

## Chapter 549 Dad's Embrace

The moment that tall, striking figure came into view, Elliana froze mid-step.

Milton also halted, but refrained from speaking, giving father and daughter the space to take each other in.

Elliana's lashes fluttered as her gaze swept over Arthur, tracing him from head to toe. Milton hadn't needed to say his name. She knew instantly. This was their father.

A surge of longing rose within her, the urge to breathe out the word "Dad" nearly overwhelming. Yet, when her lips parted, no sound emerged.

That word had been locked away for years, buried beneath the weight of Darin's cold cruelty, stripped of its warmth and turned into something distant and almost dangerous. She wasn't used to calling anyone by that name and a part of her still resisted it.

Even knowing the man before her was her father, even feeling the certainty of his love, the syllable refused to pass her lips. The inability left her quietly frustrated, tinged with guilt she could neither shake nor fix.

For all her steel, for all the fear her name inspired as the Death Thorn of the Delta, she had no armor against this. When it came to family, her hands were empty and her heart unsure.

This was the shadow that had trailed her since childhood, like a wound carved deep into her heart that wouldn't fully close. Time might dull its ache, but complete healing felt uncertain, perhaps impossible.

Arthur's reaction mirrored Elliana's. His eyes roamed over her, and he needed no prompting from Milton. One look was enough. He knew, without a doubt, that the young woman before him was his daughter.

She carried her mother's eyes, luminous and clear. Her features echoed his own so strongly that if anyone dared claim otherwise, he would defend the truth without a second thought.

Here she was, the daughter he had yearned to locate for over two decades, the one who had haunted his dreams and driven him across the world in search of her. He loved her more fiercely than his own life. In his dreams, he had always promised her the best of everything he had to give.

And yet, as she stood before him now, words failed him. The name he longed to speak caught in his throat, tangled in the swell of emotion. His lips parted, but no sound escaped, only the silent tremor of a love too vast for words.

Elliana's silence was born of unfamiliarity; his of overwhelming love.

To Arthur, the word daughter had always been sacred. It was a title no one could diminish, a jewel kept close to his heart.

Here stood Arthur, the man who had commanded boardrooms and conquered family disputes with unshakable authority, now rendered as uncertain as a boy. Before his daughter, his strength dissolved into a quiet, rigid tension.

He yearned to reach out, to offer warmth, but his body stayed locked, his lips refusing to move. All he could do was look at her, a thousand emotions crashing through him like a wild river, while his outward expression remained carefully composed.

The father and daughter held each other's gaze for a long, suspended moment.

Arthur saw the spark of excitement in her eyes, tempered by the hesitation and resistance she carried toward the idea of a father. Her quietness wounded him, as it was the embodiment of all the years she had lived without his love, and he knew that absence was his fault.

Elliana, sharp as ever, sensed the depth beneath his calm. She felt the unspoken love pouring from him, a love that drew her in like a tide she could not resist.

In her heart, she had already stepped forward and wrapped her arms around Arthur. Their souls had already embraced, even though their bodies lagged behind.

Milton's fingers remained entwined with Elliana's as his gaze shifted

between his father and sister. A gentle smile softened his features when he finally spoke to Arthur. "Dad, I've brought my sister home. It's our Elliana."

He then turned toward Elliana, his tone warm and tender, almost as if urging her forward. "Elliana, this is our dad."

Our dad. The phrase hit her like a sudden swell, resonating in the deepest chambers of her heart. Before she could think, her feet carried her forward, one step, then another, until she was pressed against Arthur's chest.

"Dad." The word emerged at last, fragile yet powerful, breaking past the years of silence. Her voice wavered, and her tears spilled freely, unstoppable.

This was the first time she had ever been held in the shelter of a father's arms.

Memories of childhood resurfaced. Moments when she had watched Paige curl up in Darin's embrace, laughing, playing, secure. She had envied those moments in quiet longing, weaving countless dreams about what such an embrace would be like, and how it would feel to be lovingly held by him.

Darin had never once held her. She had grown up without the warmth of a father's arms, without ever tasting the love that word was meant to hold.

But today, she finally had it. As she nestled against Arthur, she felt strength wrapped around her, a shield of protection and a deep, unfamiliar security that settled into her very bones.

In that moment, everything she had buried, every ache, every unspoken longing, had broken free with her tears. They poured out in an unrestrained torrent, as if a dam had finally shattered, soaking a wide swath of Arthur's shirt.

And Arthur... When his daughter flung herself into his arms and breathed that long-awaited "Dad", the fortress of his composure crumbled. He held her close, arms locked around her as if to keep the world away, his own tears spilling unchecked. Even the most resilient man could be undone by love.