

## Chapter 23 For The First Time

ELIANA.

The night was here.

The world was bathed in an eerie, silvery glow as the full moon centered itself in the velvet canvas of the night sky. The wind was in the trees and the forest was quiet as I sauntered through.

As a wolf, my senses were finely attuned to the world around me. My keen sense of smell picked up even the faintest traces of things in the air. To my right, I could scent ash coming from miles away and to my left—my stomach growled with hunger, I could scent the presence of prey.

The rustling of the leaves caught my ears as I picked up my feet. I plummeted myself through the trees, starting out slowly before increasing my speed and momentum with every second that passed.

It was hard getting used to running on all fours, but somehow, it felt like something I'd done before. There was a particular sense of liberation that filled me as I roamed the forest. A part of my fears had already died down, now I was filled with the intense urge to feed.

I didn't even know as I ran, it was in the direction of what I scented. It was a rabbit, it seemed. The first time shifting was never easy, to soothe the pain and agony, it was inevitable as it was advisable to feed. My body was going through all these changes and there was a hollow space in the stomach that urged me to capture.

It was my wolf's primal desire, who no longer merely scratched the surface anymore. She was out, and she was hungry. After being tamed and held down all these years, she was finally free.

I was well into the chase and I could feel the thrill of the hunt coursing through my muscles. My powerful legs propelled me forward, with each stride closing in on my prey. I could sense the fear but was it such a bad thing that it spurred me on?

Adrenaline surged in my eyes and once I was close enough, I leaped from a distance before coming to a halt. In a split second, I snatched the rabbit and snapped its neck on its way to escape. I gorged on it a second later, the only trace of its existence being the blood that smeared my lips.

I was calm again, once I'd fed.

And it was a lot easier to not feel guilt, to not feel anything while being a wolf. It was what they said. How it was easy to shut off your emotions and human instincts once you shift.

It's no wonder why Denver was the way he was.

I felt a sting in my chest as I looked up. There was an abandoned building at a distance from where I was. I crept further and when I got close to the windows, I gazed at my own reflection. My eyes widened as I saw my wolf for the very first time.

I inched closer, tracing with my eyes the silver fur that had spread across my skin. And along my back was a distinct red marking. My ears strut up towards the heavens and I found my especially pink snout to be hilarious.

But beautiful, nonetheless.

She was so beautiful.

She was everything I wanted and even more. And now that she was out, I promised to never allow anyone to keep her hidden again. Not even if that someone was me.

I stepped back for a moment as my vision suddenly dazed. I could feel the blood trickle down my system, subsequently awakening something inside of me. It wasn't like anything I'd felt before.

It was a lot obvious that the shifting wasn't over but at least the hardest and most painful part was gone. Now, I just fell to the ground weakly and stricken with fatigue. My eyes rested on the moonlight until they closed with darkness. And that was the last thing I remembered.

The next time I woke up, it was to the incessant chirping of the birds in the trees. It wasn't morning yet. Well even if it was, it wasn't as bright but the birds told me sunrise was near.

I sat up and a spearing pain struck my temples, banging like forks bashing into each other. My eyes could barely open for the first few seconds and as my arms folded across my chest, I realized how cold and freezing I was.

My memory was a blur but I did remember coming into my wolf a few hours earlier. I remembered gazing into the glass at my reflection but not so much anything that happened after that.

I looked down at my body and a gasp fled my lips.

"Oh!" I was naked. My hands could barely cover my boobs and between my thighs simultaneously. And the clothes I'd worn were nowhere to be found. A bolt of panic flashed across my face.

What was I going to do?

How was I going to get back home?

But then a voice crept up on me and I shook, slightly startled.

"I knew I scented you!" I threw my head over my shoulders back at him.

"Denver," I heaved. "I thought we talked about this sneaking up on me habit!" I gritted through my teeth and an arch came between his brows. I sniffed in the air and could tell something was off.

Something was different.

"Can you," I cleared my throat as his eyes pierced down every corner of my body. "Oh!" He exclaimed softly, turning to the side. "—look away" The last part of my sentence was barely a faint whisper.

"I brought you clothes" His voice echoed from behind and a pile of them fell right beside me. I looked back up at him, a little reluctant because of my gut feeling which was almost never wrong. But then again, I was standing naked in the middle of the forest about zero degrees.

I didn't have much of a choice.

"How did you know I was here anyway?" I scoffed, reaching toward a frail maroon gown he'd brought. I stretched it out and the dust tickled my nose. It was like something they'd worn centuries ago.

But I wore it nonetheless, again, I didn't have much of a choice.

He turned his back to me the entire time and only when I cleared my throat did he look back. "You can—" His gaze fixed on me immediately. I was wearing the dress but somehow, I still felt naked I don't know why.

I guess it would take some getting used to being human again.

I looked down at my arms, seeing the bruises that had come with shifting. A set of fresh ones besides the decade-old scars that remained on my skin. I could feel Denver's burning gaze even without looking up.

"You haven't answered my question" I muttered.

