Darius," Kalen said, looking over at him.

"They will rip her to shreds," Darius hissed at them.

"I said call them off. I don't ask for much, Darius, but you will do this for me, for her. Call them off and tell them to leave her birds alone," Kalen growled, glaring at him.

"She can't keep them all," Darius hissed. Lycus paled as he too looked questionably at Kalen, who wasn't giving anything away.

"That isn't up to you. It's up to them. Now call your recruits off," Kalen repeated, and I had never seen him look so determined.

"Take them to the roof," I whispered to Ryze, who screeched at the other phoenix. The other Pheonix's all watched him, and some drew nearer trying to touch me, their feathers bumping against my legs when Ryze flew off my shoulder, and they took flight after him.

The demons went crazy, and power was suddenly hurled their way as they took to the air. I screamed when suddenly Tobias and Darius moved as if in sync and raised their hands. The fireballs smash into a shield beneath the birds.

"No one touches them," Roared Darius furiously at them. The demons stopped looking at him questionably.

"Anyone who does will suffer the same fate you bestow on those Phoenixes, are we clear?" Darius warned. I swallowed and looked toward the roof where the Pheonix's perched, watching us. Kalen rushed toward me, wrapping his arms around me and tugging me closer. He let out a breath, and I watched the demons scatter away from Darius's furious anger.

"Thank you," I murmured to Kalen. Lycus turned to make his way over to us when Kalen whispered to me. "I know what you are," he said, barely audible. I gasped, looking at him over my shoulder. Kalen pressed his head against mine and kissed my cheek.



## Chapter 66

Kalen sighed. "I knew there was another reason you ran, but you don't need to hide from us. We would have kept you safe," he whispered. I glanced at my other three mates, who were making sure the demons left them alone. "You can't say anything," I whispered, my heart jolting erratically, knowing he knew.

"I won't right now, but you have to tell Darius. He will -" Kalen's words were cut off when Lycus approached. 1

"That was some of the scariest shit I have ever seen. I thought for sure your eyes were gonna go," Lycus said, then shivered. "I can't believe they didn't attack you,"

"Probably because Ryze took a liking to her; they are smart birds," Kalen tells him, giving me a knowing look.

"Well, I am not catching mice for all of them. They catch their own damn food," Tobias hissed while Darius stood between us and the castle. He looked between the birds and me, his face taking on a strange expression. 1

"Come on, we should go; I want to get back before dark," Darius said when I noticed the sleek black sports car parked out front on the driveway.

"You will make sure they don't hurt them?" I asked Tobias when he stopped in front of me. He gripped my chin, pecking my lips.

"Your devil birds will be fine, promise," he chuckled, and I nodded. He let my chin go, and I felt Kalen bury his face in my neck. He pulled my tablet from his pocket, and I looked at Darius, who said nothing but nodded, so I took it from him.

"Please don't try to run," Kalen whispered into the crook of my neck. I never had a chance to answer him when Darius called out, having unlocked his car.

"Aleera, come on," he said, waving me toward him. Kalen unwrapped his arms from around my waist and gave me a push toward the car. Yet I got that same sweeping feeling from Kalen when I first met him. That fragile state, warning bells saying he wasn't ok. Even Lycus looked at Kalen worriedly, picking up the strange sensation. We all could feel the darkness enveloping him, and I paused midway. 2

He thought I would run now that he knows, yet he wouldn't say anything to them. Moving toward him, I grabbed his face pulling it down toward mine while I stood on my tippy toes. I pressed my lips to his and kissed him. His lips were warm and soft, and Kalen clutched me to him. His strong arms squeezed me tight, and he let out a shaky breath. When I pulled away, Lycus stepped closer to him with a worried look on his face and gripped his shoulder.

"I'll be right back," I tell Kalen. He looked down at me and searched my face for a few moments, and he let out a breath, pressing his forehead to mine and nodding before letting go. 1

"Promise?" he whispered.

"I promise, I won't leave you again," I tell him, and he smiles sadly.

"What's got into you? You were fine a few seconds ago?" I heard Lycus ask him as I stepped away. Lycus wrapped his arms around Kalen's waist and rested his chin on Kalen's shoulder.

When I reached the car, Darius was watching Kalen worriedly. "He's worried I will run," I told Darius and his jaw clenched as he turned his head to look at me. He glanced down at the tablet in my hands but didn't say anything or try to take it from me.

"I wouldn't allow that," Darius said, looking like he wanted to go to Kalen. I looked over at Kalen, and Tobias was also walking toward Kalen.

"I know, but I don't think I could leave him again," I whispered, and Darius looked at me.

