

Traded To The Lycan King by MG Wattsons

Chapter 151

Kyra

I catch myself constantly stealing glimpses of Hayes' injury. The way the scars seem to crawl up his neck and into his cheek like a thorny rose vine creeping up a trellis. It twists and dips, spots shiny while others are dull and deep. My fingers itch to touch it, to trace the

tendrils that caused him so much pain as they dance up the side of his head, burning off half his eyebrow.

It's mesmerizing, almost beautiful. A map of his sufferings. He finds it appalling, convinced I could only feel the same way. But I don't avoid his touch because of his injuries. I run from the sparks he seems immune to.

The explosion that rips through my body and tries to urge me to follow what the moon goddess has given me. It's not about moving on from what I lost, but accepting what I am being offered. But I'm not sure I can or that I want to.

"Ask me," Hayes sighs heavily, the annoyance clear in his exhale as he remains looking forward. My brows pull together, the left corner of my lip pulling down in a confused frown.

"What exactly am I asking you?"

"Did it hurt? Does it still hurt? How did it happen?" Hayes says, his voice flat and unaffected.

"Is that normally what people ask?" I watch him closely as he clears his throat and looks in the opposite direction. "Because I got the feeling people avoid you."

"Because of my burns?" He scoffs, and I snort.

"No, because you're an asshole now."

Dean and Marcos chuckle ahead of us, both of them shaking their heads.

"Yeah, well, if I look like an asshole people don't ask me annoying questions," He grumbles.

I arch a brow and smirk up at him, regardless of how much he tries to look away.

"I didn't ask you any questions. You demanded I ask you what you assumed I wanted to know." I remind him and he nods, a small smile forming before he pushes it away.

"You were staring at me," He says. "I assumed you were curious."

"I'm not here to be your best friend again, Hayes." I say, lengthening my strides to distance myself from him. After three steps, I spin, walking backward as I face him. "Every warrior knows what creates those burns, and I know the pain they bring the bearer of them." Then I spin on my toes and walk toward the front of the group. I catch up to Nisha, sliding up on her right side as she looks amused by my presence. Neither of us speaks. Why would we when there isn't much to say?

It is obvious she hates me and looks down on me for some reason. But if we are going to be stuck together for a while, then I may as well familiarize myself with her snide remarks.

"Are you lost, Tracker?" She muses, her deep brown eyes blinking slowly.

"No, Nisha." I tell her. "Just coming up for some air."

I mutter the sentence, not even realizing how much I mean them until I hear them in my own ears. Being around Hayes is entirely suffocating and when he isn't around, usually there is Marcos drowning me with his closeness and his overwhelming presence. Two entirely different men both successfully making me uncomfortable and want to hide from them.

Nisha shakes her head before she points up ahead, where Koda saunters, ducking under a branch.

"You could walk with Koda." She offers and I admit her immediate desire to send me off ruffles my skin and my lip twitches with annoyance.

"Did I do something to offend you?" I ask, tired of the shitty attitude.

"No," She arches a brow.

"So your dislike for me is purely a personal choice." I scoff and nod my head. "Fantastic."

I take a few steps before she exhales and groans. Her hand reaches out, clutching my elbow, tugging me back next to her.

"Look," she sighs, "I just...I am protective of these guys. They are my family, a weird, fucked up and very anger filled family. But that's all I have, so yes, I am hesitant to welcome someone else into the group."

"Well, lucky for you, I'm not looking for a family." I say my word, drifting off as my eyes scan the area around us, a scent prickling my senses as I slow down. The trees are still, not a breeze breaking through the dense foliage of the forest, yet my nose draws my attention to the right.

Nisha says something to me as I narrow my eyes, tilting my chin up and taking a deep inhale.

Heat permeates the air, the scent of overly warm metal or charcoal in the faintest way pulling me off the path the others trod down.

My lycan perks up, and I squeeze my eyelids together, allowing the world around me to fall silent. In the darkness I see a dull light, like a thread leading me as it pulses away, calling me to follow. I can feel the excitement rising in my gut, a smile coming to my lips as I throw my eyes open and sprint off in pursuit.

