

## Chapter 31 Everything Leads Back To You

ELIANA.

"Elijah" I brought my eyes to rest upon my son from across the dining table. "Pass the salt please" I gestured. I realized he had barely eaten his food when Nana was already done with hers.

He got up, taking the salt bottle in his hands before walking up to me. I did hold him back for a second. "Is everything okay?" I asked, looking between him and his Nana.

"Someone has a long face and a short appetite" I teased, tickling him a little in his sides and he let out a soft chuckle. "Tell me, what is it?" I asked. He ran his hands over his head.

"Nana when can I go hunting again?!" He squealed and I scoffed surprisingly. "Again?" I turned to my Grandma. "He went out with Ivan during the day. Relax, it's not somewhere so far from here—"

"And we got the rabbit that we're having for dinner!" Elijah pointed to the steak on my plate and I gasped. "No..." He chuckled. "Surprise!" I whisked him into one arm as he playfully struggled to break free. The truth was I couldn't even be mad at him.

But I drew my eyes up to my Grandma, we simply must be more careful and being careful meant avoiding the risks.

The sound of the television echoed into the kitchen after dinner. Elijah had slowly but surely eaten his whole food. Now, he was watching some cartoons before I eventually put him to bed.

I cleared the plates off the table, dumping them into the sink next to Nana.

"It really wasn't far from here!" I knew she was going to say something and she did. "The little boy just gets so bored during the day. When you were not here, what did you expect him to be doing?" She asked.

"It's not that I don't understand" I heaved a deep breath. "Or that I don't want him to be out there and playing like the pup he is. It's not like I don't want him to live a much more normal life than I got. It's just that sometimes, I worry—"

"And it's only natural" Grandma interrupted. I shook my head with my hands pressing against the counter. Then, I looked back at her. "Losing Elijah is my worst fear. And I know I probably shouldn't but holding him close and tight all the time just eliminates the risks and makes me feel safer. I already wish I was here. I wish I didn't have to leave" I muttered.

"And now he's going hunting?" There was a crack in my voice as my shoulders fell flat. "One of the many things I'm missing out on in his life"

"You're not missing out on anything, Eliana" Nana drew me closer for a hug and I didn't know when a tear fell down my cheek. I guess sometimes, I do feel overwhelmed. Now, it was partly because of my conversation with Denver earlier.

I just wished things were easy. Easier.

"You want to tell me how it actually went with Denver?" She finally asked and I sighed. Looking back up at her, my Nana smiled softly. "I know when the problem runs deeper" She whispered and I cupped my chin. Could she really tell how much I was rattled still from last night?

"We spent the night together" I admitted. There was little to no surprise on her face when I looked up. "What?" Nana asked. "Are you not shocked?" She shook her head.

"I could tell already. Seeing the both of you talk earlier, there was just so much tension and...Besides, I already knew it was going to happen. It was your first night as mates. Suppressing your natural instincts could've done more harm than good" Grandma always had a way with words.

I guess some part of me was off at first but after what she said, I felt a lot better. "Your Grandpa and I, oh the first night after we accepted each other. To go back, Eliana. Oh to go back to that night." Her face instantly lit up at the mention of Grandpa, whose life I only knew in pictures and the stories I'd heard.

I never met him because he died unfortunately, in a fire that claimed so many lives that were in the church that day. He was as religious as they came, Nana once was too which she transferred to my mother.

But after she lost him that night, I didn't think she still believed so strongly in anything again. To lose both your mate and your daughter, Nana was so strong, even for her age. Her wolf may no longer come out in her lifetime but she was braver than a warrior.

She was a fighter.

"I really wish I met them...him and mum" I whispered. And her hands crawled to my neck, around which hung the pendant that she'd given me. An heirloom that supposedly belonged to my mother.

And then she whispered, "I really wish you met them too."

"But even more, I wish they'd met you. I wish Susannah could've seen what an amazing and strong daughter she gave life to and her grandson too! You should've seen him when he was chasing that rabbit" She added and I chuckled in a way that my eyes disappeared.

"Oh I know" I nodded. "He was always so playful back in Tuscany. Sometimes I think the only thing holding him back at the recurring nightmares he has" I said. "Which has unsurprisingly stopped for the time being" Nana added. My smile faded and I exhaled.

"It's not the first time it's paused before" I replied.

"But it's the first time he's been back home" She replied. There was a chance that she was right, a soothing possibility which I nodded to. Then, her hands squeezed mine lightly.

"Maybe all he needed was just to come home."

"You too" She quickly added. "Because if you never came back, then you might have never seen Denver again" She said. "Not him, please" I urged softly. "Why not him?"