"Hmm?" Denver echoed. My brows furrowed because that was something Denver had never said. It wasn't just off but a wild theory hit me at that moment—I didn't think it was Denver standing in front of me.

He had his face, his voice, his scent. But he wasn't Denver.

I lived with Denver not long but enough to know his mannerisms, and this wasn't it. "You know what forget it" I heaved, picking up my pace. "I need to get back home anyway" Once I was passed him, my heart began to race. I just wanted to get out of there.

I didn't know how far into the forest I was, but from the looks of the thick trees, it was far.

"Wait!" His voice echoed from behind and I folded my fists up. The air was tense and crippling. A hard lump formed in the back of my throat as I dared to look back but he was nowhere to be found.

"I said wait!" He suddenly appeared in front of me and I fell back to the ground with my hands wedging behind me. I pulled myself up, halting breaths escaping my lips as I looked at him.

"Who are you?!" I yelled.

"What do you mean? It's me" His arms fell wide open as he feigned confusion but I was certain. I was also a little stronger because of the blood in the system so I grasped a branch from a nearby tree and snapped it in two.

"Hey!" He reacted once I struck it out between us.

"I said who are you?!" I screamed. "Because you're not Denver. I know Denver—" "It's me" He still persisted in a malicious undertone. "Prove it then!" I gritted through my teeth.

"What?" He scoffed.

"What did we do tonight? Where were we?" I asked him, narrowing my eyes. He took a step back. "Eliana," He called.

"Answer the damn question."

"What do you mean where did we go? Of course we went to your Pack. To give your father the serum that could help him. Your Grandma made sure I followed you, can you not remember?" He whispered.

"This is all just a misunderstanding. I mean you only just shifted. It's normal that you feel confused" He continued and a deep exhale fled my lips as I placed the stick. "You're right" I muttered.

"It's all just a misunderstanding" Inching closer to him, he held his arms out, ready to hold me but I wasn't an idiot. In a split second, I held tighter around the stick and struck it through his chests.

"Fuck!" He fell to the ground in agony. "What was that for?"

"You know you missed one tiny little detail from tonight and if you were truly Denver, you would know that we kissed" I looked down at him with disgust in my eyes. He pulled out the stick from his chest and a cackle echoed from his lips. I stepped backward.

Because when he got up, he shifted back to who he truly was.

"Blake!" It didn't hit me as a surprise but I surely did for him. He clapped his hands as I smothered his jacket. I was right, something was off.

"You're a feisty one, you know" He croaked.

"Happy to have passed the message across" I seethed through my lips. "Think of it as a little revenge for what you put me through the last time" I scoffed and he laughed again.

"My brother really has a taste" He noted.

"It's always nice to meet the new girls" Blake added. "It's never nice to meet his brother though, who I never knew existed" I replied to him and he shrugged slightly. "Well, it's a shame my brother rarely talks about me."

"Not as much as I talk about him."

"It's almost like he's not proud to be my family" He said. I folded my arms. "Do you blame him?" It was a rhetorical question. "Who else is there to blame?" But he answered nonetheless.

"Let's skip the pleasantries. Why don't you tell me what you're doing here?" I asked. "I was only taking a walk through the forest and I was fortunate enough to see a nude girl laying on the earth. My savior complex was practically screaming, and so was my raging horniness—"

I scrunched my nose.

They really were brothers. The grossness, they shared.

"I mean what are you doing here? In Oakland?" I spat. "You mean, Tombsdale?" He replied. "Look around," I did the same thing. "This is Oakland. The very last time too, it was here you came."

"So why don't you just tell me what you want?" I asked.

Blake folded his arms with a finger striking his chin thoughtfully.

"You really are smart" He muttered. "Well," I shrugged. "The biggest mistake you can make is to think I'm like the other girls you've seen with your brother" I grunted. "But you were married to him, though?"

"And let me guess, he rejected you like he did to the score of the others?" Blake's words stung a bit as he inched closer to me. "The biggest mistake YOU can make is to trust him again" He added.

"Who said anything about that?" I asked.

"Pfft" He shrugged. "Like you didn't kiss tonight."

"I'd hate to be wrong about how smart you are, Eliana. I hate to be wrong to be wrong in general" Blake continued. "And you're telling me this why? You think I better trust you?" I asked with a scuffle, only to realize the sun was halfway above the horizon.

And the sky was no longer pitch black, it was now morning.

I looked up, and then back down to Blake.

"You really should get back home. It's been a long night" He winked. "Not before you answer my question, why are you really here?" I pressed but he only out a croaky laughter.

"Relax," Blake heaved. "We'll have plenty of time to talk later." And his eyes looked behind me. Reflexively, I did the same. But when I looked back, he was no longer there.

"Wait...Shit!" I cursed.

My neck turned all around me and my eyes searched everywhere for him but he wasn't there. He had just disappeared into thin air, like he was never there to begin with. I exhaled deeply from my lips as the winds grazed against my red gown. We could agree on one thing though—

It had truly been a long night.