"You wouldn't try again?"

"No, not without a good reason Darius. And if I did, I'm sorry, but I'd be taking Kalen with me," I answered honestly. He watched me curiously.

"You can't hurt him, can you? Or you wouldn't anyway," Darius said while watching me closely.

"It took you all this time to realize that?" I asked him before opening up the passenger door and climbing in.

I slid into my seat and buckled up, and the door opened a few minutes later as Darius climbed in. He looked over at me like he wanted to say something before shaking his head and starting the engine, and driving down the driveway to the grass. I watched when suddenly a driveway appeared in front of us. The grass covering it dissolving revealing the road that led toward the treeline. I closed my eyes when Darius floored it. Peeking my eyes open, I tensed, thinking we were about to smash into the trees. Darius chuckled, and I gasped when the glamor lifted, revealing a long road that weaved amongst the forest. We drove along it for a while before we pulled up at the gates. Darius hit a button on the visor and waited for the huge gates to open.

"Mirage ward," Darius laughed and shook my head. Looking down, I stared at the blackened screen of my tablet and tried to turn it on, but it was dead. Darius leaned across, opening the glove compartment before pulling out some cords.

"One of them should fit," he said before pointing to the USB socket in the dash.

"Thanks," I said while finding the right one so I could plug it in and turn it on. Darius nodded, turning his eyes back to the road, and we continued to drive in a strange silence. After a about few minute's my tablet turned on and Darius peeked over at me.

"You messaging your friend?" Darius asked, and I chewed my lip wondering if he was mad.

"That bothers you," I stated. He sighed and looked over at me. "When we get into town, just stay close. Don't wander off." He said.



**"Okay," I said, glancing down at the screen, wondering why he was being weird.**

**"No, I mean it, Aleera. Stick close to me. There is a reason I don't allow my mates to leave the castle. It's not safe. So stay close to me." Darius said. My brows furrowed, and I looked over at him.**

**"Then why are you letting me come with you then?"**

**"Because I don't know the first thing about lady products and secondly," he paused before he sighed.**

**"I wanted to apologize. Figured you would like to get out of the castle for a little bit. Kalen said it would be good for you to get out of that place for a while," I chuckled and shook my head.**

**"You can't hurt Kalen either," I laughed.**

**"None of us can, Kalen is.. He is,"**

**"Special," I offered, and he bit his lip and nodded.**

**"He is our glue. Kalen is the reason we all held together the way we have." Darius answers and I nod.**

## Chapter 67

The town actually wasn't that far from the castle. It only took roughly 20 minutes to drive there. The time seemed to fly by as I was busy talking to my internet friend. When Darius pulled into a parking spot out the front of a grocery store that was part of a small shopping complex, he got out and walked to my side. The place was bustling with shoppers as I glanced around.

The moment I stepped out of the car myself, Darius was already at my side before I had even shut the door. He grabbed my hand, and I glanced down at my hand when he laced his fingers through mine before raising an eyebrow at him.

"Don't argue; I want you close," he said, glancing around almost anxiously, which I thought odd. He led me to a small post office first before pulling a key from his pocket and unlocking a PO Box. "You don't get your mail at the castle?" I asked him.

"Nobody can find it. It's hidden," he said, placing the mail in his back pocket. He dragged me to a few different places, including a pharmacy where he picked up scripts for Kalen, and I was surprised to see how many different pills Kalen took. When we were done there, Darius pulled me to the grocery store.

I did, however, notice that anyone that stepped near or in our path quickly scattered. The Pharmacy completely emptied of people when Darius entered, leaving only the pharmacist who was familiar with Darius. The grocery store was the same except even a few of the workers scurried off.

"Do you always get such a warm welcome?" I whispered.

"It has its benefits. Never have to wait in line," Darius chuckled while stepping closer to me and placing his hand on my hip so I was pretty much tucked under his arm. He led me to an aisle that contained feminine products, and both of us stood there like idiots.

"Please tell me you know which ones to buy?" Darius murmured, and I picked up one of the colored boxes reading it, and so did Darius.

"What, they couldn't make it one size fits all?" he said, picking up a couple of different boxes of pads while I picked up some tampons. 1

"One size fits all?" I asked him, shaking my head.

"Yeah, why are they different sizes, and how do you know what size to buy?" he asks, holding up two different ones. This was the most bizarre experience of my life and not one I ever pictured doing with Darius. 1

"Just go with regular?" I tell him, and he looks at the box in my hand.

"You are not using those, Lycus said. If you forget it is in there, you can die," Darius said, placing it back on the shelf. 1



"Huh?"

