

Chapter 9 Family Reunion

ELIANA.

"Grandma!" I immediately threw myself into her arms as soon as I walked into the cabin doors. She was strapped to her wheelchair but her arms were still strong enough to wrap around me. Tears welled up in my eyes before they came running down my cheeks.

I never thought I'd see her again and even after hearing her on the phone, it was nothing compared to actually seeing her—holding her. And I sobbed onto her shoulders.

"Eliana" She sang softly from her lips.

"Oh Grandma" I heaved and there was no emotion quite like this. As Adams stood at the door with Elijah, it took me more than a moment to fully gather myself together. And when after I stood, my eyes were still wet with tears. They fell to her and so were her own.

"L..." I stuttered. "I can't believe this."

"Me neither" She echoed, intertwining her fingers with mine. I darted my eyes around the wooden cabin. It was warm and cozy in here although it was a structure at the furthestmost outskirts of Oakland.

This was a place I never thought existed and even for so long, I thought my Grandma was dead. I was about six years old when they took her from me and everyone called her crazy ever since the death of my mother, her daughter. But I knew she wasn't crazy, she was just hurt.

But she looked different now, better.

Maybe with a few more lines across her face, the wheelchair and her eyes not being as sharp. She was nearly seventy-five years old and fairing even better than some her age. I think it's a Werewolf gene, we generally age better than humans. It was something I noticed back in Tuscany.

But that wasn't what crossed my mind at that moment.

Our eyes interlocked and suddenly, I was five years old again in my Grandma's arms and she was watching over me as I fell asleep, whispering beneath her voice how special I was. And she may have looked different now but she was still the same.

"Welcome Eliana," She paused. "Welcome home."

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I sat on the couch and it gave a little squeak. My eyes still roamed around the room, I assumed this was where she was for the past six years. It was then Adams wheeled her out, she had said he was her caretaker, ordered by my father to watch over her.

She held in her arms two cups of coffee and I instantly rushed to relieve them from her hands. "She insisted on making them" Adams muttered when my eyes met his and I chuckled softly. She could be rather stubborn sometimes, but like I said, nothing had changed.

"I'm so happy you're back" She whispered as I took a sip of my warm coffee. I swallowed it down my throat, even closing my eyes to savor the taste. Ugh, I've missed this.

The smell of freshly brewed coffee swept through my nose. Tuscany had nothing like this. "I'm happy too, ma" I heaved. Just then, an emotion flashed across her face for barely a second and the smile faded slowly from her lips.

"I remember it like it was yesterday," She started. Placing the cup on the table, an arch appeared between my brows. "I never wanted to leave you, Eliana but Sienna, she captured me when your father wasn't there. She'd been trying to get rid of me ever since their marriage because I never gave my blessings—" Nana paused before lifting her face to me.

"How could I?" There was a crack in her voice.

"She stole everything that belonged to your mother and everyone was just trying to forget her. Your father included and I didn't want to. Susanna's not just something that could be replaced and deep down, I was scared that even when you grew up, you wouldn't know who your mother was. So I fought—they called me crazy but I still fought. And at the end of the day, the devil won in the end." Her voice broke.

"Not only did she silence me but she managed to get me exiled out here and I don't know what she told your father but he agreed to it. And this..." She looked around the room, her eyes brimming with tears. "This is where I've been for the past few years and I can't ever go back."

My heart shattered hearing her speak of this, finally knowing that all of this was because of my mother. Because she didn't want her to be forgotten. Sienna was evil but I never knew she was to this extent. It was one of the reasons I was back here.

They weren't even full Blood Hounds but because of my mother, she and Jaxon had gained so much power that they seemed unstoppable. They thought they could make our lives a living hell and get away with it.

My Grandmother built this Pack from after the Cold War when it was nothing, shredded and withered into pieces. She should never have been unjustly exiled. And since it was nothing we took pretty seriously, I understood now why she wasn't able to come back for me.

Why she never stepped foot back into the Pack. To go against an exile rule was an unforgivable taboo, punishable by the death penalty. It was one of the many harsh traditions and laws that governed the entire Pack.

Grandma always said how mum was against them and how she was fighting to get these laws reversed, for our freedom. But it was a fight she never saw to the end because of what happened.

I saw what had become of Oakland today and the first thing I could think of was how much it would break her heart to see the same thing. The land was dry and infertile, the trees were gone. Roads were broken down.

And even the sign that was our pride in Oakland no longer flickered. The town was dying, they said but the truth was it was already dead.