"Kyra! Where are you going?" Nisha hisses after me, but I am too far gone, already on the hunt.

As I cut around a tree, I notice a

mark on the bark of the tree. There is a small fresh cut, the under skin looking green and still moist. It's more like a dent, as if a rock were hammered into it. My fingers run over

er the indent, a shiver running through my body when I bring my hand to my nose and look closely. There is a slight shimmer, an oily hue, on my fingertips. As if it matches the flame fuel a dragon

uses to spit its fire.

I can hear hushes arguing ways behind me, but I push forward. My nose may have picked up the scent, but my other skills have verified it. Ezra and the egg are close. Now it is a matter of how close. What I need now is stealth and silence as I rely on my lycan's eyesight and my heightened hearing.

Tracking again feels like coming home after being gone for too long. My heart sings for the first time since losing everything, a part of me coming alive again as I slip through the trees. Every step brings me an exhilarating strike to my chest as I focus on controlling my breathing, keeping it low and silent.

I have no idea how long I track for, stopping every now and again to feel the trees, search for the scent and listen for the animals in the trees as I grow closer. My brow dots with sweat as I break into a small opening, ending at a large rocky wall. I stay in the cover of the canopy, lingering in the shadows as I glance up, looking for a way to climb or potentially see how they made their way up top.

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When I notice the harder rock surface to the left, away from the fallen shale on the front face of the cliff side, I inhale deeply and step into view sprinting toward it. As I reach out, touching the cold stones, I press myself to it, looking up and mapping out my path. I suck my lip into my mouth, gnawing on the lower corner, debating on whether or not I should trust the openings I see.

But this is the first real chance we have had to catch Ezra, or at least get close enough to remain on his trail. So I take three seconds to breathe through my nerves and shake my hands and fingers out.

"Ty, if you were here, you would love this." I mutter to myself before I purse my lips and exhale slowly. "This display of bravery is for you."

I throw my hand up into the first crevices, swinging my leg until I find a footing and I push myself up. Each move is slow and methodical as I work to keep myself from falling.

It is slow and painful as rocks cut at the palms of my hands, but I push on. I am almost halfway up the wall face when my fingers slip and I cling to a rock, the sharp edge slicing into the palm of my hand.

The blood makes my hold slick as I swing my body, desperate to find anything to reach for with either my fingers or my feet. One moment I am swinging and the next my toes tap into something and I force my weight to it with a pained grunt before I try to give my injured hand a shove off the rock.

The cut is too much, my fingers tingling as they lose feeling, and I linger between a delicate balance on my foot and my flailing arms. The reality hits with gravity as I teeter back and my footing disappears and the world twisting around me as I pick up speed. Fear climbs up my throat with a silent scream as my stomach moves into my chest. A part of me wants to let it happen, to just crash to the ground and let the rocks break open my skull and hide my pool of blood beneath them.

But then I remember why I am here, what it is I am doing and stopping. No one, not even the likes of Nisha, should have to experience the loss that I have, and until Ezra is found, and the egg delivered, no mates are safe.

My lycan breaks out at the last moment, my nails cutting into the side as I come to a halting stop, my body swinging into the side of the rocks with a grunt making me recoil in pain.

I scramble again for a grip, pain slipping through my body like a heated knife to butter. My body slams into the ground, a raspy grunt forced from the remaining air in my lungs.

My lycan retreats, as I turn onto my hands and knees, heaving as my stomach boils over from the sheer panic and fleeting death. As I try to stand, a calloused hand wraps around the back of my neck, yanking me back enough to make my teeth clatter together. "What the hell do you think you are doing?!" a voice growls, sending a shiver through my spine as my mouth goes dry.

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"Let go of me!" I grit out, throwing my elbow back, my funny bone tingling up my arm and into my fingers as I hit something solid. The hand on my neck releases me and I stumble forward into the wall, whipping around, ready to fight. I stop, blinking as I look at Hayes, who frowns at me and rubs his solar plexus. "Ouch," He says, looking unimpressed. "All of that so-called training and you went with an elbow jab?"

