

## Chapter 26 If This Is Going To Work

ELIANA.

"Does he know yet...Does Denver know?" Nana asked. "Are you even sure about this?" A hard lump went down my throat at that moment.

"It's something I have to tell him to his face," I paused. "And yes. Yes, I'm sure about it now more than ever." I continued. My Grandma squeezed my hands as she nodded. "Then, you have my blessings" She flashed a smile at me, one I returned.

But for a moment, everything seemed so peaceful now that I had made up my mind but that was before we heard a loud thud come from above. I jerked forward with an arch between my brows.

"What was that?" Nana was just as confused. That wasn't all. The sound of shattering glass followed and things being thrown up and down. I arose from the chair just as it hit me. "It's her!" I muttered.

"The stranger from the woods?" My Grandma was alarmed and even my heart was racing in my chest. "I have to go up—" She held my arms back. "But what if she's dangerous, Eliana?" She asked.

"Elijah is upstairs!" I yelled. "I need to make sure he's safe!" I pulled away from her before scurrying my way up the stairs. For more than a minute, the clanging and smashing didn't stop. I had to latch against the wall, cowering my head low as I made my way to his room.

"What the fuck did I bring in here?" I muttered to myself. Just as I walked in, Elijah was already sitting up on his bed. "What is that sound, mommy?" He asked softly. I knelt down, framing his face with my hands.

"Is it the monsters?" There was a crack in his voice.

"No, no" I threw my head over my shoulders. "You see, mommy's not sure but I'm going to find out. Okay?" I nodded. "And I'm not going to let anything happen to you." I took his hands.

All of a sudden, he stopped in his tracks and a tear rolled down his cheeks. "But I don't want to go inside the closet again." Elijah cried. I heaved a sigh out my lips as I clenched his hands.

"You don't have to. Just follow me behind and stay close, okay?" I said.

My heart crept into my throat as I led him out, barely inches away from me. My Grandma wheeled herself closer to the door and I widened my eyes back at her when we crossed paths. She was nearing the room we'd kept the stranger when all of a sudden, everywhere quieted.

Not a single glass broke again and our hitched breaths were what echoed along the corridor. "Stay behind me" I whispered to Elijah who had fright take charge of his eyes. "Where are you going?" Nana stamped her feet.

"I'm going on. Everywhere's quiet" Slowly, I raised my voice. "Well, that's never a good sign" She roared. "Take care of him" I handed Elijah over to her. "Don't go in!" She persisted. "Well, someone has to" I answered.

"We'll wait for Ivan" She suggested and with one hand already against the door, I looked back at her. "Really?" I batted my eyes. She rolled hers. Sucking in a deep breath through my lips, I pushed the door open.

The wood made a creaking sound against its metal hinges and I shut my eyes as if it was something I could control. My heart was throbbing in my chest with each step I took forward. Before finally going in, I threw one last look at Elijah before nodding my head.

He did the same back at me.

The breath escaped my lips as a sigh once I made my way in. And my eyes met the most horrifying sight it had ever beheld. "Oh my goodness!" I didn't even know when I blurted it out. I looked around the room and everywhere was a mess.

Flower vases broken across the floor and pictures laying everywhere. Wood was cracked and there was a dent through the television. It looked like a place that had been struck by war which didn't make sense. But then I looked at the bed.

"She's not in here!" I called out to Nana who still hesitatingly crept closer. "What the—" She too was haunted by the mess of the room and when my eyes fell to the open window, I gasped.

"I think she's gone." Inching closer, I set the curtains apart with my hands and my eyes met my Nana's. "I don't think she's normal, Eliana" I looked around the room for the umpteenth time.

And maybe then, I believed it.

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"You see this is why I don't just let anyone in here" Nana was spiteful as she reached to arrange the things she could. The whole room was a mess, I didn't even blame her.

"She was calling out for help. How could I turn my back to her?" I whispered. "Well, the devil does that too" She scoffed. I pressed my lips together, darting her a dainty look.

We tried our best to savor what we could from the mess but at the end of the day, most things needed to be thrown away. I was packing my fourth bag of trash when there was a knock on the front door.

I stood to face her and Nana sighed.

"Go." We both knew who it was. "Elijah and I can handle the rest" I looked at him and he nodded his head. "I'm sorry for this" I muttered before walking out of the room and down the stairs. Once I opened the door, my eyes almost immediately met his.

"Hey" His hands slipped into his pockets. "I came as soon as I could" Denver added. I stepped out to the breeze against my face as I closed the door behind me. "Yeah, can we talk uh...outside?" I asked him.

An arch came between his brows.

"Why? Is everything okay?" Well for starters, there was Elijah and whatever the hell happened today. And I could have told him that but rather I just settled for an old-fashioned lie.

"Yeah, yeah everything's okay" I said.

"I only need a walk is all" And Denver could often see through me which was why it was a surprise when he just casually agreed and soon, we were towing down the path that led into the forest.

For most of the beginning, our walk was silent. Although I caught a few glances on his end, only because I was glancing myself but I could tell something was on his mind. Like he was elsewhere.