"I'm so sorry, mija" Nana reached for my hands again after wheeling a lot closer to where I was. As tears formed in my eyes, I looked around until they fell to the table right beside me. Across it was a framed photo and I recognized the two people in it almost immediately.

"Was this her?" I pointed to my Grandmother and her lips broke into a smile. "Yes," She said softly. "That's Susanna, that's your mother" The tears rolled down my cheeks and plastered against the frame.

I stared into her forever youthful eyes and that smile everyone always said looked like mine and by everyone, I meant my Grandma. She wasn't lying. Even my eyes were the same color and the way we stood. Seeing this photo filled me with so much purpose and an indescribable emotion.

"She was beautiful" I whispered. Nana nodded.

"I gave you a photo of her" She added and I reached into my pocket, pulling out from a section of my wallet a tiny picture which I handed over to her. "I still have it" I whispered and it was a picture she gave me when I was six and started to ask questions about my mother. I guess it didn't really hit me until then why I was being punished by everyone else.

And that was the day I truly understood what had happened.

I held that photo, promising to keep it forever, the last thing of hers that I had. And through everything, from Denver to Tuscany—over the last six years, I took it everywhere with me. And my Grandmother had a proud smile across her face as she gave it back to me.

"And you," She heaved as my eyes fell to my hands.

"Where have you been?" Alas, the question I'd dreaded but one I could never escape. Where should I even begin, I thought to myself.

Is it from when Alpha Denver rescued me while I was fleeing from my rapist stepbrother or when I fell in love with the Alpha, even going as far as a marriage of convenience?

A marriage that he ended after two years and even after finding out that I was his mate, he still rejected me but unknown to him, I was finally pregnant with his child. A child who I ran away with, halfway across the world until I ended up in a cult-like commune and that's where I've been for the last six years.

I could tell her that at once and watch my Nana succumb to a heart attack. I mean it was the story of my life that even I couldn't believe sometimes but it was what happened.

"I've just been..." I pressed my lips together. "I've just been." I later settled on an answer and I'm glad she took it as I didn't want to talk about it—not yet at least, so she just left it at that.

Her fingers crawled to my face as she caressed my cheeks softly. I let out a light scoff.

"The necklace too!" I suddenly remembered and even she arched her brows. It wasn't until I called Elijah to stand in front of her and showed her the pendant he was wearing around his neck that she smiled.

"I held unto it after all these years" I added proudly. "I figured it was something he should have, something of hers since he didn't really know anyone you know" I whispered and Elijah slouched into my arms.

I get that he was shy, he wasn't this naturally quiet. But then again, this was someplace he'd never been.

Nana slowly reached for his arms and I turned him to face her. "Elijah, I want you to meet someone" I whispered into his ears. He lifted his gaze and her eyes watered yet again.

"I didn't...I didn't even know you had a son" She muttered and a hard lump slipped down my throat. "Well no one does" I whispered. "And I'd like to keep it that way...for now" I continued.

"I was thinking he could stay with you in the meantime—"

"Mommy," Elijah called and I held onto his arms. "It's okay, it's okay. I'm not going anywhere now." I assured. "You'll just be safer here and even if I do leave, I'm always going to come back" I promised him, not realizing the weight of such a promise, especially when waging a war.

He sulked before running down the corridor that led into a spare room.

And when we were alone, Nana looked at me and it was like I could hear even all the words that she didn't say. Who's the father?" "Since when?"

"Are you okay?" She finally asked and I smiled back at her, hoping that was enough at that moment. "I am" I nodded convincingly, even though I had yet to forget my encounter with the strange shadow earlier that day.

Whenever I remembered, it still sent a shiver down my spine.

Could it have been Elijah's father?

Was Denver just so different that I couldn't recognize him now?

It took a lot to grasp me out of my subconscious and by a lot, I meant my Grandma's voice. "Adam," She called, looking pointedly across the room as he inched closer. He'd only just gotten off the phone.

"Jaxon is back, he's already asking after me" Adams muttered and I looked at my Nana, a little unsure. "Don't worry, Adam is very loyal to me" She assured and I took her word for it.

"He needs to go back now."

"And you're sure he doesn't know that I'm back yet?" I questioned. "We were extra careful driving here. I'm not sure anyone else does." He replied. "So how am I going to see my dad? What's the plan here?"

"The Moonlight Ball is tomorrow night," He said after a brief pause. "I'll get you into Villa when everyone else is gone. Then, you'll be able to see him" Adams instructed. "For now, the best thing to do is to lay low."

"Jaxon mustn't know you're back." He gritted through his teeth and perhaps that was the moment it truly dawned on me what I was entering and I had no idea what was coming. You see, this was just the beginning.