An amused laugh bubbles up my chest as I allow my body to go lax and lean onto the rock surface for support. The cool stones soothe my aching muscles from my falling and I sigh heavily.

"Forgive me, but I'm not in the mood for any verbal sparring at the moment." I huff out, my stomach pinching and churning violently as I lean forward, hands on my knees.

"What the hell were you thinking, running off like that?" He asks, but for once, his words aren't demanding or condescending.

"I was tracking." I say, turning my head to look up at him from my bent over position.

"Looked more like you were falling." He says with a grunt.

I don't have the energy to fight with him. Going from the high of tracking to near death and then to the scare of being attacked does something to the nerves I can't quite explain.

My heart is in my throat still, the bile burning the back of my throat as I try to bring my blood pressure back to normal. Hell, fighting that damn dragon felt way less taxing.

"Ezrah is close." I whisper, standing up again before hunching back over and hurling out the acid that had settled in my throat and around the bitter taste buds around my tongue.

My muscles contract painfully, tugging at my injuries and making me groan in near agony. I have now fallen off two cliffs since starting this mission. If this starts to become a habit, I may have to send myself home. If I had a home to go back to.

"What do you mean?" Hayes asks, his body going rigid as he steps in closer to me. I slide my forearm over my mouth, cleaning it as I swallow roughly.

"I caught the scent of the egg, and then when I looked closer I could see signs they went this way-"

"Are you sure?" he asks, his voice low as he reaches out and takes my chin between his thumb and forefinger, forcing me to meet his intense questioning eyes.

"Of course I am sure." I tell him, trying to struggle away from his touch, the sparks flooding through me and calming the painful storm of my wounds.

"Look at me, Kyra." He says seriously, moving his face closer. "Say it again."

"Ezrah is near. I bet my life on it." I say, making sure to say my words clearly so he doesn't question it again. "He is over that cliff and I was trying too-"

"That's what I thought you said." He mumbles, dropping his hand before he turns away, a flash of conflict on his face.

"Why do you not seem excited?" I ask, hating how much it disappoints me to not please him with my work. Isn't this what he wanted for so long?

"Why did you rush off on your own?" He asks, his words soft before he turns and glares at me. I stutter under his look. A small shrug the only thing I can think to do to answer him.

"I- uh-wasn't thinking about it. What it came down to is I picked up the scent, and I followed to verify. That's what I have always done in the past with Tyler." I try to explain, but a sinister smile takes over his lips as he clicks his tongue. "Sorry to disappoint you, but I am not your ex-mate. He is dead" His words have a bite to them that makes my brows furrow. His mood seems to shift faster than the wind in a raging storm, and his words feel like a punch to the gut. "I know that. There is no way I could ever confuse the two of you." I snap at him. "What I mean is, this is how I was trained. This is what I do, Hayes. I track, I follow and then I report and we proceed from there. In a sense, I am a spy." "Kyra, you left without so much as a look back. Nisha thought you went crazy and freaked out." He says, a glimmer of guilt in his eyes.

"Definitely crazy, but I wasn't freaking out." I say as a sound rustles over my head, distracting me.

A rock tumbles from above us and Hayes snaps his head up, his reflexes moving quicker than mine as he grabs me, tugging me into his chest before he spins us to the right, just under a small ledge.

My back presses into the rocks, his body glued to mine, his chin touching my hair. My stomach, once revolting, now calms and butterflies emerge, dancing amidst a field of a love they want so desperately to live freely in. "Hayes," I whisper, my lips barely moving. His chest vibrates softly, sending a shockwave through my body.

"Hush," he utters and I press my lips together, closing my eyes as I try to keep tears from forming.

It feels so nice, so peaceful, so...safe, in his embrace, and that is a feeling I haven't felt in a long damn time. My lycan is preening and my heart rate climbs with every second he stays in my space. "Please," I try to whisper, but my voice breaks.

