

## Chapter 26 | Will Not Give You A Single Cent

Liana POV

Axel locks the door behind Drew and Carol when they leave and turns to me. I do not know where to look or what to say. The atmosphere between us is suddenly awkward and strained.

How did we get here? I cannot help to wonder. How did we go from sharing a bed, talking, ghting and laughing to this?

"Can I get you anything?" Axel asks politely. "Maybe coffee?"

"Okay, that's it." I throw my hands up in the air. "This isn't working for me."

"What do you mean?" He asks cautiously.

"This Axel, us," I point from me to him. "We're literally standing in the hallway grasping at niceties to say to each other."

"Would you like to sit down or ..."

"No, dammit!" I explode. "I want normal. I want you to talk to me like you used to and stop looking at me like I will have a mental breakdown if you say the wrong thing."

"Like the one you're having now?" He raises his eyebrows and crosses his arms in front of his chest.

"Like now," I laugh softly, and the tension eases between us. "Please, just be yourself. I can't stand this tiptoeing around me one second longer."

"Okay," he nods. "But for the record, I nd this incredibly confusing."

"Why?" I challenge him.

"This ... thing happened, and I don't know how to deal with it," he sighs. "Should I pretend it didn't happen? Can I talk about it or not? I don't want to make things worse for you."

"It did happen," my voice is clear and unwavering. "Ignoring it, won't make it go away. The subject isn't off the table but it's not something I would like to discuss constantly. Does that help?"

"Yes," his mouth tugs at the corners into a smile.

"Anything else I can help you with?" I place my hands on my hips.

"As a matter of fact, there is," his expression turns strict, and my gut warns me that I am not going to enjoy this. "Why did you send me a message to cancel your studies?"

"I need wine," I mumble as I turn around and walk to the kitchen. We have been talking about me and my feelings for the last twenty-four hours and frankly, I am over it. As much as I appreciate his concern and attention, I would like to take a break from it all.

"You can't have wine," he says indignantly as he follows me.

"Why not?" I shoot back.

"It's common knowledge not to mix pain medication and alcohol," he scoffs.

"Good thing I'm not driving then," I grin as I take out two glasses and a bottle of Chardonnay.

"You're being irresponsible," Axel grunts as he reaches for the bottle, but I move it out of his reach.

"No, I'm not," I argue. "I haven't had pills since brunch and I'm not planning to have any tonight either."

"Are you sure?" He squints his eyes.

"Yes, I'm sure," I roll my eyes and open the bottle. "I'm not on a path of self-destruction, Axel. If and when I have pain, I will take pills. And I don't need it right now. But you and I are about to have conversations that require wine."

"Fine," he gives in and takes a seat by the table. "How are you so okay with this? Last night, after the shower, you were ..."

"Hysterical," I wish the sentence for him. "And emotional and in pain. Now, it's twenty-four hours later and I'm coping better."

I know it will take me hours and days of more drawings and tears to put this behind me completely. But I am not pretending; I do feel so much better after expressing myself on paper this afternoon.

"But how?" He frowns.

"I had a therapy session," I pour the wine.

"So," I place a glass in front of him, and change the topic. "I want to lay charges against Brad."

"You can't," Axel grunts as he nishes his wine in one go.

"And why not?" Instantly, I am furious. I do not care that this is wolf territory. He will be held accountable for what he has done to me. He cannot get away with it.

"Because I killed him," Axel says softly and reaches for the bottle to rell his glass.

"You did what?" I murmur as my knees go weak and I sit down.

"Are you insane?" I explode as the full impact of his words manifests. "That's murder. You'll go to jail for that."

"Not murder," he looks at me. "Execution. He was trialled and sentenced. Case closed."

"And that's why I need wine," I grunt as I empty my glass. "To absorb shocks. So, that's it? SWAT's not going to barge in here in the middle of the night and arrest you?"

"I am SWAT," he wiggles his eyebrows and I give him an annoyed look.

"No, Liana," he sighs. "Nobody's coming for me. Missy and her friends will be rewarded for their bravery and Brad will never lay a nger on anyone."

My heart utters for a moment but I squash it immediately. He did not do it for me. He did it because he is the future alpha and it is his duty to maintain law and order within the borders.

"Why did you start working there?" Axel interrupts my thoughts.

"Why would you ask that?" I laugh softly. "For the money, what else? You knew I was looking for work."

"But you have money," he looks at me and for a second, I could swear he is angry. "I didn't open a bank account for you for no reason."

"That's your money," I say adamantly as I stand up and rinse out my glass.

"Which I gave to you," he sneers, and I turn around to face him.

"Why are you angry at me?" I look at him dumbstruck. "I did nothing wrong."

"I'm not angry at you," he replies through clenched teeth.

"But you are angry," I state. I have seen his anger enough over the last couple of weeks to know I am right.

"No," he says slowly. "I only wish you accepted the money and didn't go to work, because this thing wouldn't have happened to you."

"This thing?" My voice is soft and icy as fury ares up. "This thing is not a turd in a toilet, Axel. It was an attack and I'll be damned if it's going to stop me from living my life. It could've happened while I was walking down the street carrying bread and milk which I bought with your money. Bad stuff happens to people every day, Axel. There's no hiding from it. And to imply that I would've been safe if I didn't work is foolish."

"You don't need to lecture me," he says furiously as he jumps up and comes to stand in front of me. "I know perfectly well how evil mankind can be."

"Well, if you know then why the f\*\*k are you blaming me for taking the job?" I am so angry right now that it is hard for me not to scream at him like a mad woman.

"I'm not blaming you," he grunts.

"Yes, you are," I argue.

"I'm blaming myself. I'm supposed to protect you," he shouts, and I stare at him in disbelief. "And you're making it impossible to do so. How am I supposed to keep you safe if you don't allow me to?"

"You were never my guardian, Axel," I close my eyes for a moment. "That was never part of the agreement. I'm here when you need me, not the other way around. I'm immensely grateful that you care so much about my well-being, but you don't have to."

He steps back and looks at me as if I had physically hit him. For a second, I cannot remember why he is so upset and then I remember Drew's words. Axel cares for me. And I just basically told him that I do not. Which is not true. Besides being contractual bed buddies, I regard him as a friend. I only wanted to exempt him from feeling responsible for me.

"You are the best man I know," I say softly as I walk towards him. "And my life is so much better in every aspect since I met you. I haven't been this happy and content in a very long time. And it's all thanks to you. I do care for you, Axel, not your money. I'm not being dicult. It's not my intention to make your life harder while you make mine easier. But I cannot and will not accept that money. You're more than a convenient nancial plan."

He only looks at me with a stoic face to the point where I want to panic. Why is he not saying anything?

"You really need to work on your communication skills," I sigh theatrically. "I cannot read minds."

"I will no longer give you a single cent," he says after a moment. "And you will start working on Monday. Granted if you're healed by then."

"Thank you," I smile brightly. "I will text Missy and ..."

"You're not working there," he says brusquely. "You're going to work at Silver Enterprises."

"Dammit, Axel," I grunt as I close my eyes in frustration. "How is that any different than taking your money?"

"You'll be working for it," he grins satished before he turns around and walks to the bedroom.

"That's not how it works," I argue as I follow him. "Creating a job to accommodate me, does not count. It's just another handout."

"No, it's not," he kicks off his shoes and pulls down his pants. "Juliana is pregnant, and I was going to employ a temp during her maternity leave. It might as well be you."

"Oh yeah," I cross my arms in front of my chest and look at him suspiciously. This is just too much of a coincidence. "When did that happen?"

"Last week," he replies as he climbs into bed. "Now, turn off the light and come to bed."