

Chapter 27 Once And For All

ELIANA.

As soon as the car pulled over next to his castle, a breeze of nostalgia whooshed into my face. I swallowed a hard lump down my throat as the doors opened, already dreading coming down.

But luckily, Nana had already made it this far. Cory helped her out and she wheeled closer to where I was. "Come on," She stretched her arms.

Flashing a smile at her, I took them before alighting the car. My gaze trailed up the massive building and I realized not a lot of things had changed since the last time I was here.

"Future Luna," Beta Cory bowed his head, helping me with the bags I'd packed for the weekend. "I'm Cory—" "Of course I remember you" I interrupted him. "You're like Denver's right-hand man. I remember him saying how you were the only one he trusted in the world" I chuckled and he nodded humbly. "I try"

"And please, just call me Eliana" I refuted the idea of any title whatsoever. It was bad enough that I had to come back to this place that held so many memories. But the mating ceremony needed to be done.

And it was most definitely not going to happen at my Pack. Denver wanted it here as well. And since I stepped foot out of here six years ago, this was the first time I was back.

It didn't sting as much but the nostalgia was there.

Two years wasn't such a long time but when you realize you only knew just one person back then, it seemed longer. I remembered a few things as they were, like the flowery veranda and the cabins close to the fence on the other side. Children used to play in one and the others were reserved for meetings and all of that.

Denver's pack was my home once. How could I forget?

"This way, I'll lead you inside" Cory mounted the steps. "Alpha Denver's being waiting for you" He walked straight to the door while I was a bit hesitant. I smothered the sides of my dress as my brows arched.

"What is it?" Nana asked. I looked at her with a sigh escaping my lips.

"Is this about Elijah? Trust me, he's in safe hands with Ivan. He was able to take the day off to care for him and by evening, I'll return back as promised you don't worry" Nana whispered and it was me who took her hands this time. "No, it's not that. I need you" I muttered.

Nervousness crept into my eyes.

"I just can't believe it's happening. I mean it's only hitting me now just how much of a big deal this all is. Not just finally being mated to Denver but challenging Jaxon and everything. What if we're not completely prepared—" "Eliana" When my Grandma called my name, I realized how paranoid I sounded.

I exhaled. But I couldn't help it.

"It's okay to feel nervous, it is a big day today. In fact I'd have been worried if you didn't have your doubts. Times like this, you remind me of HER." Nana smiled. "Her?" There was only one person who could light up her face like that. "My mother?" I whispered.

"She was nervous the day she was marrying your dad. All dressed up in her white flowing dress and then she started to cry," I couldn't help but chuckle. "Cry?" I echoed. "She did that a lot" Nana said.

"What happened next?" I lived for these stories about my mother. That way, she didn't seem so far away. That way, I could pretend like I actually knew her. "I made her remember the days that weren't filled with so much pressure. The days when she loved your dad more than life itself."

"I reminded her of the day she said yes" Nana added and the smile dropped from my lips. I looked ahead. "But...this is different. Right?" I didn't love Denver. It was only an agreement but it meant for us to be mated. This wasn't like the contract marriage before, this was a seal that could bind us for life.

"To me, it's really not" Nana shook her head. "I don't love him" I blurted out. "Not anymore!" But who was I trying to convince really? Part of the reason I was still hurt was because the emotions never fully left.

The anger, the rage and the sense of betrayal that still lingered. The heartbreak and grief but most especially, the love. I batted my eyes, purging my mind of that word, of those thoughts.

It was the only way to get by.

I heaved a deep breath as my hands left my Nana's.

"All I have to do is think of the greater good. I can get through this" I said. "Yes, you can" She whispered. "You can get through anything, Eliana. Just like her" A smile crippled my lips as Nana reached into her purse for something. The wind filled my hair, swaying it upon my shoulder.

