

## Chapter 18 First Encounter

ELIANA.

"Eliana, wait!" Ivan held out the door as I stormed inside angrily. My fist folded up and my mind was racing with a thousand thoughts.

"Eliana!" It took him shouting much louder before I finally came to a halt and with tears in my eyes, I threw a look back at him. "What are you going to do now?" His hands fell to his side and I just shrugged.

"Anything but stay here while they're killing my father slowly. I can't believe this" I ran my hands through my hair as a tear dropped down my cheeks. "Jaxon must be stopped—"

"I know that too, we all do. But we have to be wise about it. It has to be at the right time otherwise," "There is no right time!" I snapped. "You didn't see my father the other day, I did." I added.

"And I'm not sure how much time he has left, I'm not sure how many doses they have to give him till it's over but I'm not going to sit back and let it happen" I was about climbing the stairs when Nana wheeled herself out on a chair. Perhaps it was because of the noise but her brows were arched across her forehead.

"What's going on?" She asked and I sniffled through my nose. "Is this about Jaxon? Ivan told me he already knows you're here" She continued and my eyes met his. He stepped back for a moment.

"Eliana?" She called. I heaved a sigh.

"He does."

"I ran into Nora at the party and she would've told him by now but that isn't all. When I was there too, I saw her slip something into Dad's drink and I got the powder and had it tested. It's Serpentina, ma" I broke the news and she was taken aback.

"Serpentina, that's not..." Nana fluttered her lashes and I nodded with teeth into my lips. "Oh it is" I sniffled. "All this time, only God knows for how long now they've been poisoning him. Dad's not sick, he's only like that because of Jaxon. I know he was the one who ordered Nora to do it and maybe Sienna is in on it too. Maybe it's their grand plan to finally clinch onto the throne and take over the Pack" I said through my teeth.

"But I'm not going to let that happen" I walked up the stairs and into my room, to brainstorm my next course of action against Jaxon but it was barely five minutes later when I heard the sound of gunshots outside the cabin windows. Alongside the echoes of screeching brakes.

I arose from my bed with my heart between my teeth.

Throwing myself toward the window, I peeked behind the curtain and my eyes immediately fell on Nora and—"Jaxon!" I echoed. "What the fuck are they doing here?" My heart skipped once I heard the banging on the door and I crawled backward.

"Elijah!" My son was the first person that came to my mind. I knew Jaxon's visit was imminent since the Moonlight Ball, but I didn't think he would actually show up today with an army of his betas too. The whole house was surrounded in a second while I scrambled inside in search of Elijah. And when I finally saw him, I grasped him by his shirt.

The toy he was playing with fell out of his hands while he looked up at me with horror in his eyes.

"What was that, mom?" He was quivering but I just reached for his teddy and shoved both of them inside the closet. "You have to stay here, Elijah and don't make a sound—"

"Am I trouble, mommy?" There was a crack in his frantic voice and I pushed a hard lump down my throat before shaking my head. "Of course not" I forced those words out in a whisper.

"Are you in trouble?"

"Will you be back, mommy?" His nails dug into my shoulder and I fixed my eyes into his. "Mommy will be back, Okay?" I assured him. "But you have to promise to listen to me. Not a single sound and don't come out until I tell you to. Okay?" I ran my hands through his hair, bringing his forehead to graze against mine for a moment.

And when Elijah nodded, I nodded too.

Holding back the tears in my eyes, I pulled away and closed the door to the closet, sealing it with a chair. All this time, the banging against the door hadn't stopped.

"Eliana," I heard my Grandma's voice from behind. "They're here" I nodded, burying my quivering hands into my pocket. "Where's Elijah?" She grasped me backward and I looked at her.

"He's safe" With yet another hard lump in my throat, I walked down the stairs, just in time as Ivan finally opened the doors. And my heart sank in my chest the moment my eyes met my evil stepbrother's.

A grimace curled his lips as he clapped his hands. He stepped into the house uninvited and with an aura that tied my stomach into a knot.

"So it is true?" His voice was raspy and gritty. I lifted my gaze to Nora who was right behind him but she darted her eyes to the book in her hands. Of course she'd told him. I'd never seen anyone with as much loyalty as she had to her brother.

Then all of a sudden, Sienna walked in too.

She inched closer with her arms across her chest and my Nana held me back. It was her, Ivan and I on one side and Jaxon, Nora and Sienna alongside his multitude of guards—my father's guards. He too, but you don't poison your father, do you?

I couldn't even look into his eyes, not because of how violent they'd become, even more over the years.

He wasn't as different from how I left him six years ago but he wasn't exactly the same either. He was stronger, more powerful with more authority than ever. He was a breath away from finally getting my father's throne and all the power over Blood Hounds.

