

Chapter 8 Not Even The Monsters

ELIANA.

The bumpy roads caused my shoulders to sway back and forth, gnashing against the sides of the truck. I was in the back, alongside all the other travelers after we alighted from the train that brought us into New Orleans. I knew my way from there.

Squatting in the back of the truck with a helmet around my head and blanket wrapped around both Elijah and myself, we finally arrived at the town's market. Oakland was not so far from here but to get across to it, I needed to go through Tombsdale.

The scent of the ever-dark and eerie town sent a shiver up my spine and Elijah jerked forward immediately after the truck came to a halt. The driver alighted and opened the back for us to come down.

"Come on," I held around my son's shoulders, holding him up so he didn't fall. His eyes were obviously still blurry as he'd just woken up and the sun was merciless in its shining from above the horizon.

I couldn't remember the last time I saw a morning as bright as this. Tuscany could be hot but we never really saw the sun because of the thousand mountains that surrounded us. So it could be shining with all its might but the most we'd get is the wind.

The breeze here was gentle, only carrying a few strands of hair which I neatly tucked behind my ears. It was still the market, on one end was Tombsdale which led directly to Oakland but on the other, a more further journey went into the city from where I would now enter into Oakland.

There was no way I was stepping foot in Tombsdale, not when Denver could very much be hiding in the trees like he usually does, and most certainly not when I'm with Elijah. The market was busy and as soon we stepped down from the truck, I grasped his little hands in mine.

"Where are we?" His voice was subtle and meek as I glided my shoulders through the marketers. "Mommy," He persisted even though I didn't dart an eye at him. Not until we made it out of there and ahead of us was a busy highway, flooding with cars speeding back and forth.

"This is New Orleans!" I yelled, leaning over his ears and the winds from the road flushed into my face. "You said we were coming home?" Elijah wasn't so confident with the sound of his voice. The highway scared him, I could tell by how tight he gripped around my wrist.

Fear crippled his eyes.

"I know a shortcut." Grudgingly, I drew him toward the forest. We trailed in between a path between two forests and occasionally, we came across a person or two. For most of the journey, however, it was quiet.

"Are you tired?" I strapped my bag tighter around my shoulder and Elijah lifted his gaze to me. "You said we were going home" He echoed again. Looking ahead of us, I narrowed my vision.

"We are going home" I replied.

"So I'll never see Chester and Harry again?" His cheeks lit up as he yelled. "Yeah, we're not going back to Tuscany" I couldn't tell whether or not he was relieved at the news. "I'm sorry," I muttered nonetheless.

"Are you kidding me? I'm so happy!" He chanted and his voice was so pitchy screaming through his missing front teeth. A smile crept to my lips as I ran my hands through his hair.

"Really?" Conversation made the journey faster. We just kept walking through and through and luckily, the trees shielded the harsh sun. "Yes, and if we're going home..." Elijah shot me a glare.

"Yeah?"

"That means I get to meet my dad, right?" He asked and my heart sank into my chest. The smile across my lips faded into oblivion and now, fear crippled my eyes. "Right?" Elijah echoed and I forced a hard lump down my throat. "Where is he?" He asked.

"Who is he?" I should have known that all it would take was the first time for his curiosity to heighten. I knew ultimately, questions like these would come but he was a little boy. I didn't know he'd start asking about his father now.

How could I explain the world's most ruthless wolf was his dad? Or that I had to run away after he had rejected me?

How could I tell him the truth but at the same time, how could I look into his eyes and lie to him?

Elijah stopped in his tracks and his brows furrowed.

"Did I say anything wrong, Mommy?" His voice was disheveled and I squeezed his palms. "No!" I exclaimed. This was all me. "No, you didn't say anything wrong."

"It's just that Chester talks about his dad all the time and how much he loves him and he asked me about mine, I told him I didn't know where he was and Chester said it was because he didn't love me" Elijah narrated and it broke my heart to hear him talk like that.

"Of course not" I whispered.

"So my dad loves me?" He asked and I nodded my head. "Can I see him...I want to hear it from his mouth." Elijah added and I sucked in a deep breath through my lips. Squatting to the ground, I never let go of his hands and I looked into his eyes.

"Your father loves you, Elijah. Even though he's not here right now, he's just...he's just very busy. I could never lie to you, right? Mommy can never lie to you?" I scoffed lightly and he pressed his lips together softly.

