

## Chapter 7 Returning Home

ELIANA.

"Eliana..."

"Are you there?" My Grandmother asked and a loud sob rang through my ears from over the phone. Heartbroken, terrified and soul-shattering. I could hear the pain in her fragile cracking voice.

And soon, tears started to form in my eyes. I stopped in my tracks on my way down the hill and Elijah was right beside me. It took a moment for me to fully grapple with what she was saying and even longer for me to say anything back. I just...I was just so confused.

"I don't understand" I softly whispered.

"Your father is sick, Eliana" I'd heard her the first time but that was only one of the many things that raced through my mind at that moment. "No, how are you even...how are you talking to me right now?" I asked.

"I thought you were dead, Grandma."

"All those years, they told me—" "Eliana" She interrupted, her voice was just as I remembered. "I wasn't dead, your father only kept me away. It was what Sienna wanted. She'd brainwashed him for all those years" She added and I pushed a hard lump down my throat.

"Now that he's sick, where is she? Where is Jaxon?" I asked and that name left a sour taste in the back of my mouth and all my Grandmother did was let out a heavy exhale. Thick with all her unmentioned worries and I could tell whatever was going on in Oakland was pretty serious.

"Oh Eliana" She gasped.

"Nothing is as it was anymore."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "Your father fell ill not so long ago. Terribly stricken by a disease no one has a cure to. He first started to lose his memories and then all his strength. His health has deteriorated ever since and these days, we're just counting down the days until..." She could barely continue and I felt the tears stream down my cheeks.

"Until he dies now Eliana" And even with my rough relationship with my father, hearing those words still broke my heart into pieces. Those were words a daughter should never hear about her dad nonetheless.

But that wasn't even all.

"And Sienna and Jaxon, they're just waiting patiently for him to die and for his Alpha title to be stripped off him. Jaxon's looked forward to the day that he's finally crowned Alpha for so long now and the people have deeded that day. He's started to rule since your father got sick and incapable, and he's done so with an iron fist."

"He's been merciless to everyone under him. We're all treated like slaves like it's a dictatorship. No one dares say too much or disobey him. And even now, I'm hearing of a war that he's declared. It's unsafe here in Blood Hound, Eliana. We're all just scared and Jaxon, he can't take over."

If there was anyone familiar with Jaxon's wrath, it was me. And suddenly, the memories of those nights that he would sneak into my dungeon came into my mind as hot, tumultuous flashes.

I shut my eyes with my heart between my teeth. Of course, no one else knew but myself till now. He was only my stepbrother then and he was so cruel, I couldn't imagine how ruthless he could become with so much power as an Alpha of the Pack.

Blood Hound for that matter, a Pack usually known for its peace and collectiveness but also the same one that turned their backs on me when I needed them. The ones that blamed me unrighteously for my mother's death.

"What...what do you want me to do now, Grandma?" I stuttered and there came another sigh from her lips. "There's only one person that can stop your brother from taking over and—"

"Grandma" I interrupted because I knew exactly where this was going. As I stood still, the winds went through my hair and dried the tears on my cheeks. My throat was sore and so were my eyes. "That person is you, Eliana" She continued nonetheless.

"You are as much of an heir as he is and if you come back and challenge for the role of an Alpha then it could block Jaxon. Everyone knows that you would be a much better ruler than he could ever be." She whispered and I shook my head.

"The same people that treated me like slaves?" There was a crack in my voice. "That made me go through all of that when I was just a little girl, now you want me to abandon everything including the life that I have made here and you want me to come back and help them?" I asked her.

"Eliana,"

"Because it's not fair you know. It's not fair that you ask this of me Grandma" I broke down into tears and by the sound of her voice, I could tell she did too. "We have nowhere to turn, Eliana. You're my last hope, you're the last hope of the entire Pack."

"If Jaxon rules, he would run the whole Pack into the ground in no time and Blood Hound would be no more. It would be worse than it already is." She said softly. "I can't be Alpha" I muttered.

"And I can't be Luna, I can't be anything at all." I blurted out. "This wasn't what I wasn't meant for. I can't take it, Grandma. Please don't make me take it" I whispered and she hummed. "Of course you can" She replied. "You are meant for so much more even."

"Have you forgotten all those years that I told you day after day that you were special? I had to remind you so you would never forget" My Grandmother said but I shook my head. "You have no idea what you're talking about because you left!" I exclaimed.

"And my life was so unbearable for so many years. I never felt special, not for one day of my life. But I felt broken and shattered into pieces, I felt mistreated and worthless. I felt abandoned and devastated, hurt and dispirited so you can't stand there and tell me that I'm special." I cried.

"I never left, Eliana" She answered.

"I never wanted to but it was Sienna, she convinced them to take me into exile and I too have spent so long in the darkness of the forest. I'd felt broken and devastated and dispirited and all those things when I thought I would never see you again, Eliana."

"But thankfully, your father has come to his senses and so have the rest of the Pack. The real villains are Sienna and Jaxon and they want to take everything from us—" I pushed a hard lump down my throat before I echoed. "Dad knows?"

"Yes" She replied. "Does he know that...does he know that you called me?" I whispered and Grandma Abbey heaved. "Of course he does, it was his idea to come to me, it was also his idea to call you." She continued.