"Before I leave and forget, I have something to give you. I kept it for his special day and it turns out you especially need it the more" She said, pulling out what seemed to be a necklace with a crystal spherical amulet.

My gaze fell on the diamond and I marveled.

"Wow" I opened my hands to my Grandma and she dropped it tenderly into my grasp before clenching my fingers herself. "It belonged to your mother. I was going to keep it until you were getting married and hand it over to you on that day but this today can suffice" She whispered.

"It's so beautiful" It glittered in my hands.

"It's no ordinary necklace, Eliana. Make sure after tonight, you always wear it wherever you go. I believe it can protect you, especially as you're going against Jaxon. You'll need everything you can get" Nana continued.

"Thank you" I said back to her.

A rumble in the skies was what drew her attention. "Oh, I better get going before evening then. Don't want to be trapped in the rain" She said and I scoffed regretfully. "What?" She chimed.

"I really wish you could stay" I muttered. "Then who's going to take care of Elijah? The journey already took most of the day. Don't worry you're fine in his hands, I assure you. And when you get back, you'll tell me all about it. Okay?" With one hand on the door, she looked back at me.

I leaned forward to grasp her in for a lasting hug.

"I love you, Nana" I whispered softly. "And thanks for the necklace" I pulled away and squeezed it in my hands. "It's my gift to you" She said.

"No," I shook my head. "You're my gift to me"

Flashing a smile, she was able to get back into the car and even when the doors closed, our eyes remained locked into each other's. I felt a tear roll down my cheeks before I wiped it away. Her car soon pulled away, next stop, Blood Hound. Denver had taken care of everything, the transportation and the logistics, including the whole planning for tonight.

And when Nana was gone, was when it truly hit me.

There was yet another rumble in the skies and a drop of rain dropped on top of my nose. "You coming?" Cory yelled out from the door and I nodded before briskly making my way up the stairs.

It was a bit chilly once I'd gotten in and it was Cory who handed me a coat. "If it rains, will we still be able to go through with it?" I asked him.

"Of course, nothing can stop it from holding tonight. It's the night of the full moon remember? We mustn't have to wait for another one" Cory wore the jacket across my shoulders.

"And where's Denver?" I muttered. Cory darted his eyes at me.

"Making sure everything is perfect, for you. He'll drop by once he's ready" He replied. My hand dropped to the pit of my stomach. "That's very bride of him" I scoffed. Cory chuckled regrettably.

"Eliana!" I heard a familiar voice echo from behind and then I turned around to face a woman heading toward me. "It's really you! Oh you haven't aged a day since I last saw you!" There were two kids in her hands, about age six and ten.

"Come on, Thelma" Cory joked, whisking her into his hands before placing a kiss upon her lips. "That's so gross" The ten-year-old clung to me before gasping. "I think I remember you!" She pointed.

"You used to stay here..."

"Honey" Cory cautioned, letting go of his wife. "They can be a lot" He whispered and I chuckled. "I didn't think you'd ever come back" Thelma walked up to me and although the memory of her was vague, it wasn't nonexistent. The thing with heartbreak and the trauma was that it was never easy to deal with them.

And to deal with mine, I may have forgotten most of the two years that I was here. Not so much the building, but the people. But Thelma, I recognized her. She was one of the few people who truly accepted me when I first came here back then.

And her daughter was so little back then. It was just the both of them and Cory. Whenever I looked at them, I was convinced love still existed. I wanted what both of them had.

I had always been a sucker for true love and soulmate, all of that. But once, after everything that happened, things just changed.

"Well, I'm so glad you're back" Thelma took my hands. "Come on, I'll show you to your room" She drew my arm upstairs. "My room? I'm not even staying the whole weekend!" I teased.

"You're our future Luna, again. So of course you get a room" She replied. "And the best of all to be precise. As requested by Alpha Denver himself, here is our finest suite in the villa. Just for you" We reached a silver door which she thrust open after her words.

And my jaw dropped to the floor.