"Are you afraid that talking about him would make you realize the truth?" Nana asked and I slipped my hands away from her. "Do you think I'm still in love with Denver?" I questioned with an arch between my brows. "After everything he put me through?"

"I'm only saying that it's harder now to figure out the dynamic between you two. With the mating and Elijah—" Nana paused. "Elijah, I'm willing to keep him a secret but it's only to protect him, ma" I heaved.

"And for how long? What's the plan for when all of this is over? Denver is the Alpha of both Packs and you're Luna. Elijah is what? Or will you go back to the wilderness, Eliana?" Nana asked and as I stood from the chair, my heart sank in my chest.

"Breaking a mate bond is never easy, you know" I wiped across my moist eyes. "Well, at least it isn't my heart that's breaking. We might've had a one-night stand but make no mistake, I won't be fooled twice"

"And I won't be the one who leaves, it's always him, And when he does, I'm going to make sure Elijah doesn't suffer for it. It's what's best, ma and that's final" But as soon as I turned, there he was.

Standing in the corridor with his onesie and a finger in his eye.

"I heard arguing my name, mommy" He whispered and I threw myself at him, holding him close. "No, Elijah. It's nothing, I was only talking about how it's past your bedtime" I ran my fingers through his hair before we took to the stairs but I did throw one last look back at Nana.

Her arms were folded and her eyes, intent.

I wish she'd just understand that not every love story could be like hers and Grandpa's. I wasn't acting irrationally. I was already hurt badly once before and now I'm making sure it never happens again.

And that Elijah doesn't doesn't end up missing his 'father' far longer than he knew him.

"Goodnight, Elijah" As soon as I helped him into his bed, he fell asleep. I leaned forward to place a soft kiss on his forehead and then squeezed his hand. I really wished things were different.

Around that same time, there was a knock on the front door. My heart throbbed as I inched close to the window. Peeking through it, I was only expecting one person but even Denver's car wasn't parked in the driveway like it usually was every night.

I pulled away with a furrow between my brows and then I walked out of the room, closing the door gently with my hands.

"Who's there?" I heard Nana call out as I made my way down the stairs, just in time for her to open the front door. And I saw caused my lips to fall wide open.

"Oh God!" Grandma was rattled. I thrust myself forward.

"What do you want?" Her hair was drenched across half her face and her clothes were torn yet again. And somehow, she found herself back on the porch of the house she'd destroyed. "Huh? You want to burn it all down this time?" She was the girl we'd rescued that night.

And I wasn't falling for her games that night.

"Eliana," Nana called as soon as she lifted her eyes, they were shimmered with tears. "Oh" I softly exclaimed, guilt stinging my heart.

"I'm sorry" The girl whispered. Her hands were quivering and her eyes bore the darkest spots underneath them. She could barely look into my eyes as she talked. "No, are you okay?" I inched closer to her.

She shook her head.

"Do you need us to help you?" I asked. Nana cleared her throat doubtfully but I had a plan. The girl nodded at my question. And I made sure I looked her in the eyes when I told her—

"Then you have to tell me who you are." I whispered.

"Tell us what exactly you're running from. Or what exactly is doing this to you...then I promise, we'll be able to help" I continued. Her chapped lips fell apart. "Promise?" She echoed.

"Promise."

"My name..." There was a vicious crack in her voice. "My name is Carys from what I remember and," A hard lump went down her throat. I waited eagerly to hear her next words but nothing could've prepared me still.

"I'm a witch."

I looked at Nana in disbelief after those words and even she was shocked, but that was until Carys stepped into our home and the lights began to flicker, up until they went off. And then, by herself and control, she brought it on again. Carys paused with a brow perched over her eyes.

My lips were sealed with a hand over them.

"A witch in Oakland?" My Grandma whispered. "That's a first. Now, that you've answered who you are," Carys paused. "How about you tell us the real reason why you're here right now?" Nana persisted and Carys pushed yet another hard lump down her throat before she answered.

"Well, you." Carys didn't hold back and even a slight chuckle escaped her lips. "What?" I was restive for a moment, running my hands through my hair. You see, you're the real reason why I'm here," Carys muttered.

And there was just something off about the way she was speaking like she was being controlled. And when she inched closer to me, I stepped backward but Carys was able to grab my wrist.

"Fuck!" My jaw fell open.

"Everything leads back to you, Eliana!" Carys yelled as I struggled to fight her off. "That was the reason,"

"Reason for what?!" I shouted.

"The reason I was told to find you!" And once she said those words, I was able to graze my heel against her face. Carys fell back on the porch and I was able to charge forward to lock the door. Once I turned around to my Nana, I was breathing heavily from my lips as I echoed.

"What the actual hell was that about?!" And she was just as speechless.