

Chapter 6

Elena POV:

The motel room was behind me. I had left the key on the bloodstained nightstand.

I walked through the woods. The night air was crisp, biting at my exposed skin, but I couldn't feel the cold anymore. My body was shutting down, system by system. My legs moved on autopilot, guided by a singular, final instinct.

I wasn't going to die in a ditch. I wasn't going to die in that filth.

I checked my burner phone one last time. The email had been sent. The truth was out there, traveling through the digital ether to the Pack Council.

Goodbye, Caleb, I thought, though the Mind-Link was dead. *I hope the silence haunts you.*

I saw the warm, yellow light of Rosa's diner through the trees. It was closed for the night, but Rosa never really slept. She was an old Rogue healer, a woman who had seen too much of pack politics and chose the quiet life of frying eggs and brewing herbal teas.

I stumbled up the back steps. My vision was tunneling, black spots dancing at the edges.

I knocked. It was a weak sound, barely a scratch against the wood.

The door opened instantly. Rosa stood there, a shotgun in one hand, a dishrag in the other. Her eyes widened when she saw me.

"Child," she breathed. She didn't ask questions. She didn't ask for money. She dropped the gun and scooped me up.

Her arms were strong. She smelled of sage, thyme, and old paper. It was the first time in years I had been held without malice.

She carried me to the back room, laying me on a cot near the wood stove.

"The poison," she murmured, pressing a hand to my forehead. "It's done its work. You're cold as ice, Elena."

"I know," I whispered. My voice was a wet gurgle. "Just... stay? Please?"

"I'm not going anywhere," Rosa said. She grabbed a bowl of warm water and a cloth. She began to gently wipe the blood and dirt from my face. "You rest now. The Moon Goddess is waiting."

I looked out the window. The moon was full, a giant, unblinking eye.

Suddenly, a wave of peace washed over me. The pain in my bones vanished. The fire in my veins was extinguished.

Is this it? I wondered.

I took a breath, but it didn't go all the way down. My heart gave one final, heavy thump against my ribs.

Thump.

And then, nothing.

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Caleb POV:

I was sitting in the Alpha's office, staring at the paperwork for the border patrol. The letters were swimming. *Since Elena left, the silence in my head had turned into a deafening roar.*

A sudden, piercing shriek tore through my head. It wasn't a sound; it was a sensation. It felt like a violin string snapping inside my chest, whipping back and slicing through my heart muscle.

"Argh!" I roared, clutching my chest. I fell out of my chair, knocking over a heavy oak table.

"Alpha?" Beta John, Elena's father, rushed in from the hallway. "What is it? Are we under attack?"

I couldn't breathe. I gasped, clawing at my shirt, ripping the buttons. The hollow ache that had been there since the Severing Ceremony suddenly expanded into a black hole. It wasn't just an empty space anymore. It was a tomb.

My phone buzzed on the floor. Then John's phone buzzed. Then the Council Elder's phone buzzed.

The synchronized vibration was ominous.

I reached for my phone with a trembling hand. My vision was blurry from the pain, but I saw the notification.

Sender: Elena (Scheduled)

Subject: The Truth.

I tapped it. *My fingers felt numb.*

"No," I whispered. The denial rose in my throat like bile. "No, no, no."

I tried to reach out with the Mind-Link. *Elena! Answer me!*

Silence.

Not the silence of a blocked link. Not the silence of distance.

It was the silence of an empty room. The silence of a grave.

"She's gone," I said, my voice breaking. "My mate is gone."

I vomited blood onto the rug.