

Another Family Reunion Novel
In The Wisdom of the Ancestors Series
— Book 20 —

WALKING
*on
the* *Wilde*
SIDE

Alex-Mont Kids Saga—Episode 3

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Chapter 1



After Simon Wilde pulled his dull-green canvas duffle from the overhead compartment, he hung the long, wide strap over his left shoulder. Because there was a delay in opening the aircraft door, the aisle in the first-class cabin was full of weary, slow-moving passengers. He cracked the knuckles of his big hands, stretched his long arms out against the upper railing, got to his booted toes, and pumped as if doing pushups on the floor. The extra weight of the duffle made his thick muscles reach burn stage much faster. It was the best he could do to get the kinks out of his long, solidly-built body and stay awake after such a lengthy flight out of Africa. Still, even with the delay, he was damn glad to be home in the good old US of A.

Once the door opened and the aisle began to clear, he straightened and twisted his neck from side to side until his bones cracked, releasing the tension. Then one by one, he began from the neck down to stretch elements of his torso, relieving his body's rigidity into a feeling of near relaxation. Now, if he could just get his mind into the same state of calm, his Sensei would be proud.

Although exhausted, he couldn't sleep much on the flight because his brain wouldn't shut down. When he was able to nod off for brief periods, the high adrenaline level was still coursing through his veins and arteries, startling him awake and pushing him into fight or flight mode. He didn't want to frighten anyone if he happened to have a bad dream and shout or thrash around while he slept. Now jet lag and fatigue were beginning to take control of his body, he fought off the effects as best he could. Simon's discomfort was also created by sitting in a cramped space for long periods. He'd been moving at light speed for the last six weeks. Even though his seat was in first class and fairly wide, it wasn't so easy for such a tall man to fold himself into an airline space designed for a much smaller person.

Served him right for waiting until the last moment to pick his flight. If he didn't have to get out of the country fast, he could have reserved an Adventurer Executive Airline flight, had it waiting for his arrival, and spent the time on the trans-Atlantic flight comfortably relaxed in a bed. However, he was chasing a story of the terrorist attacks on North African cities and certain factions vowed he wouldn't live to report what he found. Just in case he was caught, he spent his time on the run, recording and uploading the text for his weekly column. Once that was accomplished, his immediate objective was to catch the first thing smokin', regardless of its destination before the terrorists caught up with him and made good on their threats. Fortunately, there was a flight headed for Dulles International Airport in Northern Virginia with one first-class seat being held in his name. The Saints be praised. He had to run for the departure gate, but his long legs and agile body ate up the distance in no time.

As a foreign correspondent for the Wilde Star Media News Group, a subsidiary of Wilde Communications, getting the story was his stock and trade and he was good at it...that and much, much more.

Since he resigned his commission as a captain in the US Navy SEALs, he'd been hell-bent on doing more than going wheels up at the discretion of bellicose, tight-ass politicians posing as military strategists who were in positions of power in the military hierarchy and the halls of the US Congress. Now, he didn't have to kowtow to their whims or political agendas. His frustration level ended and he was able to do work that netted real, definable results and contributed to the common good.

Admittedly, in order to camouflage his covert missions, it did cost him to disingenuously agree to work for his father's newspapers and broadcast facilities. He never purposefully lied to his family, but at least he successfully negotiated the role he needed to keep them out of harm's way. He wasn't in a leadership position or the corporate structure like his twin sister, Catrina Avril (her nickname, Cat Wilde). So, there would be no blowback on her, he wasn't responsible for her welfare or anyone else's welfare in the company. No one's life in the newspaper or broadcast industry depended on him or what he did or what those who worked for him did. He didn't have to feel any gut-wrenching guilt because of something he did or failed to do. He worked on his own, picked stories that interested him or concealed his activities, and reported to an editor who believed in breaking the rules when necessary. He had done some of his best work under his editor, Kyle Richland, even earning a Peabody Award last year. The coveted award was given to honor the most powerful,

enlightening, and invigorating stories on television, radio, and online media. This year's stories, three of them, were even more provocative, explosive, and hard-hitting. The one he was working on now would be epic.

In all, he accomplished over the last six weeks in the Middle East, on the African continent, and in his former career in military service, he was ready to stay put for a while and finally start writing his first definitive book on the state of life in Third-World countries. He was even toying with the idea of writing it as a novel. Once his head was clear of the secret intelligence he and his team gathered on this last trip, he might try his hand at writing a foreign intrigue or mystery...maybe a James Bond- or Jason Bourne-type thriller with a female secret agent and Special Forces character as the protagonist. Yeah, he liked that idea. Other than Angelina Jolie, he didn't know of any females in novels or movies who had leading roles in action adventures or dramas. For this first novel, he would need a muse to help him create a credible lead character. After all, he wasn't a woman. He'd have to give it some thought, but the idea was intriguing and gaining significance in his deliberations.

The line of passengers began to move toward the exit and the covered ramp beyond when Simon noticed three women standing to the side whispering to one another and eyeing him as he slowly moved forward. One of the women, a pretty bottle blond, stepped into his path blocking his way.