"Lycus said something about some syndrome,"

"Toxic shock syndrome?" I offer.

"That's the one. Stick with the less-lethal kind," Darius said; I shook my head at his words. Darius grabbed a few different boxes, chucking them in the basket he had. "You know it only lasts 24 hours, right? I don't need all those," I tell him.

"What if they are uncomfortable?" he said, and I just let him go, letting him steer me toward the next aisle. His basket was full by the time we were done, and he escorted me to the register. The entire time Darius kept glancing around nervously when his phone binged, and he got a text message. He pulled his phone from his pocket. Looking at it and sighed. He looked around for a second before looking behind him.

"I will be right there, put the rest of the stuff up. If anyone speaks to you, scream," Darius said, wondering off about 3 meters away to some confectionary stand. I placed the contents out with a sigh before putting the basket back beside the register when the man behind the register spoke.

"Never seen you in here before with Darius Wraith, family member?" he asked while scanning another item and placing it in the bag before looking at me. Surely Darius didn't mean to scream if the teller spoke to me.

Before I could answer, though, Darius chucked some chocolate bars on the register. "Her mate, so eyes down." Darius sneered at him. My face flushed; the poor guy only asked an innocent question. The man dropped his gaze and quickly started scanning.

"Why are you so nervous?" I asked Darius when I noticed him looking around again.

"Because you're with me," he said before stopping as he stared out the window at something, cutting off what he was about to say.

"So?" I asked, and he looked down at me.

"Usually, I don't bring Kalen or Lycus in here without Tobias. I should have brought someone else with me. You're too exposed," he said, and my brows furrowed.

"Exposed to what?" I asked, looking around at the empty store before looking at the man serving us. He smiled at me before dropping his head when Darius's hand fell on my shoulder as he tugged me back against him, wrapping his arm around my waist.

"You won't like it if I have to warn you again about looking at her. Fucking do your job," Darius growled. He scanned faster while my face flamed at how rude Darius was to him.

Getting to the car, Darius placed everything in the boot before walking me to my side of the door and waiting for me to get in before walking to the driver's side.

When he got in, he chucked a chocolate bar on my lap, and I stared at him. "Lycus said you

"Wouldn't you **crave sweet stuff?**" I shrugged before opening it. **What girl turns down chocolate? Not this one, that's for sure.**

"**Exactly why is Lycus googling about Keepers shredding?**" I asked him.

"**Because I asked him too,**" Darius said, starting the car.

"**And did you have to be so mean to that poor guy? He looked like he was about to wet his pants the second time you snapped at him,**" I tell him, biting into the chocolate bar.

"**He is a Vampiric-Fae, Aleera,**"

"**So?**" Darius tilted his head to look at me before looking at my lap.

"**Remember Tobias when I found you?**" Darius asked, and my smile fell. My face heated, remembering how crazed he became. ①

"**Exactly why. I don't want him taking a bite out of what is mine,**" Darius said, pulling onto the road before slamming on the brakes. I lurched forward in my seat and nearly smashed into the dash when Darius's hand flung out, shoving me back before I head-butted it. My breathing ragged when a dark-haired middle-aged man walked out in front of the car. ①



## Chapter 68

Darius growled, and the man just stared through the windshield at us for a second before walking off and watching us leave. I shook my head and turned to Darius, who was watching the man in the rear vision mirror. "I need to get you home," he muttered.

"Gosh, he came out of nowhere,"

"They always do," Darius muttered, and I peered over at him, wondering what he meant. He never elaborated on his words but kept glancing in all the mirrors as he drove. Finishing my chocolate bar, I pouted, and Darius laughed.

"I got you more in the bag in the boot," Darius chuckled. We were about 10 minutes from home and had been driving on a backroad for about five minutes already.

"Maybe Lycus was right about that one," I said before suddenly everything exploded and I was tossed forward in my seat. One minute we were driving the next, we drove into a wall.

The front of the car smashed into a shield. The windows exploded on impact, and I remembered the sound of groaning metal and felt the glass rain shards into my face before everything went black.

Dazedly I blinked to find the car upside down on the roof. I groaned, my head throbbing, and I stupidly unclipped my belt falling headfirst onto the roof lining. Blood trickled down my face as I tried to see what had happened when I noticed Darius hanging limply from his seat. Blood gushed from a massive gaping wound across his forehead.

"Darius?" I called, shaking his arm, but he was unconscious. Crawling out of the wreck, glass stabbed into my hands. I stumbled over to his side and opened the door. I kept trying to wake him, but he was knocked out and bleeding profusely. I unclipped his seat belt worried about a car slamming into us, and he fell from his seat with a groan. The smell of petrol filled the air, and I shook him, trying to rouse him awake.

