

Chapter 59

Moving to the rear of the car, the women crowd around, and I hear Elena trying to regather herself. Trying to slip a facade she has worn for too long back on. Clearing her throat, she moves to take one of the blankets her mother rushes out with.

Opening the rear door, Sondra grabs her vodka bottle, and I pick her up moving to the front of the car. Only when I do, Elena's entire pack is on their knees, baring their necks to Sondra. Sondra smiles and then shivers, Elena moves to wrap the blanket around her, and I start climbing the hill.

However, when we reach the top, Sondra speaks. "I was wrong about you," she tells me, making me glance down at her.

"Now I know you're dying, you just admitted you're wrong about something," I tell her and she chuckles softly. I sit on the ground and I prop Sondra between my legs so she can lean against me. Elena sitting beside me.

"You're nothing like your father, I used to think you would be just like him, having grown up in his image, but now I see you were just another of his victims." Sondra tells me, and I swallow.

"I'm sorry, I couldn't save her; I couldn't save any of them. If only I had the courage to do what I did to Floyd back then, we may be having a different conversation. Maybe none at all." She muses.

"You couldn't have predicted the outcome of being with your mate, Sondra," Elena whispers.

"You're right, but I could have stopped it before he took more lives. I had plenty of opportunities. I just didn't take them. Same as your fathers, I could have ended them, but I didn't. Instead, I convinced myself I would be the same as them if I did. Instead, I was the same because I sat back and did nothing." she sighs. Elena shakes her head but Sondra reaches out and grips her hand.

“But you two are different. You’re both who you are in spite of your father’s. Defeated them, conquered the trauma instead of passing it down to the next generation.”

Elena laughs. “That is yet to be seen,” she chuckles.

“No, I’ve seen it,” Sondra tells her, and Elena looks at her.

“You left despite loving him because he was toxic. You didn’t use your boys as an excuse to stay. You used them as your excuse to leave. So, I know you will do the right thing by them if you’re willing to break your own heart for them.” Sondra tells her.

Sondra looks over her shoulder at me. “I mean no offense by that. I’m not just referencing you, but her father. She could have gone back and asked for forgiveness, but she didn’t.”

“Yes, you did, but it’s okay,” I chuckle.

“Yeah, I did. But it’s the same for you, son. You overrode your ego and are trying to make up for your mistakes. That is more than your father ever cared to do. No, he would just beat her down until there was nothing left but a compliant shell of a woman. Therefore, you are not the same, Elena is not beneath you, she is your equal. That is people’s biggest mistake in life, heart, and ego. Sometimes, they follow their heart and stay not realizing they’re giving them the power to keep breaking it. In turn they raise their children broken. Others can’t see past their ego to know their flaws so they can’t work on fixing them. Neither of you are those people, neither of you are your fathers,”

“My childhood was good, Sondra,” Elena tells her. “It was only when I grew older did dad turn into that.” Elena sighs.

“But not for your mother, do you think she would hold the same answers, dear? She put all her time and energy into you kids hoping you didn’t make the same mistakes, hoping he would be the man he said he was. It was only until he didn’t keep his end of the deal that she realized she was lying to herself. Just like me with Floyd,” Sondra tells her. She lifts the bottle to her lips.

“Gosh, who would have thought you were so depressing drunk, give me that.” Elena tells her, taking the bottle and swigging from it, Elena chokes coughing and spluttering.

“Geez what is that, jet fuel?”

“Almost, I once fired my tractor up with this shit,” Sondra tells her, taking the bottle back.

“You two promise me you won’t ever sacrifice life for love,” Sondra says. Elena’s brows furrow and so do mine.

“It sounds funny now, but that is what I did. I sacrificed life for love that wasn’t really love, just some twisted version of what I perceived as love. You two will be different, because both of you want the best for each other.”

“It wasn’t until I was old that I suddenly found myself comfortable in my own misery. It took me killing Floyd to realize I hated the person I also loved—years of living a step behind him, becoming and morphing into his shadow while mine faded away. So caught up in everything to do with him that I forgot what I wanted. Forgot who I am and who I truly loved.” Sondra sighs.

“Instead, I became what he wanted me to be, just like your mothers did for your fathers. They sacrificed themselves until nothing was left, and now yours is trying to rebuild her life, just as I had to. And yours, Axton, is dead because it took me too long to realize I could have stopped it.”

Elena drops her chin on her knees, watching the sunset. Sondra lifts her hand, brushing it down her hair before her hand falls limply to my leg and she clears her throat.

“I’m not saying this to hurt you, either of you, I’m trying to explain. I’m not saying your mother was wrong, Elena, she did what she thought was right at the time, just as I did, but it was because I was blinded by the mate bond, as she was. You become comfortably familiar in it. You spend so long with someone you eventually lose yourself within them. They slowly break the pieces off that you thought you could live without. Just like me, your mother lost herself, and it took her leaving to find herself again.”

“We aren’t the same,” I tell Sondra and she nods.

“Resentment and sacrifice are the two things that anchor us, pull us down and slowly drown us. Resentment that he didn’t see how much he was breaking me. Sacrifice that I allowed him to do it, sacrificing my own happiness allowing him to decide when I received it because my ego got in the way to notice my own toxic traits. I convinced myself that love was holding me here, but it wasn’t, it was fear of losing everything

that I sacrificed for, in the end what I thought I was gaining was nothing, instead I lost everything.”

Hearing a car, I glance over my shoulder to see headlights as Marco races to the packhouse. “You two are different, I know because I have seen it, you work well together, but fight for each other even when fighting against each other. Floyd never fought for me; it was always one sided.” I tug the blankets higher, noticing the goosebumps lacing her skin.

“Floyd would have let me burn in the flames if it meant saving his own skin,” she looks over her shoulder at me and inclines her head. “But he’d walk through them and burn with you while trying to save you, rather than leave you behind.” Sondra tells her.

“Like Marco?” I ask her and she nods.

“He tried to save me so many times, unfortunately I was too stubborn to realize. I thought he was on his brother's side, not realizing the only reason he stuck around was because I was with his brother.” she sighs, sipping from her drink before coughing, blood spills from her lips. And Elena rubs her back.