

## Chapter 600 Hope

When Elliana announced that she needed to discuss something serious, her entire demeanor shifted. The warmth in her expression disappeared, replaced by something grave and urgent.

Eloisa, ever perceptive, could tell immediately that whatever Elliana wanted to talk about was far from trivial. She turned to Barbara with a gentle but firm voice. "Sweetheart, you have school in the morning, and you shouldn't be staying up this late. Why don't you head upstairs and get some sleep?"

Eloisa considered that Barbara was still just a teenager, and she'd only recently recovered. There was no reason to expose Barbara to whatever emotional swing the upcoming talk might cause.

Barbara had always been a well-behaved child. Even though she would have loved to spend more time with Elliana, she stood up without a word of complaint. "Elliana, I'll visit you when you're free."

"I'd love that," Elliana replied, her smile returning briefly to reassure the girl.

With that settled, Barbara made her way upstairs to her room.

The butler, who was just as skilled at reading the room, quietly gestured for the other household staff to leave. He then withdrew from the room himself, closing the doors behind him to ensure the Hendersons and Elliana had complete privacy.

Once they were truly alone, Elliana didn't waste a single second. "I need all of you to look at this carefully." She set her phone down on the polished table, the screen displaying the photo of Jules that she'd managed to capture secretly the night before. "Do you think this could be Cutler?"

Gatlin, Eloisa, and Charles all leaned forward at exactly the same moment, their breath catching in their throats.

Cutler had gone missing since he was barely two years old. The Henderson family had spent countless years searching for him, following every lead and clinging to fragile hope. After more than two decades, just hearing his name spoken aloud was enough to send shockwaves through all of them.

When Gatlin, Eloisa, and Charles actually looked at the face staring back at them from the phone screen, that initial shock transformed into something much more powerful—a surge of desperate, almost unbelievable hope.

The young man in the photograph, from the shape of his eyebrows to the way he held himself, looked remarkably similar to Charles. They could have easily passed for brothers.

"This..." Eloisa's hand shook violently as she grabbed the phone, pulling it closer to her face. "He looks... He looks exactly like Cutler! It has to be him. My Cutler. My son!"

Gatlin moved closer, his eyes locked on the screen with intense focus. "The resemblance is incredible. The way he carries himself, that look in his eyes... It's exactly the same expression Cutler had when he was little."

A person's physical features could change dramatically between childhood and adulthood, but parents could always spot those unchanged qualities with a single glance, no matter how many years had passed.

At that moment, both Gatlin and Eloisa felt something deep in their souls telling them the truth. This wasn't a coincidental resemblance. It was something much deeper—a parental instinct, an unshakeable certainty that they were looking at their son who had been stolen from them twenty-three long years ago.

Charles, his voice thick with barely controlled emotion, was the first one to ask the question that mattered most. "Ms. Marsh, where exactly did you get this photograph?"

Holding nothing back, Elliana recounted the details of the assassination attempt from the night before. "That's the long and short of it," she concluded. "Even in the middle of all that chaos and fighting, I couldn't help but notice how incredibly similar he looked to you, Charles. It wasn't just his facial features—his whole way of moving and carrying himself

reminded me of you. I managed to take this photo while we were fighting them off."

Gatlin and Eloisa had listened to every word with growing tension, their initial hope now mixed with a terrible sense of dread about what this might all mean.

When Elliana finally finished, Eloisa's voice came out as barely more than a broken whisper. "An assassin? How could our sweet little Cutler have become someone who kills for a living? He must have been taken by some horrible criminal organization when he was just a baby. They must have warped his mind and trained him to become that kind of person."

Eloisa no longer had any doubt whatsoever. The young man in that photograph was definitely her lost son.

Clinging to logic, Elliana could see that Eloisa was getting swept away by her emotions and tried to reason with her. "Eloisa, please, let's not get ahead of ourselves. There are many people in the world who look alike. Right now, we don't have any solid proof that this man is actually Cutler. I understand how desperately you want him to be Cutler, but we have to be absolutely certain before we get our hopes up too high."

Eloisa knew that Elliana was speaking logically and sensibly, but her heart completely refused to listen to reason. Her eyes stayed glued to the phone screen, and her voice was thick with raw emotion when she spoke again. "A mother just knows these things," she whispered, her voice starting to break. "I can feel it in my bones. This is him. This is my son. It has to be!"

Eloisa looked up at Elliana with eyes that were bright with desperate, almost frantic hope. "Ms. Marsh, do you have any idea where he might have gone after the fight? I have to find him somehow. I need to see him face-to-face, to know if he's safe, to find out if he even has any memory of me or this family..."

Elliana said as gently as she could, "I have no idea where they disappeared to, or if there's any way to predict when or where they might show up again."

The fragile hope drained from Eloisa's face, leaving only raw disappointment. Gatlin, who had always been the more level-headed

partner in their marriage, wrapped a protective arm around his wife's trembling shoulders. "Take it easy, sweetheart," he said in a soothing voice. "Elliana's absolutely right. We can't be completely sure of anything yet."

Charles stepped in to smooth his mother. "Mom, Ms. Marsh took the trouble to come here tonight specifically to talk to us about this. Let's give her a chance to tell us everything she wanted to say."

Their words seemed to cut through the fog of Eloisa's overwhelming sorrow. She took several deep, shaky breaths, wiped away the tears that had started streaming down her cheeks, and managed to give Elliana a watery but genuinely apologetic smile. "I'm so sorry for falling apart like this. I just got completely overwhelmed. Please, go ahead and tell us whatever you came here to discuss."

Elliana smiled back at Eloisa with complete understanding and compassion. She had originally planned to jump straight into her main request, but suddenly a new idea occurred to her—something that might help add some real certainty to this fragile, desperate hope the Henderson family members were all clinging to.

Elliana gazed at Eloisa. "Do you happen to have any photographs of Cutler from when he was a small child? If you could show them to me, I might actually be able to help you figure this out. I have quite a bit of experience analyzing and comparing bone structure between different images."

After all, Elliana was Milena, one of the most skilled medical professionals in the world. When it came to human anatomy and skeletal analysis, she was rarely wrong in her assessments.

That suggestion was all Eloisa needed to hear. A bright spark of renewed excitement immediately returned to her eyes. "Yes! Of course, I have pictures! I'll go get them right this second!"

Eloisa didn't wait for anyone to respond, practically sprinting toward the staircase with renewed energy. Every single photograph that had ever been taken of Cutler during his brief time with them was an irreplaceable treasure that she had carefully protected and cherished for more than twenty years.

Just a few minutes later, Eloisa came hurrying back down the stairs,

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clutching an enormous, thick photo album against her chest like it was the most precious thing in the world.



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