

Chapter 69

I've barely caught any sleep. Worry for Elena keeps me awake at night, knowing she is not coping with the loss of her mother. All week she has done nothing but work, leaving before I wake and coming home only to crawl into bed. I miss her terribly, and so do the boys, but I know all too well what this sort of loss feels like, so I let her go. Although Khan wants me to step in, he doesn't like how much she is working. It has almost become an addiction to her. I just hope after today; things can go back to normal. Today is their funeral, and when I feel her move and roll out of bed, I reach for her before sighing when my hands only manage to grab air.

"We have to be at the funeral home by ten. Service is at 10:30," Elena reminds me like she is reminding me to grab milk on the way home. Sighing, I climb out of bed.

I help her pack the few items she needs for today and take a deep breath. We drive in silence to the funeral home; none of us are ready for this, yet it is something that must be done, and because Sondra's funeral was supposed to be the day after the explosion, we have decided to join them. So today, we lay two to rest, though one I don't know how to feel about. Derrick had done so many wrongs, yet he was still her father and Luke's. I could feel Elena wanted to hate him, wanted to be angry, but no matter the things he had done, she still loved him.

Reaching over, I try to grab her hand, but she is quick to move it away. "Elena?" I murmur, pulling into the car park.

"I know what you're doing and don't. Tears won't bring them back," she says, staring vacantly out the window.

"There is nothing wrong with being emotional, Elena. You don't need to be strong for everyone." I tell her looking in the mirror, I peer at Luke, his headphones in as he stares vacantly out the window. Kyan is banging his rattle against the side of his car seat trying to get his attention.

"Strong is all I got left right now, Axton. My pack has had their entire lives turned upside down, and they don't need another crying pack member. They need an Alpha," Elena snaps before shoving the door open and climbing out of the car.

Elena moves to the trunk to pull out the stroller, and I move to help her before getting the boys out. Michelle pulls up beside us and instantly jumps out to help, and takes the stroller.

However, Luke doesn't climb out of the car, and Elena looks around for him to find him sitting between the two car seats staring out the window. Elena leans in and waves him forward, and he climbs over the seats, falling into the passenger seat, but still, he refuses to climb out. Elena looks at me, and I step forward, trying to coax him out of the car. When he still refuses to get out, Elena crouches beside him, fixing his tie and buttoning up his suit jacket.

"We can't stay out here with you, Luke. I have to go in."

"I will just wait in the car," Luke says, and Elena glances at me over her shoulder. I shrug, not understanding why he doesn't want to go in, and she sighs heavily, turning back to face him.

"Don't you want to say goodbye? If you don't want to go in, I won't force you, but I think you'll regret it if you don't," she tells him.

"It's not that I don't want to say goodbye. It's that everyone will have nice things to say about Mom, but what about Dad? I don't want to listen to them speak badly about him. He wasn't perfect, but he was still ours," Luke says, breaking down. Watching Elena, her lip quivers, and she nods, rubbing his back in understanding.

"Nobody will speak badly about him, I promise," Elena assures. Luke looks up at her, his eyes are puffy with the surrounding rings from crying.

"I won't let them, okay," she tells him.

"You promise?" Luke asks her, and she nods, leaning forward and pressing her lips to his head. When she stands, she offers him her hand, and Luke reluctantly takes it, allowing her to pull him to his feet. Locking the car, I place my hand on Elena's back as we walk inside. The atmosphere is somber, yet there is a sense of peace in the room. We are welcomed by familiar faces of the funeral service people, and I can tell Elena is trying to take comfort in that as they discuss the service, and she tells them no one is to speak for her father.

I swallow, watching as the woman in charge of the service appears confused before understanding crosses their faces, and their eyes go to Luke. Opening the mind-link, I open it to our pack while blocking out Luke's link, warning them if they haven't got anything nice to say to keep their mouths shut regarding Derrick. It wasn't uncommon

for packs to list a person's crimes when they depart. In fact, for those that betray their pack, a service is rarely held, and if it is, it's not the sort of service one would expect. No, it's usually not held in their honor but in their victims, giving them a chance to speak about the pain they caused them to set them free of the past of hurt.

Knowing this, I used to wonder sometimes if my funeral one day would match my father's, or if people would be sad to see me go. I have no doubt now that'll make up for my failures because no failure is bigger for me than not being there for Elena when she truly needed me, and if my mate can forgive me, I can live with everything else bad I've done because her opinion of me is the only one I care for.

While we wait for everyone to arrive, I watch Elena as she stands alone next to the casket, her eyes dark with her grief as she stares at her parents' coffins. My heart aches for her, and I wish I could ease her pain. I wish I could shield her from all of this, but I cannot. I can only stand helplessly by her side, offering silent support.

Luke makes his way over to her, and I notice her eyes flick down toward him, tears threatening to spill, but I know she won't let them. She is strong-headed and will not let her emotions show, even though she is in immense pain. She is trying to stay composed for her mother, also for Luke, and is showing the courage it takes to do so.