"You're joking" The lasciviousness sent a chill down my spine. I walked into the suite, drawing my finger across the walls and counter. This was the largest room I'd seen. I'd always noticed this door the last time I was here but not for once did I dare come in.

"It's all yours" Thelma smiled, dropping the keys at the door. "Enjoy" And then she disappeared while I was staring around the room. The large painting over the wall was what first drew my attention. And I inched forward to take a closer look when he suddenly crept up from behind me.

His sharp cologne pierced through my nose and his aura was undeniably electrifying. I sharply turned around to see Denver in a stormy grey suit, attaching silver cufflinks to his wrists.

"I hope you like the place." His deep voice echoed through the room. I merely shrugged, so as not to feed his ego. "What's the point of all that if you're only going to rip those clothes to shreds later?" I asked him.

"Why wear a wedding dress if I'm going to rip them off you at midnight?" He threw the question back at me. "I'm not wearing a wedding dress and that's different." I replied.

"Unfortunately, you are not." He puckered his lips. "You don't listen to me so much. You're the only person that doesn't. A wedding dress can be quite poetic and it suits the occasion better" He added.

"I'm not a doll you can play dress up with, Denver. You know why we're here today. It's better we just stick to that" I brought the black dress I was wearing from my wardrobe. I turned to find the sun already setting which meant we had only a few hours to go.

"That could suffice" He grudgingly admitted. Not that I even asked him.

"Put it on" He sat on the bed uninvitedly. "Denver—" "What? It's not a wedding dress so technically it isn't bad luck" He argued. My shoulders fell at that moment because of how exhausted I was.

"Fine" I walked into the bathroom with the dress and once I changed into it, I walked back out. Denver clapped his hands as he stood.

"It's not so bad" He reviewed. It was a silky short black dress.

"And it's easier for me to get out of once we've shifted" I added.

"Economical" I could sense the sarcasm in his voice before I sighed. "I'm not wearing a wedding dress, Denver." I turned to face the mirror, wearing my earrings and letting my hair fall upon my shoulders. "I get it" He inched closer to me. "The dress is actually really good too."

"And I mean it" I rolled my eyes, taking his words with a grain of salt.

"Besides, I already got you to wear a wedding dress once. I'll just picture that instead" He said. "Regrettably" I muttered. His hands fell to the dressing table and he picked up the necklace my Grandma had given me.

"What's this?" He asked.

"It belonged to my mother. Nana gave me as a gift for tonight" I replied to him. He clicked it open and stretched it around my neck. I was caught off guard by his heated breaths trailing my back. But I didn't budge when he had his arms around me.

"Here," He whispered. "Stay still." All his attention went into finding the right hoop. I couldn't help but chuckle as I watched him through the mirror. "I don't know why you insisted your Grandma went back" He said.

"She just..." The smile wore off my face as I cleared my throat. "She wasn't feeling it. Can't be away from home for too long" I lied. Because how could I tell him about Elijah? Now...of all the times too.

"There!" He chanted victoriously as the pendant rested across my chest. I turned to face him and slowly, he lifted his eyes to my face.

My breath hitched in my throat as Denver paused. He was staring so intensely that my heart started to race for a second and then he smiled.

"You look beautiful Eliana," He whispered. There was a sensation in my chest that exploded at that moment. "Wedding gown or not" There it was, that genuineness in his eyes that so always so conveniently managed to get me. He knew what he was doing.

Denver.

"Thank you" My hands reached to adjust his tie too but he held it for a second. And for that same time, the world seemed to stop around us. I was so lost in his eyes and he was lost in the moment.

"And you're sure I can't kiss you?" Denver softly asked. I exhaled from my lips, pulling away from his hands. "Rule number one." I whispered as I brushed past his shoulders. He heaved a longing sigh.

"Rule number one" And when he looked at me, I smiled softly.

"Now come on, let's do this once and for all." I said.