Chapter 20

"I said wait in the car!" he growls, grabbing me and spinning around. I growl, turning back when he grabs the back of my head, pulling me to him and blocking my view.

"Please go wait in the car," Axton whispers, and I can feel his heart racing beneath my hands, smell his fear of whatever is going on emanating from his pores. His fingers tangle in my hair.

"What's going on, Axton? Is Tieriny alright?" He makes a weird noise in his chest.

"Please, Lena, you can't unsee what's in there. Just go back to the car, I'll be there in five minutes."

I push off his chest, trying to see around him, only for him to step in my path again. "Axton! What about Tieriny?" he doesn't answer, but his jaw clenches.

"Go back to–" I shove past him, needing to know if my friend is okay, and shove open the doors and nearly throw up from the stench. It is amplified in here worse than in the foyer, and I retch, gagging and clutching my knees when the foul smell steals my breath.

"Elena, do as he say!" Lexa snarls at me, and I shake my head, pinching my nose.

Axton growls behind me as I gag again when I see a small red shoe with blue laces not far from me. Lifting my head a little, I notice the dead body of a child.

He is wearing navy-blue sweatpants with some cartoon character on them, and a white shirt, only the shirt is covered in blood, his skin is black from decay, his throat is ripped out and I gasp. My eyes move higher to look at his face when I spot another crumpled, disfigured body next to him as I stand upright.

A second later, a hand covers my eyes and sparks rush across my neck where Axton's lips press gently, his other arm wrapping around my waist as he pulls me back against him.

"That was a boy," I murmur in shock. Who would do that to a child?

"Please, wait in the car," Axton whispers.

"But–"

"Tieriny is dead, Elena," Axton murmurs, and my stomach drops. My blood runs cold in my veins and my heart feels like it is about to leap out of my throat.

Axton moves, pulling me with him, keeping his hands over my eyes, and I hear the doors close behind us. "How many?" I ask him, my eyes burning with tears.

"Twenty-nine, eleven are children," Axton whispers. So many.

"How could that many people go missing without you noticing?" I ask incredulously.

"All restaurants have been shut down, only essentials trades are open, Elena."

"Elena?" I nod, walking toward the foyer doors, wishing I listened to Lexa, and backed out of the room. Axton is right. I can't unsee the little boy. Needing to get out of here, I shove open the doors. The moment the fresh air hits me, I rush to the gutter, now understanding why the officer threw up because I am forced into the same predicament as I lose my stomach.

I retch, bile coming up and the lunch we bought when tingles brush my face as Axton grabs my hair, pulling it back.

"Come, I'll take you home." I shake my head, not wanting to be left in the packhouse alone with the boys after seeing that.

"I'm fine. I'll wait in the car."

"I'm done here. Marco just showed up." He tells me, and I lift my head, seeing his black car pull up beside Axton's, and then so does my father's.

Marco moves toward Axton, who quickly moves to the car. He reaches in and grabs his drink because I drank mine already. He hands it to me and I sip it, to wash the taste away, just as my father comes over.

"They found them?" my father asks. Axton nods his head and Marco curses, rushing inside.

"All of them?"

"Looks like we found one lair." Axton answers.

"Tieriny?" I shake my head.

"We think she stumbled upon them. Her body was fresh. She was found by the alarms which signaled the station." Axton tells him. My father curses and rushes inside.

I watch him, knowing I should be the one going in there since I technically own his pack.

"Let your father identify your pack members. You don't need to go back in there." Axton says, sensing my thoughts. I chew my lip, yet even Lexa is urging me away and I can't get the image of the boy from my head.

"Vampires?" I ask him and he sighs.

"We are starting to wonder if it's something more. Half the bodies were torn apart."

"Werewolf?" I ask. Vampires mostly drain their victims, not rip them to pieces, yet how do you explain the blood loss?

Axton says nothing, instead opening the passenger side door and motioning for me to climb in.

"He knows something," Lexa states, and I agree, watching as he slides into the driver's seat.

"You know something."

"We aren't sure. Not even Marco has come across something like this. It will cause hysteria if it gets out."

"So, the council has just been sitting on information?"

"No, Marco and I have been, though I don't think we can hide it now."

"Hide what, Axton, tell me."

"We think it's a form of strigoi."

"Strigoi don't exist anymore," I tell him.

"We know, they haven't for centuries, but it's the only thing that makes sense, why we can't catch them also explains why sometimes we find fur at the murder sites."

"Fur?"

"Yes, vampires only need to feed once or twice a week. This thing is draining victims daily." I gasp in horror. I've heard stories, but these creatures were hunted to extinction. They are the very reason humans feared vampires in the first place.

"Strigoi can shape shift," I murmur, praying I remembered that wrong.

"Exactly."

"You think one is in the city?"

"I think it's not just hunting in the city; I think it's within one of the packs."