

## Chapter 58

“Sondra,” Elena breathes, and Sondra looks up. She smiles, but it doesn’t look right; it’s forced, and I can tell she is in pain.

“I see you found me,” she murmurs before coughing and choking on her cigarette. Elena instantly rushes over to her and rubs her back. Reaching for the glass of water on the table, I pass it to her when Elena snatches it and sniffs it. She scrunches her face up, passing it back to me. I sniff it, finding it is vodka, not water like it appears to be.

“Grab a glass of water from inside,” Elena tells me. Sondra continues to cough but holds up her hand, it’s shakes terribly, but she snatches the glass off me. Elena watches her worriedly and glances at me.

“Call an ambulance,” Elena tells me.

“You’ll do no such thing. Can’t a woman die in peace?” Sondra snaps at her.

“I don’t want you to die at all.” Elena retorts.

“Well, it is not up to you; I want to die and die I shall. Not even the gods will stop me from croaking this time, the grim reaper is knocking, and he wants an accomplice; I have volunteered,” she says, only to wheeze and start coughing again.

“I feel a hospital would be far more comfortable than this plastic chair. If you insist on dying, wouldn’t you rather die in comfort?” Elena asks her. It’s funny watching them, they have their own love language, and it comes out in short replies and sarcastic words thrown at each other.

Sondra sighs, her fingers white as she grips the table, and she leans back. Blood dribbles from between her lips, and she shakily wipes her mouth on the back of her hand.

“Why here, of all places?” Elena demands.

“You know why, Elena. Let's not play pretend. Besides, I didn't want to drop dead next to Marco. Only when I got here did I find this whole dying ordeal is taking a little longer than predicted, I kinda believed I would croak going over the bridge, but seems Floyd is trying to torture me more by dragging this shit out. You hear me, you old bastard, I am coming for you, not even death will save you from me!” she yells at the sky, shaking her fist. I raise my eyebrows at her.

“Oh stop looking at me like that! Now be a love and fetch me another glass of vodka, if I am going to hell, I am going drunk!” she huffs. Elena presses her lips in a line but nods for me to do as she asks, walking over to Sondra's car, I grab the bottle only to hear the chair scrape across the ground. Glancing back, I see Elena helping her to stand, but Sondra smacks her hands away, making Elena toss hers in the air.

“I'm coming, I'm coming, just hold your damn horses,” Sondra mutters.

She stands upright, and wobbles on her feet. “I'm driving!” Sondra declares.

“Like hell you are, you may want to visit the grim-reaper but I sure as hell don't!” Elena scolds, snatching her keys before Sondra can off the table.

“Oi muscles, get here and help carry a legless old woman to the car,” she snaps, clicking her fingers at me.

Chuckling, I walk over to her and scoop her up while Elena grabs the door.

“Now, now, stop that. Why so handsy!” she snaps at me.

“Exactly how am I supposed to grab you if I can't touch you?” I ask her. She seems to think for a second.

“He has a point,” Sondra babbles to Elena. I set her in the seat of her car, but when I go to close her door, she clicks her tongue.

“Weren't you getting me a vodka?” she asks and I glance at Elena over the roof of the car. She sighs but nods and I quickly grab the bottle and her glass.

“Life's too short to wait for you to pour me a glass, just give it here, I'll show you how real women drink!” she tsk's. She swigs from the bottle and nestles back in her seat, pulling a cigarette from her packet. Elena climbs in the driver's seat and starts Sondra's car. On the drive home, I ring Marco and the relief in his voice is evident.

He tells me he will meet us back at the packhouse, yet the longer we drive, the more Elena keeps glancing in the mirror at Sondra. Peering over my shoulder, Sondra is leaning to one side, head slumped forward, bloody drool seeping from her lips and her unlit smoke has fallen into her lap.

Sondra mumbles to herself in her half drunk stupor and I turn back to the front. However, just before we arrive, the bumpy dirt road must wake her because she speaks.

“I always hated this place,” she speaks, and Elena’s eyes dart to her in the mirror. We say nothing, instead listening to her ramble.

“It was never home, not to me. It was a prison.”

“So where was home, Sondra?” I ask, peering over to look at her. She laughs and shakes her head.

“Not here, wasn’t there either. The closest to home I ever got was my shitty apartment next to Marco. Every other place was a prison, just a little shinier than the last.” she murmurs, looking out at the fields. Elena stops the car halfway up the driveway. She swivels in her seat, looking back at Sondra, and I can tell she is barely holding it together.

“So, where do you wanna go?” Elena asks her and Sondra smiles sadly.

“Home, but it doesn’t exist any more, not for me.” Sondra says.

“We made this place a home. The women here love you like family,” Elena tells her, and Sondra nods.

“Home is where your heart belongs, a piece of mine is here, but it's not my home. Those women are a pack, family. But home to me isn’t a place. It’s a someone. Someone I could never have.”

“Marco?” Elena asks her, and she snuffles and nods. Elena looks at me, and I nod, letting her know Marco is on his way.

Elena keeps driving until Sondra tells her to stop. Women have gathered outside the packhouse. We sit in the car for a second when Sondra points to the old willow tree on the hill.

“That looks like a nice place to croak, I can see the shit hole for what is up there. What do you say muscles think you can carry me up that hill?” she asks me.

“Depends if I can touch you?” I ask her.

She slaps my arm. “How would you carry me, if you can’t touch me?” she scoffs, and I open my door and climb out of the car.