"He's realized his mistakes and how he'd treated and unfairly blamed you all those years for your mother's death. And I could sit on this end and tell you how sorry he was but he wants a chance to tell you to your face. He wants you to come back home, Eliana."

"We all do." And there was such a time that those words would have meant the whole world to me and I would've come running but that was six years ago. So much had changed now. I was different, I had Elijah—a secret no one knew about and it was going to stay that way.

Alpha Denver could never know of his son but the chances of him finding out were more if I moved back to Oakland. Besides, it wasn't even safe for me with Jaxon, and how we last left off. So many odds were stacked against me and my mind was filled with uncertainty and confusion.

On one hand, was Elijah who was finding it so hard to fit in with the humans, I didn't blame him because sometimes, I don't think I fully have myself. But it could be so much better back in Oakland. He wouldn't have to feel so different. I would just have to keep him away from Tombsdale.

There was a brief pause over the phone and my stomach had tied into a knot. "Mommy, are you okay?" Elijah asked softly and I sniffled through my nose, wiping the tears from my eyes. "I am" I replied, holding him close and the next thing I heard was my Grandma's voice.

"Who was that?" She asked, hearing him from over the phone and a hard lump slipped down my throat. There was no use hiding him from her, she was the one person I could actually trust. And an idea struck me, it wouldn't be so bad if I kept Elijah with her amidst everything. It would be so helpful to know that he was with someone safe.

Someone who could take care of him and train him just like she trained me. "It's my son," I whispered. "Your—" There was a crack in her voice bridled with disbelief and I nodded.

"It's your Grandson" A lighthearted sob echoed from her lips at my words and as his fingers intertwined with mine, I drew him closer to me.

"Don't worry, you'll meet him when I come back" I muttered before pressing my lips together and my Grandma gasped. "Eliana" She called softly. "You're coming back?" Did I have a choice?

Of course I did but I would be just as much of a monster as they were to me if I turned my back on them when they needed me. I could escape, hide and run from Blood Hound but the truth remains that it was still my Pack. It was my home, not anywhere else.

And most importantly, it was my mother's home.

She loved the Pack so dearly and they meant so much to her. Even as she passed, they always said her last wish was that the Pack never crumble. That we take care of each other, that they take care of me. I would do the same when I grow older.

They failed on their end, but it didn't mean I had to on mine.

After all, this was all for her. Everything I did was for my mother, even this decision I'd taken.

"I'm coming back" My voice was low and my eyes set on the Tuscany Hills in the distance. I had to leave this place. "You don't know how much this means to me, Eliana. To all of us," My Grandma said.

"It won't be an easy war standing up to Jaxon but I'm sure it would be one that we would win in the end because it's a war we're fighting together." She continued and I heaved in a deep breath. Like I said, things were different now. I wasn't who I was six years ago.

Here in the commune, we trained every day to be warriors, to face the obstacles and grab them by their horns. We were trained to stand up to our greatest fears and the trauma of our past.

We were trained to overcome and so, I had faith too.

And Jaxon didn't scare me so much anymore. I could finally, after so long face him and charge him for all the terrible things he'd done to me. And in the end, I could rescue my Pack with Elijah by my side.

It wouldn't be so hard now, would it?

"Eliana," My Grandma called after a while and I held the phone against my ears. Her words slipped easily from her lips, falling to cradle around my heart and a smile crept to my lips.

"Your mother would be so proud" She'd said softly before hanging up the call. As the winds flushed into my face, I sucked in a deep breath and Elijah squeezed my hand. "Who was that?" He asked and I looked at him.

"Was that daddy?" Those words escaped his lips and it stung my heart so suddenly. I looked into Elijah's eyes, this was the first time he called that name and he meant it. Caught off guard, I fluttered my eyelashes.

"No," I paused and Elijah shrugged before making his way down the hills.

"No, it was not." And as soon as I reached the bottom of the hill, I was met with Alicia. "There you are!" She exclaimed. "You missed breakfast."

"Yeah, I just—" I shrugged my shoulders. "I wasn't hungry."

"Are you okay? Your face seems a little flustered" She noted and I just scoffed lightly. "You know what, I'm okay Alicia" I reached out to her shoulders before flashing a smile at her. "And thank you..." I continued.

Over the last six years, Alicia has been my closest friend here. But as I looked at her and around the mountains, I knew it was time to go.

"Thank you for everything." I left her with a furrow between her brows as I drew Elijah's hands. "Hey, I want to tell you something" I held him close, because where do I even begin?

I threw one last look back at Alicia and it was the last time I ever saw her. Because immediately the clock struck midnight and the beginning of a new day, I woke Elijah up in the tent. I'd already packed my things and his and he knew what was going on. Well...enough, he knew enough.

"It's time" I whispered, beneath the sound of the cricket noises and he yawned with his arms above his head. I carried him on my back, climbing out of the tent and down the hill. On one side were the forests and the other one took you outside Tuscany Hills.

However, it wasn't until I reached beside the giant billboard that said 'Goodbye To The Mountains' that I realized this was truly happening. The night was mercilessly cold and I gazed into the star-filled skies for a moment. I was really leaving—and most of all, I was really going back.

"Come on." After so long, I was going back home.