I can feel him move, a slight cool breeze coming between where his chin was pressed into my hair, but I can't bring myself to look. I am wrapped in his scent, in the dream of what could be if only we weren't so broken. "Please what, Kyra?" he asks. "Are you hurting?"

His voice is still so soft, like he actually cares and doesn't want to be heard.

"Why are we hiding?" I ask him, trying to lean forward and look around the rock.

"Someone is above us," He whispers, placing his hand on the side of my head, his body pressing harder into mine. "They can not see us, but if you keep talking, they may hear us."

I can feel the heat of his breath on my ear, tickling the loose hairs that twirl about my neck and lobe.

Seconds bleed into minutes and the air seems to grow thicker with each breath.

"He is gone," I murmur, unable to withstand a second more of being this close to him. I shouldn't crave this or enjoy it. He isn't the Hayes I knew, and he isn't someone I can afford to love anymore.

Especially when he can't feel this

bond, the one that draws me in and

leaves me vulnerable in every damn way. The second he feels it, I will reject him and we can both be on our way. I just have to hope he doesn't recognize it during a crucial moment of this mission.

Ever so slowly, he takes a step back, his eyes meeting mine with a fierce look before he takes another step away, leaning to the side and looking up. I watch as he wipes his hands on his jeans and clears his throat. "We should get back to the others." He says.

I scrunch my nose and tilt my head, knowing the words he said but not understanding his suggestion.

"Why would we go the wrong way?" I ask him, "Ezrah is that way."

I point up the cliff side as if he doesn't know, but clearly the knowledge must have escaped him to suggest we go the opposite way. He nods and rolls his eyes.

"Yeah, I am aware, but we came with a group and we need to have them traveling in the right direction."

"Or you go back and get them and I will continue on."

"Over my dead fucking body," He growls, getting in my face. My eyes grow wide as I take one step away from him. Search the FindNovel.net website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

"This is why I am here," I remind him, and he shakes his head in disbelief.

"You still need to do things my way." He says, reaching down and grabbing me by the wrist. "If you are fast, we won't lose Ezrah's trail. I suggest we get moving." "Unless it rains." I huff but follow along, breaking into a run when he does. He holds onto my arm for too long, and once we hit the tree line, I shake myself loose.

"It would have to rain really damn hard to wash away a trail so fresh. As an expert tracker, you should know that." He says, kicking his speed up.

He is right. It would take a rain pretty hard for hours to muddle my ability to follow Ezrah or even locate him now. Hayes weaves through the path I took, ducking under branches and looking back to ensure I am still behind him.

By the time we make it back, Dean,

Nisha, and Koda are waiting anxiously. The moment they see Hayes, they seem to relax, breathing easier as their shoulders drop. Dean drags a hand over his face before I feel a heated gazer. When I look to the left, Nisha's angry eyes meet mine as she tuts and clicks her tongue, looking away.

The moment she opens her mouth for a smartass comment, a loud, earth shattering sound breaks free that makes me jump in alarm. "What the hell." Koda says, looking at her shocked and she glares at him.

"It wasn't-"

There is a brief flash before lightning cracks through the air, the buzz of electricity bringing to life the clouds that rumble and, after a moment, release their wrath. I groan,

throwing my head back, cold hard drops of water hammering into my heated skin. Then I roll my head over and scowl at Hayes, my eyes harrowing in sheer annoyance.

"Fuck," He mutters.

"I really hate you right now," I grumble.

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My shoes squelch from the water that fills them. The cold of the mud mixed with the soggy fabric makes me shiver. No amount of running hot could warm me from this icy chill as it settles into my bones. I knew the second Hayes made us go back to the others that we "Shit, it's an endless fucking stream of rain," Dean growls with a shudder, his arms clutched to his chest.

were screwed. Everything on this mission has a way of going sideways.

"We should try to wait it out," Nisha yells, her voice barely audible over the droning sounding of hard, heavy droplets pelting us from the sky.

Hayes drags his hands through his hair, droplets running down his cheeks before he meets my eyes, and a frown grows on his lips. He knows there is no way I will willingly stop. We have already lost so much valuable time and likely important clues. Maybe this explains their lack of finding Ezra all along. Do they even want to find the guy?