"You're Simon Wilde, aren't you?" she asked as more of a statement than a question while running her eyes over his body.

Giving her a blank look, Simon shook his head and shrugged. "No, sorry. It's a common mistake. No need to apologize. It happens all the time," he lied and skirted around the women. He noted their perplexed expressions, but didn't offer more. Digging his Nationals baseball cap out of his back pocket, he set it firmly on his head to further his disguise. His hair was long enough to grace his shoulders and he was sporting a full beard of well over an inch long. His six-foot-five-inch height alone usually drew attention no matter where he was. Slipping his hands into the pockets and wearing his wraparound sunshades, he hoped no one else would recognize him.

No such luck...

"Mr. Wilde," an airport security official hailed. "This way, please, sir."

Simon's shoulders slumped. He couldn't lie to the officials and hoped this extra scrutiny wasn't going to take too long getting through Customs.

As he followed the TSA officer into another room, he figured taxicabs would be plentiful at this time of day. In an hour, maybe two, he'd be home in his steamy shower with a cold beer in his hand while the hot water beat his weary body into submission. This temporary delay wouldn't even be a footnote in history. He put his duffle on a table and unzipped it for another TSA officer to inspect the contents. He was reaching for his passport and credentials when the officer opened a different door, waited while his credentials were stamped, and then ushered him through. Simon was resigned to the fact that this Custom's search might include all orifices. Then he found himself in a long corridor which led to a security door to the outside.

The officer said, "Have a good day, sir," and let him out into a secured employee parking lot.

Surprised by the gesture and quick service, he thanked the man and planned to make his way to a cab stand when he heard someone say, "Over here, Wilde child."

Leaning against her chauffeured Bentley and thumbing through her iPhone, Simon looked up to see Veronica Henderson Wilde. A smile lifted a corner of his mouth as he approached her. She angled her head for his expected kiss on her cheek, but never stopped scanning her text messages.

"Hi, Mom. This is a surprise. How did you know I was coming home today?" he asked as her ever-faithful driver, Mr. Harrell, took his duffle and put it in the trunk.

"I'm your mother. I'm omniscient. I know everything," she commented and opened the rear car door for him to get in. She trailed him into the car and once seated said, "Someone saw you running like a track star through the airport in Niamey, Niger, and noted which flight you were on. Pictures of you are all over the social media sites. Good form, I'd say, but, of course, you take after my side of the family in that regard. The Scots were always better at track and field in the Olympics than the Irish. On your father's side, they'd stop in a pub and have a lager of dark beer with a lemon wedge along the way in a ten-K race while our winners played *Scotland the Brave* at the finish line."

He laughed at his mother's joke and believed it to be true. His paternal relatives owned pubs all over Ireland and parts of the east coast of America. However, his maternal Scottish relatives were dyed-in-the-wool politicians. His grandfather, in his seventies, a government minister, was still considered a firebrand by the Scottish Parliament. A

first minister, designated by the Parliament, required approval by the Queen of England before he could be seated. He ruled the devolved powers of the Scottish government with an iron fist defying the crown in areas of education, agriculture, health, and justice. Veronica Henderson Wilde was a chip off her old man's block and considered a skillful agitator in the US House of Representatives for the benefit of her constituents.

"The press and news media are camped out in the airport awaiting your arrival," his mother continued. "The last story you posted has everyone talking. Your father would be spastic and apoplectic if you gave an interview to a competitor before he has an opportunity to have you interviewed on one of his Sunday magazine talk shows. I dearly love your father, but at the moment, I want to continue to have a good sexual relationship with him. If he's paroxysmal, sex with him might be problematic. So, now that you're home, he'll start the promos and teasers for your appearance right away on his network, then he'll be responsive when I jump his bones. You're scheduled to do *Let's Talk About It* live on Sunday at 1:00 P.M. He asked me to tell you he expects your byline before the Friday evening edition of the news."

Simon smirked and got comfortable in the roomy back seat, stretching out his long legs. Tilting his head back against the seat cushion, he closed his eyes as the car began to move. He would meet those deadlines with no sweat.

"Jeezuzze, child, when was the last time you bathed?" his mother complained, her expression pinched.

"I don't remember. What month is this?" he joked.

"Mr. Harrell, please lower the rear windows a tad," she instructed her driver. She still had her iPhone in her hand thumbing a text message to someone. "So, did you get the story you were after?" his mother absently asked.

The breeze felt good on his skin. There was a chill in the air, Simon noted. Fall was approaching, but he welcomed it after the heat of the African desert regions. Fall was his favorite time of year. "You're omniscient, what do you think?" He opened one eye and peeked at her gamine face with one raised eyebrow and grinned. "I did, yes. Thanks for your help in making those introductions for me."

"You're welcome. It helps when one attends the best schools with a wide, diverse group of future leaders. I need whatever you can share so I can use it in the Intelligence Committee hearings next week. I'm planning to roast a few high-level, corporate presidents who are charging