

Chapter 68

Axton

I watch in a panic as the house explodes and instinctively snatch Luke just before he reaches the threshold of the smoke-filled porch. The explosion was deafening, enveloping the packhouse in flames and smoke so thick that it makes breathing next to impossible.

Everything happens too fast for anyone to really comprehend and it was the last thing I was expecting when Luke mind-linked me to tell me they were in trouble and Derrick had shown up.

However, amidst all the chaos of screams and burning debris, adrenaline surged through as I pulled up, and I only just got to Luke in time when I raced forward to snatch him up. He had been standing so near to the entrance of the house before it burst forth with destruction. Tossing us back once again when the gas cylinders alongside the packhouse exploded a second time.

Grasping him tightly, his entire body trembles, and tears pour down his face as he stares in anguish at his now-destroyed home. Turning my head, I look for my mate. Elena stares motionlessly. Her blank expression makes my heart sink as she stares at the house, and I can feel her mind racing to take it all in - she seems unable to connect the sight in front of her to reality.

Our sons screaming in the background makes me glance at the cars to see the front windows have burst, but lucky, the angle of the car prevented the back ones from erupting.

It feels surreal.

Luke continues to scream, and I choke back a whimper at what he just witnessed, unsure how to comfort him while trying to figure out where everything went so wrong. My arms remain tightly wrapped around him to protect him from the sharp debris and the heat from flames cascading around us.

Despite being held securely against my body, Luke wails for his mother and father, who I know have perished in their burning home.

Glancing at Elena, she stares expressionless from where she sits on the grass nearby, stunned into silence as she is confronted with the ruins that were once her home; all that is left behind are pieces of smoldering wood and a cloud of ash that seems to go on forever. Her emotions through the bond are tumultuous, grief, anger but also this strange sense of numbness like she can't comprehend what's happened as she keeps flicking between emotions. Lost.

"We can't stay here," Khan murmurs in my head as he comes forward, his despair also potent. His worry for our sons and mate, and his desire to protect them, is far stronger, keeping him level-headed when, just like me, he wants to break something and hurt someone for the anger of what just happened. We were too late, a few minutes earlier, and we may have been able to prevent this. If only I had canceled my appointments today, we would have been here.

Covered in soot and scraps from the blast, I stand, hauling Luke with me as I get up, and I cast one last glance at the burning wreckage, with Luke still sobbing softly in my arms.

I move toward Elena and offer her my hand. She stares at me, blinking back tears, a look on her face so heartbreaking it twists knots in my stomach. Her face is blotchy, her lips quivering, and she has a cut on her cheek.

"We need to go, Love," I whisper to her and reluctantly, she places her hand in mine. When she stands, her gaze is distant and empty. We make our way to her car. The windows in the front are blown out, and the boys scream inside, which seems to set her in motion as she rushes to pull them out, hugging them close.

The fear I felt from her when Luke mind-linked me, was so potent I nearly swerved off the road. It was stomach-turning.

We finally get the boys' car seats out and put them in my car.

In the distance, I can hear the sirens blaring loudly on their way to us. Mind linking Eli, I tell him to get Marco so they can handle it because my mind is on one task and one task alone, and that is to get them away from here. Silently we begin our journey home. Along the way, I try to piece together what had happened and why our lives were suddenly upside down.

We drive in silence, just the sound of the car engine humming low and soft. I can feel a seismic shift within us as we make our way home. I feel helpless against this tragedy that has befallen us. As hard as I try, there is no way to undo this damage. But I can focus on the present and make sure they are safe from further harm.

When we finally arrive home, I hug them tightly, my arms trembling with relief as I lead Elena inside with the boys tucked in her arms.

"Luke?" she panics, whirling around, and I lift my hand, showing I have him. She exhales with relief while glancing down at Luke. He looks lost.

"It's okay, buddy," she whispers softly to him. Elena looks up at me, and I know that her strength will eventually get us through this. We are family, united together in love, and nothing can break that bond. As long as we have each other, we can survive anything.

She will get through this.

"They're gone," Luke murmurs. I watch as Elena swallows down her grief, her eyes turning glassy and her lips quivering.

She takes a deep breath before gathering her courage and nodding resolutely.

"Yes, they are gone," she whispers back, her voice thick with emotion. "But we still have each other."

"But what will happen to me? Where will I go without mom?" Luke asks, and I blink down at him.

"With us, Luke," I murmur. "You'll always have a home with us," I tell him, and he nods sadly.

I wrap my arm around Elena and pull her close. We will weather this storm together, no matter what comes our way. The pain we feel now will eventually pass, but the love that binds us will last forever.

We can survive anything as long as we have each other, and so can Luke with us by his side.

"I'll settle the boys. I need to change them. Can you?" Her eyes move to Luke.

"I'll remain with him," I tell her, and she nods, yet I can tell she was trying to remain strong for him, even when her heart was breaking.

I pull Luke close, and he buries his head in my chest. I hug him tightly while Elena turns away to take care of the boys.