

Claire

When he opens the door, I'm ready. I've steeled myself. I've lived through the pain once before. I can do it again.

"Claire, why did you knock? This is your room too." He says a moment before he kneels in front of me. "Why do you have that look on your face?"

I look at him and blink, my mouth not working.

I watch as realization dawns on him.

"You still think I'm going to reject you, don't you?"

I nod, looking down. His finger gently tucks under my chin, lifting it until I'm looking him in the eye.

"You couldn't be farther from the truth. Come in. And next time, don't knock. This is your room."

When I walk in, the room is an explosion of flowers. They are everywhere.

"What's all this?" I ask, looking at him.

"I didn't know what kind of flowers you like, so I had Feena pick out ones that mean love, ummm, this one means 'new beginnings' or something like that, and these mean a 'long life together' or something similar. I would have gotten them, but I didn't have time. I wanted you to know that I remember it's your birthday too. I wasn't sure if you ever had a present. I know you haven't in the last couple of years,

so...it's not much, but I hope you like it."

He is talking so fast that I can tell he's nervous wondering if I like the flowers.

"You got all these flowers for me?" I ask quietly, moving to the nearest bouquet of red, yellow and white flowers. They're gorgeous. I've never been given flowers before.

"Yes." He says, watching me closely.

I turn to look at him. "They're beautiful." I say.

"Really?" He asks, and his smile is magnificent. I'm not sure I've ever seen him smile before, not like this anyway. It changes the entire look of his face, from hard and mean to kind and caring.

"Yes, thank you so much. But..."

"But? If you don't like them, I'll have Feena take them away. Oh my goddess, are you allergic? I can get them out of here..."

"No! No, it's not that, it's just, I didn't get you anything." I tell him.

"You're here. You're giving me a chance to show you that I've changed. That's the best present I've ever received." He says and I can see that he means it.

I look around the room, amazed at the flowers everywhere. I see the swans on the bed, in the shape of a heart. I walk over, looking at them.

"Vivienne?" I ask, turning to look at him.

"Yes, she did a great job, didn't she?"

"She did, I'll have to make sure I tell her so." I say.

"We" he says, stressing the word, "will have to tell her so."
He says.

"We will have to tell her so." I confirm.

Now that I see the effort that he's making, I'm worried again about tonight. Pulling on my courage, I turn to him.

"Tereshan, there's something you should know."

"What's that?" He says, taking my hand and pulling me to the couch in his room. He sits down, pulling me beside him.

"I don't have anything to wear tonight. You did all of this..."

He hops up, making me stop. "I can't believe I almost forgot." He says, rushing into the closet.

He comes out holding up a garment bag. "This is also for you. Again, I needed Feena to get it for me, but she seems to know you and know what you would like, so....I hope you like it." He says, coming over and laying the garment bag across my lap.

I open the bag and see a beautiful off-white dress with small sleeves for the shoulders falling into a deep V. It has a band around the waist with a silver pendant on the side, just above where the skirt begins to fall in a fluttery wrap around look. It looks like it will be open in the front and longer in the back, giving me room to walk without having to worry about tripping.

It's perfect.

I see the shoes in the bag and even though they are high heels, which I've never worn before, the heels are wide and there is a strap across toes and the ankle to help me walk. The shoes match the dress flawlessly.

"Do you like it?" Tereshan asks me softly.

I look at him and that same worry is in his eyes.

"I love it."

Relief washes over his face. "Oh, I'm so glad. I had no idea what to get you. Oh, and Feena said Elise knows how to do hair, so when you're ready, we'll call her up here to do your hair."

"Oh." I say, my hand going to my hair. I hadn't thought about my hair, I'd been too worried about what to wear.

"So, I hope you'll get ready in here. I thought you'd like to take a bath and I could wash your hair for you?"

"You want to wash my hair?" Who is this man?

"I know you might feel shy about being naked in front of me, but I think we both know that I know your body inside and out, now." He gives me a playful smile.

I'm instantly reminded of our conversation where we talked about touching the other person's body. My cheeks heat with embarrassment.

His fingers caress my cheek and I look up at him. "I love seeing your cheeks turn pink. And just know that I won't do

anything you don't want me to do while you're in the tub. I just want....I want you to know that I mean it when I say I've changed."

He rolls his eyes. "Plus, Magnor is being very loud about taking care of his mates."

That does make me smile.

"Thank you, Magnor. And thank you, Tereshan."

He nods. "I'll go draw a bath. I already showered, so all I have to do is get dressed."

I set my dress aside, not sure where to put it. When Tereshan comes back out of the bathroom, he takes it and hangs it on the bathroom door. I walk into the bathroom feeling very self-conscious. But when I look at Tereshan, he's looking over the shampoo choices, frowning.

"I didn't think about getting you shampoo. You get in the tub, let me see what Feena can find." He says, walking out.

I quickly get undressed and get into the tub. The heat from the water feels wonderful on my sore muscles and bruised body. I'd forgotten how awful it felt to be bruised all the time and being an omega, I don't heal quickly.

I'm just about to lean back when Tereshan comes in, snarling. I turn and see him looking over my bruised body.

"Who did this to you?" He asks.

I look back down at my body, frowning. "I honestly have no idea. I don't remember now, and back then it happened so

frequently..."

I stop, feeling his aura pushing out. As I watch, he takes several deep breaths and calms himself, pulling his aura back.

"That never happens again. If anyone, ANYONE, hurts you Claire, you tell me."

I nod, watching him closely as he moves toward the tub.

He reaches out and I flinch, ready for his anger to impact his touch. Instead, I'm surprised that his touch is gentle, despite his anger.

"Lean back." He says quietly, his hand at the back of my head.

I do as he says, hearing him dip his hand into the water before I feel it pouring over my hair. When it's wet enough, he gently lifts me up before putting shampoo into my hair and beginning to massage it into my head.

A moan slips, unintentionally, from my mouth at the pleasure of feeling his fingers on my scalp. I quickly stop, but Tereshan is chuckling behind me.

"I guess this feels good?" He asks, continuing to massage my head and hair.

"Yes." I say, my eyes closed, just enjoying this unexpected pleasure.

When he's done, he tells me to lean back again. "I don't know how you are able to manage all this hair. I struggled and it's

only because of Vivienne that I was able to." He says to me as he rinses my hair.

I shrug. "I've always had it. It was weird for me NOT feeling hair on my neck and back, not constantly having to push it out of my eyes."

"Yeah, your hair is so fine, no matter what I did, it was always falling in my face. It made me nuts." He says.

"Do you want me to cut it?" I ask him.

"No. On you, I love it. On me, it was aggravating. If it doesn't bother you, keep it."

I finish bathing and he hands me a towel. I've just gotten it wrapped around me when there's a knock at the door.

"That will be Elise. You wait here, I'll send her in to do your hair."

"Thank you, Tereshan." I tell him as he walks out.

He turns, winking at me before going to let Elise in.