"Waiting it out is the difference between a quick mission or two years of wandering aimlessly." I yell over the noise. Marcos' eyes widen in shock, but Hayes doesn't seem phased by my comment. "I have no intention of resting or losing what little trail we have left." I pick up my speed, moving faster as Nisha falls behind with Koda at her side.

"Kyra," I hear my name being called, but I can't in good conscience slow down. If they can not keep up, then they will have to find me on their own later.

"Kyra!" I hear Hayes roar loudly, and yet all it does is cement my stubbornness as I keep moving. His hand clutches at my elbow as he whirls me around. Hayes' lips purse together, droplets raining over them as he huffs out an exasperated breath, spraying the water away as he pinches the bridge of his nose with his free hand.

"It's gone already," he finally says. "I fucked up by heading back. I can admit that. But slogging around in a fucking rain storm isn't going to get you anything but wet and more lost."

I yank my arm free, my pride and anger swelling in my chest. He knows nothing about my abilities. All he has done is severely undervalue what I can do, admittedly things have been off to a rough start, but that isn't entirely my fault. I trusted too easily when I should have known better that the worst kind of enemy is the one who knew you.

"Right now, I am trying to cling to whatever closeness we have to him." I throw my hands up, "Of course all the clues and trail are gone. Ezra is traveling with an egg. One, he must keep warm at all costs, Hayes. That means he is not moving, he is hunkered down, keeping warm and staying somewhere dry."

He scoffs, shaking his head.

"I'm calling it. We have passed the furthest point you were at earlier. It is time to find shelter and wait this out." He demands.

"You are not my alpha, and as luck would have it, you are not my beta either. So you may find the others shelter, and sing cute songs around a fire and cuddle. I am doing my job." I snap, turning to run away from him. His hand wraps around my elbow again and he yanks hard, pulling me around and into his hard chest.

I can only help my eyes carry the anger I feel about him manhandling and demanding I follow his stupid orders. Orders that will mean I am stuck here with him for longer and I need to be rid of him and this fucking bond I used to beg for.

"My priority is everyone's safety." He says, glaring down at me.

"Well, I relieve you of that priority." I say, looking up at him as he growls in his chest.

I can feel the way it vibrates in his vast chest that is pressed against me. My body shivers, the warmth of his body reminding me just how cold the rain actually is. Damn my traitorous involuntary movements that only help convince him he is in the right. "Enough of this back-and-forth shit, Kyra. I am not here to bicker with you. Merikh asked you to do this but with my permission you were allowed to join us. I take others' safety fucking seriously. I will not fail another person the way I failed her ever again."

The bitter resentment and hurtful words sit at the tip of my tongue, which I bite down so hard the twang of blood colors my mouth. What I want is to make him mad enough he lets me go, but something tells me he won't be dropping this issue anytime soon. What a drastic change from the time he left me for the fucking dragons, drugged and alone.

"The second the rain lets up, even a little, I am gone to track. Is that understood?" I sneer at him, and he arches a brow down at me.

"Weird. It sounds like you were asking permission all while you were telling me what you were doing."

I roll my eyes, stepping away from him.

"Yes, well, I listen to orders to the best of my ability. Doesn't mean I have good hearing, though."

We walk back in silence, not really sure which way we are headed in, until I catch a whiff of smoke and a little glimmer of light. To my left, sheltered in a corner over a massive overhang, sits a small rundown cabin.

I scrunch my nose at it as we move closer. Tyler had a love for the human world's horror movies. They weren't really something I liked at all, but of the few I watched, I am fairly certain this is a scene from one.

Hayes lets out a bird call and I smirk, amused. The guy couldn't so much as whistle when we were growing up. Now he is tweeting like a bird. A similar sound comes back, and I watch his shoulders roll back as he motions for me to move forward.

