

Chapter 34 The Great Fire

ELIANA.

"I don't...I don't understand"

"My Grandfather died in the Great Fire and it was an accident. Nana told me they figured out it was something electrical in the temple..." "Well did it ever occur to you that the only people that died in there were werewolves?" Denver asked me and I gulped down a hard lump.

"Oakland's filled with Werewolves" I denied and he scoffed.

"It wasn't an electrical fire, Eliana. Neither was it an accident. My mother died in that fire and it was because of Aurora and ultimately because of me." He said and it struck a chord in my chest, hearing him talk about the first woman he loved.

I didn't even think Denver had it in him love.

Maybe it was because of Aurora, maybe she was the one who changed him. I lifted my eyes to him as he began.

"The Witches and the Werewolves never mixed. For centuries, we both hated ourselves and were mortal enemies" I'd only read that in books. I, for one never thought that witches existed until Carys showed up.

"Why?" I asked. "Why did we never get along?"

"Because they were here first" Denver pressed his lips together. "They claim that Oakland belonged to them. That it was their land, so when the Werewolves settled down here all those years ago, it caused a rift between the two tribes that ultimately left the Witches displaced."

"But it also made us enemies" Denver explained. "Ever since then, they'd been trying to get back and the Cold War gave them the perfect opportunity. It was a plan in the making for so long and I can't believe how easy it was for us to fall for it" There was regret in his raucous voice.

"What happened that night, Denver?" I asked.

"I'll tell you but the story doesn't start the night of the Great Fire, it starts the day I met Aurora. Blake and I had gone hunting that morning, in search of game but instead, we came across an angel. I'd always remember how I stopped in my tracks when I heard her sing" He said.

"It was like the voice of a siren which drew my brother's attention and mine towards her. We climbed hills to get to the waterfall and finally, when I first laid on Aurora, she was the most beautiful girl I'd seen. She was bathing in the pond and her exposed skin glistened beneath the sun"

"She's beautiful, Blake said, his jaw hanging loose. Mine too"

"I'm so sorry, Aurora apologized as soon as she saw us. Then her lips curled with a smile that could brighten up a room. Her hair was light blonde and her eyes were golden. Her voice was—"

"Denver" I cleared my throat and he looked back at me. Then he scoffed.

"I'm only telling you this because Aurora looked like something extraordinary, something she was but I didn't know then. I didn't know her antics or games before it was too late" He replied.

"So Blake fell in love with her?" I asked.

"Immediately, he was bewitched. Convinced it was love at first sight. After we got home, he wouldn't stop talking about her. Swore, he'd do everything he could to see her again. She did to him first. Blake loved her like she was oxygen" Denver said.

"Did he see her again?"

"I was the one who did. A week later, I ran into her in the woods again. Aurora and I took a walk that lasted for hours and we talked and talked about everything. I was only nineteen, I was convinced she was the best thing. She made me believe that," It was me who scoffed this time.

"So you fell in love too? Both you and Blake?" I questioned.

"We both did." And even though I'd like to think it was a hilarious joke, Denver said it with the straightest of faces. "I was sure it was love. That she was who I wanted. We spent days and days together after that, hiding from Blake at first because I knew he loved her too."

"But when he finally found out, he was so furious we got into this big fight. It was the first time Blake and I fought like that. Maybe over the television remote or over who gets the most cereal but the fight that day, it was different. Like something had overcome us" Denver added.

"Looking back now, I realize it was all her" He laughed. "Everything from the onset, singing in the forest, our supposed chance encounter, it was orchestrated by the witch herself, Aurora" Denver continued.

"And you knew when?" I asked him.

"I knew, I had my doubts after catching her in so many compromising situations but I mean, I didn't actually know until I found out the Witch's Plan. By then, they'd infiltrated the Packs, every single one of them. Just like Aurora forced herself into our lives, there were many other hers as well, roaming in Oakland. Witches, who had come back."

"I thought I was in love, Eliana. For most of it now, I'm not even sure how much of it was real. Aurora played us and then she betrayed us. That betrayal was what killed my mother" Denver said.

"She met her?" I asked softly.

"She met everyone, and it was not just because of me alone. Blake too, we might have fallen apart after the fight but he was relentless in his pursuit. He wanted Aurora for himself but she was playing us both. Like puppets to a string, she was telling us different things and that she both loved us. My mother was very skeptical, she couldn't believe Blake and I would fight over a girl so she thought Aurora was bad news."

"And I should've listened to her. Man, I should've listened but all I wanted was for the both of them to get along. That's all I wanted for that day. Aurora had invited my mum to the temple that night and she didn't want to go but I made her to. I told her how much it mattered to me that she liked the person I was in love with. I sent her to her death" Denver's voice cracked and tears were streaming down his face.

I reached for his hands before squeezing it softly.

"No, Denver. It wasn't your fault. For all we know, it may have been Aurora who compelled you" I whispered. He shook his head. "Your Grandpa was also invited by someone. By a Witch."