With each step Jaxon took forward, he exuded an aura of malevolence. His long, tangled hair cascaded down to his shoulders, black as a moonless night and framing a face that bore so many scars. There was a stick in his hands which he wedged against me.

"You really are back" He finally continued.

"I would've never believed if it wasn't Nora. Hell I even had my doubts at first. What exactly could bring Eliana Jacobs back to Oakland, after so many years of being away?" He hissed and after a pause, shot a glare back at me.

"It was a question, answer me." His eyes glinted and a shiver went up my spine. "How dare you come back? Or do you think I don't remember what I said six years ago? When you were on the cusp of running away, clearly without thinking it through and I told you that if you walked out those doors you must never step foot back here."

"Otherwise, what?" Our eyes met and my memories drifted regretfully to that night. I had to shut my eyes.

"Enough!" My Grandma came to my defense and it was Sienna who inched closer to her. "You're the one who's been harboring a traitor here, isn't it?" She asked. "That's my Granddaughter you're talking about"

"Careful how you speak to me!" Sienna ordered, almost lifting her hands to Nana but I stopped her. "Don't think for one second that because Gerald ordered you back from exile I can't make you disappear again. This time, no one would even have a clue."

"You'd be dead for all they know. Finally..."

"Leave her out of this" I said. Sienna looked at me.

"It's me you want, isn't it? It's me you came for huh? Rather than seeing Adam's funeral rites through, you came here to threaten me?" I seared through my teeth. "How do you know about Adam?" Jaxon asked.

"I know everything that goes on here and I know every one of our Pack members. I'd be damned if you do. Damned if you cared about anyone or anything other than becoming Alpha. So much that you'd do the most vile and unimaginable things to clinch your way to the top" I narrowed my eyes and Jaxon echoed a cackle.

"There's some truth to that" He looked to his mother, Sienna who shrugged. I cringed. They both disgusted me.

"Is that why you're here? Why you came back?" His lips finally pursed as realization set in. "I know the Grandma had something to do with this" His mother cooed. "She's never wanted you to become Alpha" She said.

Jaxon scoffed.

"Well she hasn't succeeded all this time, has she?"

"And I would be damned if she ever does. If anyone ever thinks that they could stop me from getting what I want" His eyes knowingly darted back to me, like he was speaking to my soul.

"That would be the biggest mistake of that person's life. I'll make sure of that I wouldn't hesitate to kill. I'm not the Jaxon you knew six years ago—" I inched a step closer to him. "Good." I muttered.

"Because I'm not the Eliana you knew six years ago" I couldn't even explain it but there was this surge of courage inside of me as I uttered those words and I could see the shock brazen in Jaxon's eyes, even as he tried to play it off with a smirk.

"Don't test me, Eliana" He threatened and a red glint flashed in his eyes, like he was making it obvious that his wolf wasn't so far away. I didn't back down nonetheless, even if my heart sank in that moment. Jaxon was a lot stronger and more evil than he was six years ago.

It would take an awful lot to defeat him.

"Or I'll finally do what I should've done back then," He gnashed his teeth together and a sharp tense breeze swept between us, from the door. "Which is kill you" The door, it opened at that moment.

And I drifted my eyes immediately because I knew exactly what that scent was.

"What's going on here?" His voice, deep and decadent thundered from the door and a chill went up my spine as my eyes met his. "Denver." I called faintly. What was he doing here?

"Denver?" Jaxon had to turn around to ascertain his doubts and when he was faced with the Alpha of Black Mountain, he drove a scoff out his lips.

"What are you doing here?"

"I wouldn't lay a finger on her if I were you" Denver croaked, walking inside the cabin and for a moment, the air was thick with tension. "You think you can just waltz into my pack and order me around?" Jaxon asked and with each step Denver took closer to him, my heart sank deeper in my chest because I couldn't tell what he was going to do.

But then he came to a halt.

"It wasn't an order," He looked into Jaxon's eyes squarely. "It was merely a word of advice. Step away from her—so was that too" Denver flashed a malicious glint in his eyes before echoing a low growl to ascertain dominance between the two of them.

You see, Jaxon may have been strong but he hasn't killed nearly as many people as Denver had. Everyone knew not to mess with him, including Jaxon, which was why he did step away from me, although reluctantly and then he cackled. "You'll regret this" He struck a finger at me.

"Because I'll be back" Sienna walked to Nora and held her close. Jaxon, on his way to the door, stopped next to Denver. "So will you. You of all people know it's best for both Packs to stay in their own lane. You crossed a boundary today, Denver. Just so you know that" He muttered.

And before he finally walked out with the rest of them, Jaxon threw me one last threatening look.

Then the door closed and I could finally breathe.

Relief flashed across my face at that moment when Denver grasped my arm. "Are you okay?" Concern knitted his brows and filled his eyes. I had to let go, pretending my mind a lie from my lips.

"I am," I said. "I'm okay."