Maybe it was Blake. But my mind wasn't clear off this morning too. That woman still struck a curious chord within me. And to leave without even saying anything was as hurtful as it was a mystery.

"I wanted to say something" Someone had to. "Well, that's why you texted me, isn't it?" Denver remarked. I scoffed lightly. "Something is off with you" I noted. He wasn't as witty as he usually was.

"I could say the same" He urged back.

"Look, I've just been thinking. About this whole thing with my father and Jaxon and—" Denver came to a halt at my words. "You're taking me off on my offer?" His voice pitched in disbelief and I covered my head.

"No shit" He cursed and it was almost like that gloomy cloud on top of his head suddenly lifted. "Are you going to make me regret it already?" I asked him and Denver smirked. "Of course" Who was I kidding anyway?

There he was, the Denver I knew.

"I can't believe it. What changed your mind?" He asked. "I figured I didn't have a lot of options. It's not like I chose you" I kicked my feet forward and his chuckle followed me behind.

"This doesn't mean there are no rules—"

"Rules?" He interrupted with a scuffle. "Of course yes" I mounted a rock, only to look a few inches down at him. "You really do take the fun out of everything you know" Seeing I was serious, the smirk across his lips vanished before he grudgingly nodded.

"Go ahead."

"First off, I would like to clarify that last night won't ever happen again"

I hissed. "Which part?" He played dumb. "No more kisses, Denver. Even if that's the last option and we're about to get our heads chopped up. Absolutely no more kisses under no circumstances" I said.

He folded his arms with a smile.

"Is that all?"

"You're going to have to tone down your sarcasm and wit to make this much more bearable for me. No extensive touching or prying and there must be a mutual respect between the two of us" I went on.

"Is that all?" He asked again. I pouted my lips. "And no sex" I added.

"You might think because we're going to be mated that it means we could—but no, I'm saying this because I don't want you to get the wrong impression" Denver couldn't stop smiling even though I was so serious.

"What is it now?" I scoffed.

"I didn't say anything" He just folded his arms. "Something just crossed my mind actually now that you mentioned sex" He added.

"Do you remember the last time?" His question caused my heart to well up in my throat. "What?" I spat. "Because I do. You know I find myself thinking about it often these days" He said.

"Denver," I paused. "What did I just say about sarcasm?"

"It's not sarcasm if it's the truth. I mean it this time. I don't why it's in my head but it just is" His eyes fell to my lips and I cleared my throat before turning away. "You didn't seem to remember it that night" I said.

"Come on, Eliana"

"Denver you're a few years too late" I scoffed and he laughed a bit. "Now, back to my rules. If this is going to work, we must stop these unnecessary banter and fighting all the time" I added one off the top of my head because of what he'd just said now.

"What?" His jaw hung open.

"But this is what we do. This is our thing—I find it very sexy when we're arguing and you're mad. And your brows arch this kind of way that's just so hilarious" He teased and I pouted at him.

"That I have such control over you fills me with bliss, Eliana"

I climbed down the rock and walked ahead of him. He maneuvered his way to grope my hands back to him. "Hey! What about my rules?" He asked softly and I rolled my eyes to the back of my head.

"Your rules?" He was so difficult at times.

"Why should you make all of them?" Denver asked. "Fine, as long as it doesn't have anything to do with the sex one" I hissed. And his lips fell into a frown. "What if it does?" He asked. I freed myself from him.

"I mean it Denver, it's not going to happen. This is all an agreement, it's not love." I replied. "It's very ironic, isn't it? Our second agreement"

And even though I wished he didn't remind me of that, Denver still did.

You could always count on him to say it as it was.

"But you realize we are going to have to be mated for this to work?" He asked and I halted. Maybe it hadn't really dawned on me yet what I was about to do but I merely just nodded. "Of course I realize that" I replied.

"You know I've been asking myself, what exactly is in it for you?" I turned to him for a moment. "I said I owed you" He answered. "Besides your silly quest for self-redemption. Don't lie to me, Denver" I muttered.

"When I called you earlier, I heard you scream and yell at the top of your voice and the only thing that made sense was that the kiss had triggered something in you as it for me" I continued.

"I know you need this as much as I do"

"I have many reasons for doing the things I do" He croaked with his lips curling into a smirk. "You are smart" He noted. "You're a little bit late to that realization which is why you shouldn't underestimate me" I said, walking a bit further into the woods.

"You know I do have one rule though" But when his voice called out to me, I came to a halt. "Trust," Denver pursed his lips. "This is merely an agreement but we have to trust each other, Eliana. If this is going to work, then there must be no secrets between us" He said and Denver's face was all serious at that moment.

I felt my heart stomp in my chest as all I could think about was Elijah, our son whom he knew nothing about. My secret.

He inched closer to take my hands in his. "Okay?" With an intense gaze resting on me, he asked and I nodded after a brief pause. It was a fair rule. "Okay" I said. He scoffed lightly from his lips.

"I can't believe we're really doing this" Once his brows unarched, he said those words that hit me. And as I gazed in the distance, maybe it was then that it truly dawned on me, what we were about to do. I clutched my chest with my hand.

"I can't believe this too" I muttered.