"Every werewolf in that building when it came down was there because of a Witch. That was the plan. That during the distraction of the War, they would sneak back into Oakland for their revenge. And starting from every Pack leader's home, they'd take one soul with them." Denver explained.

"And my mother paid the price."

"My Grandpa, he was religious. It wasn't the first time he'd been in a temple—" "Eliana" But Denver called. "It was a setup. The Witches started that fire and sealed the doors with magic until the whole building came down. They murdered us, in cold blood" Denver shook his head.

"And Aurora told me that day, she told me everything. But it was too late. I was the first to get to the temple when the building was burning and I remember my whole world just crashing in. That was the day I lost my mother and you lost your Grandpa and the score of other Werewolves" I covered my head with a sting in the depths of my heart.

My Grandpa couldn't have died because of a Witch.

Except there was someone else. He was seeing Nana at that time, I wasn't sure she knew the truth. This couldn't be the truth.

"And Aurora, what happened to her after? To the both of you" She said. "She told me everything but that she wasn't sorry. The Werewolves had ruined her family years ago and this was a carefully planned revenge. But then, she told me that somewhere in the midst of everything, that she loved me and I loved her too. That we could've been something."

"But she killed your mother?" There was a crack in my voice.

"Aurora was sick and twisted. She was manipulative and evil. Her endearing and angelic persona was only a front for the monster she really was and we fell for it. I fell for it. I don't think I ever forgave myself for that day. My mother died because of me. Because of love"

"My father was distraught. Everyone was and a chunk of him changed that day. A chunk of me too. Because I swore to never fall for another person again. Love only existed for betrayal. The one that can't happen without the other, I told myself" Denver said and a tear welled up in my eyes. This was the why, wasn't it?

The why I was treated the way I was.

It wasn't never me. It was Aurora and all the hurt and heartbreak and betrayal, the trauma he still carried from her.

"You're not incapable of love, Denver. It wasn't love with Aurora" I whispered. "It was manipulation" "Well, I just refused to put myself in a position where I can be manipulated" He replied. "That's why my guards went up and I became so cold and stoic. I had to be, especially for my father and for Blake" His voice went low.

"Blake?" I muttered. "What happened to him when he found out the truth?" I asked. "Blake," Denver paused, shaking his head. "Well, he never believed because he never heard from Aurora herself. He was still convinced that he loved her. He still is,"

"Still?" I echoed. Denver nodded.

"And he never forgave me for taking her away from him. He was convinced I was still doing everything in my power to keep them apart up until she died. Which was not long after. The Werewolves took their revenge back on the Witches and unfortunately, Aurora was massacred."

"He's been angry at me ever since" Denver said.

"He's been angry at the whole world" And suddenly, it made a lot of sense why he was the way he was. Denver had only just explained. And then he pulled away from my hands after being intertwined for so long.

Wiping his tears, he cleared his throat.

"There," He sniffled. "That's the whole story I promised to tell you"

"Do you now believe that I trust you? That what happened six years ago wasn't because of you, Eliana?" He darted his eyes to me. "If anything, you caught me by surprise when I rescued you that night. And I started to feel these things I told myself I never would. I had to make it stop..."

"Rejecting you hurt me, Eliana. It hurt me even more" He whispered. I looked at him and a tear dropped down my cheek. "You didn't have to" I shook my head. "That one betrayed you so much doesn't mean the whole world would. It didn't mean that I would" I replied.

"It wasn't a chance I was willing to take" He muttered and it hurt my throat to say what I did next. "Still?" I whispered and Denver let his gaze fall back on me. For a moment, it was hard to read what he was thinking.

That was before he said, "Still." And the realization hit me like a storm.

"You have to understand. I'm an Alpha now, there are so many lives and so many risks. I can't ever let that happen again. I just...I can't Eliana" And I stood with my eyes welled up with tears.

Why did it hurt me so much when I was sure I felt nothing for Denver?

Or was that a lie? Was it Denial?

Did I still feel something for him?

"Eliana," He called, roping my hands back. I stopped in my tracks to look back at him. "You may have told me this Denver, but it doesn't mean you trust me still. Because if you did, you wouldn't be worried about me betraying you like Aurora did" I gritted through my teeth.

"But it's okay. This is just an arrangement, isn't it?" I wiped the tears on my cheeks as I pushed a hard lump down my throat. "One more thing," I looked back again, sure as hell now about where I stood at that moment.

Because I didn't need someone that wasn't sure. Elijah didn't need a father that was too afraid to love him.

"I didn't tell you about my kid because I didn't want to complicate things and I didn't think it was your business" I said, freeing myself from his hands. "Eliana, don't be like this" I stepped in front of the door, leaving it open for him. "I should get some sleep, Denver." I looked down.

His approaching footsteps reverberated in my heart until he walked out of the door. And when he did, I leaned against it, dropping to the ground in tears. I buried my face in my hands, crying silently because it was a lie.

It was all a lie.

I still loved Denver, and deep down, I feared I always would.