"A bird's call?" I scoff as we step onto the leaking porch. "In a rainstorm? Really inconspicuous,"

"Unless someone is closer than they

should be, they couldn't hear it over the rain, and considering Ezra is a Fae and not a lycan or werewolf, his hearing is as shitty as a basic human." he gives me a tight smile, like we are battling and he won. I respond with a solid eye roll, and he shakes his head as he pushes the door open.

Heat wraps around me and there is no hiding the shiver that runs through me at the relief of the warmth. Marcos moves over, looking Hayes over, who whispers and points in my direction. Marcos then grabs a warm blanket that had been hanging near the fire and hands it to me.

"Everyone has taken their clothes off to let it dry. You should do the same, but you can wrap up in this." He says kindly.

I nod, taking it from him, my white fingers struggling to bend as I clutch it. Then he frowns and Marcos reaches out and takes it back.

"How about I hold it up while you change?" he asks. I sigh in defeat and nod yes as I turn to a corner and he follows, holding the blanket up as I try to quickly rid myself of my wet clothes.

"Thank you," I tell him as I reach up and take the blanket. His head turned to the side before he meets my eyes, a heated desire there, and he swallows roughly and then turns away, heading toward the fire.

I wrap the blanket around my body

tight as if I were hopping out of a shower and then I take my messy hair out of its ponytail and tie

it up in a bun. When I look up, I notice Hayes' eyes on me, watching my every move as I blush and move toward the fire, the heat making me sigh in relief.

"You are a real hardass." Nisha snorts after a minute. "We are used to traveling in shitty conditions, but damn, I couldn't even see my own hand."

I arch a curious brow and smirk.

"That sounds like a compliment." I tell her, and she looks away, licking her teeth before he chuckles.

"It might have been." She shrugs.

"So we camp out here tonight, and head out in the morning?" Marcos asks, coming to sit next to me.

"No, once the rain lets up a little, I will be back out there again." I say, looking around. "No offense, but I can't do this for two years. I refuse. So I will do everything in my power to end this as soon as possible." Hayes laughs low, his eyes finally leaving me as he looks out the window.

"Got somewhere to be?" He asks, looking at me again. "So eager to go home to an empty house and bleak, lonely future?"

His words hit me harder than I hope he intends. Because he is right. What is there left for me? No Tyler, no baby, and no doubt a rejection from my second chance mate. There isn't much.

But I refuse to believe my life is over because I lost my mate. If the moon goddess had intended for it to be over, she would have taken me as well. So for now I will cling to the hope there is something better for me.

"An empty house doesn't have to mean loneliness. It can mean peace and space to grow." I murmur, then I turn to Marcos as I lay down, my head close to him. "Wake me when the rain lets up. I am actually trusting you again. Please don't fuck me over this time?"

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Hayes

"You should get some rest too, Hayes." Marcos says.

I know he is looking out for me; he is the healer and someone I would almost consider a friend if I had intentions for friendly attachments. But every time I look at him, I find myself envious where I never was.

Kyra has turned me into someone who cares when she looks at me. How can I both crave and hate her gaze? How can she make me jealous of another man who has nothing? I know the reason. It's because he at least has a fucking face. But the fact that it bothers me so much...that is what's so infuriating.

"Hayes?" Dean says, touching my shoulder, dragging me from my thoughts as I glare up at him.

"What?"

"Marcos is right. You are better use to us all if you are rested. You seem more lost in your head than you usually are."

I sigh, and turn back toward the fire, pinching the bridge of my nose before squeezing my eyes closed.

"Being lost in my mind is preferable to being lost in my nightmares, Dean. You know how that goes." I mutter.

"I can help you sleep, Hayes," Marcos offers, and I look down at Kyra, who pretends to be asleep, his hand gently rubbing up and down her back. The simple, sweet gesture makes me want to rip his fingers off.

"I don't want your drugs, Marcos." I snap at him before I stand and walk over to the door.

"Where are you going?" Kyra's voice squeaks, no doubt, as she spins to look at my back. And for whatever reason, her caring brings a smirk to my face.

"To sleep where a dog like me belongs." I tell her, not bothering to look back before I exit through the rickety door.

Koda looks up from his spot, tilting his head to the right.