"You will see him, one day" At least I knew within myself that it was true, it was inevitable. One day, Denver would find out but at least not today nor tomorrow. Not all the years before he turns twenty at least.

Elijah was a wolf but I had to protect him from all that darkness and the same time reassure him that this wasn't his fault. The things that happened had already happened and it was a long time ago. I would never want him to feel like a mistake because he ended up being the greatest gift of my entire life. He was my entire life.

"Your father loves you and I love you even more" My hands caressed his cheeks. "And I'll always protect you, okay? Nothing will ever harm you" I said and Elijah looked at me. "Not even the monsters?" He asked and an arch came between my brows.

"The monsters?" I was stunned.

"The ones in my nightmares, the ones you said weren't real" He lowered his voice and I could see the fear in his eyes. All I did was hold him closer to my chest and I heaved a whisper through his ears.

"Not even the monsters" I promised him.

And there was a brief pause for the moment I held onto him. I couldn't even pretend like a million thoughts weren't racing through my mind. But then he screamed. "Ice-cream!" Elijah jerked out of my hands and just in front of us was a singing pick-up truck.

I looked at his dazzling eyes and pouty lips as he tried to guilt-trip me.

"Please." He begged. And grudgingly, I pulled out some of the spare change I still had, handing it over to him. He scurried across the road but not so far that I couldn't see him. I stood by the sidewalk with my arms folded across my chest and I looked around.

But alas, it wasn't long until a strange sensation hit me. I suddenly felt uneasy and my stomach was in a tight knot. There was this eerie feeling that I was being watched. I ran my hands across my arms as I turned around but there was nothing so unusual.

Besides the ice cream truck and the couple that was seated across the roadside bench, nothing out of the ordinary. I reminded myself to breathe, perhaps it was only PTSD from the last time I ended up in this forest.

It was not so far from Tombsdale, that I had no other option besides the highway.

I closed my eyes for a second, calming myself down but then a harsh breeze suddenly hauled it's way past me and a wolf scent stung my nose.

Immediately my eyes charged up, I faced the forest ahead and now, I saw something. Someone, perhaps. It was dark but I could see a pair of shiny luscious eyes looking back at me. I let out a gasp from my lips, across which my hands clamped. It was barely a minute but I could make out the wall of a man, not so much his face but his aura was possessive.

His scent drove me mad with fear. I pulled myself away, almost like I shouldn't be looking in that direction anyway. And the next thing I did was grasp Elijah by his hands. The ice cream almost fell but he held onto it. I didn't care, I just needed to get the both of us out of there.

I lunged myself through the trees, throwing breathy glances over my shoulders as I pushed forward. Adrenaline fired up my chest with every step I took and my heart pounded against my sternum like a cannonball.

I didn't fully breathe until I got out of the forest and ended up on the other side of the highway. I looked behind me and alas, there was no one there anymore. Not even the scent.

I held onto Elijah but I clutched my chest with my other hand. I forced deep breaths out of my lips and my eyes shimmered with tears.

"What was that, Mommy?" Elijah softly asked. Pushing a hard lump down my throat, I shook my head. "It was nothing," I lied to him for the second time that day. But I needed to convince myself that this one was true—that it was all my head. PTSD.

Fucking PTSD.

As I carried on, a thought hit me—I knew it wasn't Denver. I could scent him from a mile away. My wolf, although weak and buried would've risen to the surface if it was him.

He was my mate.

But the person I'd just seen was stronger and ultimately, more powerful. He was unlike anything I'd scented before which was a harsh reminder as it was a welcome back to Oakland.

I finally crossed into the town and the first thing that hit me was that smell—that familiar scent of home. But I lifted my gaze upon the earth, this place was unrecognizable, it didn't look like my home. Oakland was usually so bright with evergreen trees and colorful flowers but staring now, it was almost as if drought had ravaged the land.

There was barely any color, and the trees had fallen and withered. There was mourning in the air and darkness all around even though it was only daytime. I knew immediately that this was Jaxon and my mum wasn't lying when she said Oakland wasn't as it used to be.

"Is this the place?" Elijah was just as stunned as I was and I sucked in a deep breath through my lips. But before I could say anything, a voice echoed from behind and I turned around to face Adams. He was a beta the last time I was around and he was usually so close to my Grandma.

I knew immediately that she'd sent him.

He let his arms fall from his chest and with an uncertain expression across his face, he parted his lips. "Welcome home." He said.