"Darius!" I hissed nervously, looking around at what we ran into, but I found nothing besides the clearing, forest, and a clear road ahead.

Grabbing his arms, I pulled him out, dragging him to the side of the road to a small clearing amongst the trees before fumbling in his pockets for his phone. When a thought came to me. I could run! Yet as I looked at Darius unconscious and thought of the others back home, I dismissed the idea before clutching my head that felt like someone smashed it with a sledgehammer.

My vision blurred as I tried to unlock his phone to ring one of the others when I heard a whooshing noise and lots of them. Blinking, I tried to clear my vision. The shimmer of portals glistened in the distance, blobs of black spilling out. A gasp escaped when I heard the snarls, and my head twisted each way to see around twenty different portals suddenly open up in the clearing and on the road.

"Darius!" I screamed, shaking him when I recognized what they were. Hellhounds. They charged at us; I screamed, shaking Darius as they drew closer, trying to wake him. Darius groaned, and they got about 20 feet away. I panicked, crawling on top of him. My lips smashed against his.

Their feral snarls sent shivers up my spine at the sound of them, their black furless huge bodies bounding toward us, all sharp teeth and massive claws leaping our way. Darius's magic slammed into me like a tidal wave, stealing the air from my lungs. It was so cold, like ice, as I consumed it, taking it from him.

It writhed in my veins and I choked, ripping myself away, unable to consume anymore. A scream tore out of me as four of them pounced about to rip us to pieces. My ears rang from the loudness as I tossed my hands out, slamming them on the ground on either side of us and shut my eyes, waiting for my death when I jolted. The movement rattled my pounding head as the hellhounds collided with the force field that I created.

The huge beasts growled, trying to find a way past it when I pushed the walls higher, creating a crystal clear dome around us. Their massive bodies collided with it. Trying to break through it. Each hit weakened me as I tried to hold it in place.

Sweat beaded on my neck and dripped off my face as I tried to hold it in place; everything ached and cramped at the amount of exertion it took on me. Digging my hands into the earth, vines started wrapping around the dome as it splintered from the repeated blows.

The vines grew with thorny branches encasing the dome, and the hellhounds snarled louder. The trickling sensation running down my face told me I wouldn't hold it much longer when my nose started bleeding, my blood dripping onto Darius's chest where I hovered above him whilst praying for him to wake.

If he didn't soon, I was going to pass out from using so much magic at once, yet they kept tearing into the vines, ripping them down as quickly as I replaced them. The magic it burned to hold them started running low and faltering when I felt warm hands grip my waist and move under my shirt to my ribs. My eyes flew open to see Darius staring at me wide-eyed at me, his obsidian eyes watching my face. "You're a harmony," He whispered before looking at the crystal and vine dome surrounding us. "And an elemental," He sputtered, looking at my vines growing around us and encasing us.

It was at that moment I felt his hands heat as he gave his magic to me, replenishing it more and trying to keep me strong. "I can't hold it!" I said through gritted teeth. My vision turned red as I blinked through bloody tears. I could taste my blood running into my mouth from my nose.

"Hold it a second more," Darius said before one hand moved off my waist, and he placed it over his mark. I felt a shudder run through me and my infinity mark burned on my wrist as he used his to call the others.

"Darius!" I cried, digging my fingers into the earth further as black dots danced before my



vision, and I felt the dome start crumbling around us when Darius growled when I crashed against his chest. Darius's arms wrapped around me, and he rolled, flipping me onto my back as the walls keeping us safe started to fall.

"Good girl, but now I need you to remain still," Darius murmured, and I blinked up at him dizzily when he growled. His eyes glowed so brightly they almost turned silver. His hands hit the ground next to my head, and the noise was horrendous.

The ground was lifting, in a wave all around us, and his car alarm started sounding loudly. My head fell limply to the side, and I saw the hellhounds suddenly become air-borne and blast backward. The ground split around us as Darius's wave of power made the ground shake and move, sending them flying back. I blinked, trying to remain conscious as my vision doubled.

"Stay with me, Aleera," I heard Darius call to me as the sound of portals opening up reached my ears. Heat rushed around me when firewalls suddenly encased us. The sound of pained whimpers shrieked through the air and the dots taking over my vision grew larger before taking my sight completely and leaving me blind to my surroundings. "Darius?"

"Right here with you, you're safe with me," he said above me though his voice sounded muffled, and I tried to nod but couldn't fight the exhaustion as it sucked me under. "I got you," were the last words I heard before nothingness. 2