**Chapter 18: She Came in Blood. I Let Her.**

*Wild is the Wind — Nina Simone*

The sirens were closer now.

Elena moved fast.

She grabbed a bedsheet off the unmade bed, ripped a long strip free with shaking hands, and pressed it hard against the worst of the bleeding. Blood soaked through almost immediately. She added pressure, cursing under her breath, then tore another strip—this one longer—and tied it tightly around Vivien’s waist to hold the first in place. A crude, desperate bandage. It wasn’t perfect. But it would have to be enough.

Elena found a towel in the marble bathroom—white, too clean, too soft—and wiped Vivien’s body fast but gentle, pulling a discarded dress shirt over her shoulders, buttoning it wrong. She grabbed Vivien's slip from the floor, found her heels under the bed, and wrapped everything together with the trench coat—scooping up any trace that might've been left behind. Slung her trench coat around her, hiding the worst of it.

"Stay with me," Elena whispered, voice splintering. "Please, baby, stay."

Vivien's lashes fluttered. A ghost of a smile. Then nothing.

Elena dragged her into the hallway. Down the back stairwell, footsteps swallowed by rain and rot. Through a service door that screeched once — too loud — then into the night.

The car was waiting. Gallagher's car.

He sat behind the wheel, engine idling, a cigarette dangling from his lips.

"Jesus Christ," he muttered when he saw Vivien. "You weren't kidding."

Elena hoisted Vivien into the back seat, cradling her like a fallen saint.

Gallagher tossed the cigarette into the gutter, crushed it under his boot.

"Drove like a fucking maniac getting here," he grumbled. "Probably blew my pension on toll tickets."

"You retired?" Elena rasped, shoving herself into the seat beside Vivien.

Gallagher pulled into traffic without looking. The rain blurred the city into a smudged confession.

"Turned in my badge this morning. Threw it at the Captain's fat head. Should’ve seen the look on that bastard’s face. Like someone pissed on his last donut."

Elena gave a choked laugh. It cracked something in her chest.

She looked at him, *really* looked—and for the first time, she saw not the broken man, not the relic of a precinct that ate its own. Just another sinner trying to leave the world a little less bloody than he found it.

"Thank you," she whispered.

Gallagher didn’t speak. He just nodded once, eyes on the wet black road.

They hid her.

A retired paramedic Gallagher trusted. A basement apartment. Old supplies. No paperwork.

Elena stayed with Vivien through the fever, the stitching, the shivers that rattled her bones. She bathed her. Fed her soup with trembling hands. Pressed kisses to her damp forehead when the nightmares came.

Days blurred.

The city rotted above them. But here, in this dim cocoon, something else bloomed.

Vivien lived.

Scarred. Frail. Glorious.

And one night—weeks later, when the stitches were just thin silver ghosts on her skin—Vivien crawled into Elena's lap like it was the most natural thing in the world.

No blood between them.

No ghosts.

Just skin. Breath. The soft gasp of a woman who finally dared to live.

Elena lay back against the battered couch, pulling Vivien over her. Their bodies fitted together like a memory they hadn’t lived yet.

Vivien kissed her.

Not hungrily. Not desperately.

Tender.

A mouth learning how to worship without asking for forgiveness.

Elena cupped Vivien's face in both hands, thumbs stroking the damp corners of her mouth, feeling every tremble. Vivien's hands moved under Elena's shirt—slow, reverent—fingertips grazing ribs, sternum, the heartbeat that had only ever raced for her.

"I’m here," Elena whispered into her mouth. "I’m yours."

Vivien shuddered.

Her slip slid up as she straddled Elena's lap, thighs parting with the lazy grace of surrender. Elena’s hands found the curve of her hips, steadying her, guiding her down.

Vivien's pussy was slick, hot, alive.

They gasped into each other's mouths as Elena entered her slowly with two fingers—no rush, no pressure, just an invitation to stay.

Vivien rocked against her hand—forehead pressed to Elena's temple, breathing like prayer.

Every roll of her hips whispered: *still here, still yours, still breathing.*

Elena kissed the shell of Vivien’s ear.

"Let go," she murmured. "You're safe."

Vivien sobbed—but it wasn't grief. It was awe.

She moved faster, clenching around Elena's fingers, slickness soaking her palm. Elena held her close, stroked her clit in slow, steady circles until Vivien gasped, broke, bloomed.

Vivien came with a soft cry, forehead collapsing to Elena's shoulder, thighs trembling.

Elena kissed the crown of her head.

Held her through the aftershocks.

No blood.

No death.

Just breath. Just skin. Just two women surviving themselves.

The rain was soft that morning—not a storm, just a weep. The kind that made everything shine.

Elena stood on the sidewalk outside her building, coat open, collar damp, hair sticking to her neck like a hand that hadn’t let go.

Red lipstick stained her mouth.

Crimson Psalm.

It wasn’t hers.

She looked in the mirror of a shop window.

There she was.

Not a cop. Not a detective. Not even the woman she used to be.

Just Elena. Marked by everything she chose to love. Everything she chose to survive.

She touched her reflection.

The glass was cold.

Vivien might’ve been behind her. Or not. The scent was still there—perfume, blood, sweat. A memory with fingers.

Elena didn’t turn around.

Didn’t need to.

Because Vivien was in her breath now. In her hips. In the space between each heartbeat.

The rain eased.

The sun cracked through the clouds in brittle beams.

Steam rose from the asphalt, a ghostly breath from the city's mouth. The streets shimmered, smoked, peeled themselves free of the night's sorrow. Sidewalks glistened under the newborn light, tendrils of mist curling into the morning air like a final whispered prayer.

It was the first peace Elena had ever felt.

Because Elena didn’t solve the case.

She surrendered to it.

Because love wasn’t the point.

Because truth didn’t save her.

Because Vivien came in blood.

And Elena chose to stay.