"Too stuffy in there, huh?" He asks, but I ignore him looking for a dry enough spot to lie down.

The second I find something remotely dry, I lower myself and stare up at the barely standing roof. It shakes as rain patters down. I wonder just how damn long the clouds sustain this type of downpour?

The moment it lets up, she is going to leave. And knowing how she is these days, she will likely try to sneak off and proclaim it is what she was taught to do. I snort as I turn onto my side, my arm under my head to keep it from the slightly damp, rotting wood. "Hayes," Koda says, more of a question if I am awake or asleep, which I should be.

"What?" I mumble with a heavy exhale..

"Can I ask you something?" His words are hushed as I hear him coming over.

When he enters my view, I see him peek in through a crack in the siding, then plop down in front of me. I arch a brow in interest. Koda has no problem speaking his mind when he wants to, but this desperation in his voice is different. He never asks before he speaks, he just simply talks.

"What is it?" I ask him and he clears his throat.

"It's about Nisha..." He murmurs, looking away for a minute.

"You want to choose her as a mate?" I say the words he is struggling to get out. Instead of growing angry like I thought I would in a situation like this, I find myself more open to the idea of others finding their happiness.

"I know that we wouldn't qualify to be here, in this group anymore, but I was hoping you would let us stay?" he swallows and I narrow my eyes, pushing myself up.

"Are you telling me you two have already discussed this and marked each other?" I ask him.

His eyes grow wide and he shakes his head, then he drags his hand over his face.

"No. It is just that...I know she, well, I..." He exhales. "I refuse to sleep with her unless I know she is mine. Only mine."

I plop back down on the wood, annoyed. Why the fuck is he asking permission if he knows the rules and what is at stake here?

"Koda, if you two want to mate, that is fine, but the rules remain the same. No mates are allowed in the group."

It's not like it was just a rule I made

up, either. It was one Merikh also suggested. There is no nefarious

reasoning behind it, no excret

based on the life they want to

choose. But If someone has a mate, chosen or fated, they should be with them, fully and truly focused on them.

One of my greatest regrets was fighting the bond with Leandra and then never truly having that bond

strengthened between us. If Kodaet

wants a life with Nisha, and she agrees with his feelings, then they should remove themselves from the dangers of this mission and go and actually have a life together.

"I see." He says, sounding disappointed. I frown, feeling the need to explain it to him.

"Koda, you understand my reasoning, right?" I ask him and he exhales.

"I do, so perhaps I will keep her at arm's length until the end of the mission." Koda says, resolute.

"Or you tell her and you both decide what to do from there."

He remains quiet for a moment before he clears his throat.

"Is that what you plan to do with Kyra?" he asks, and I bark out a laugh.

"There is nothing between Kyra and I," I tell him frankly and he frowns. "I mean it, Koda. Kyra was a friend once, a long time ago. But now she is nothing to me but a nuisance."

He pulls himself up using the railing, the rain splashing on him as he looks out into the distance. Then he sniffs the air, his muscles going rigid. I jump up, trying to scent or see what he might be seeing, and then he elbows me. "Smells like bullshit, doesn't it?" He grins. I opt to glare at him as he shakes his head. "Can I ask what she was like? I mean, was she always like this?"

I press my lips together tightly and then drop my head, shaking it.

"This woman looks like the Kyra I

knew, but she is not the same. The

Kyra I knew was soft-spoken, sweet, and easy to love. My biggest fear with her was seeing her heart

"I chuckle, remembe

all

the ways Kyra used to blush or giggle softly when my hand would

brush hers or I would give her a

treat.

"Is that why you dislike her so much now?" He asks and I furrow my brows, looking at him, confused. SEARCH THE website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, you never wanted to see her broken, and now that's all she is. A broken misfit like the rest of us. Like you."

"I don't dislike her." I retort. "She just...gets on my nerves and thinks she is high and mighty. Not to mention she has to fight every fucking thing I say."

He nods his head slowly as if he is processing what I am saying.

"So it bothers you that she is here?" He asks me.

"Of course it does. I don't want her here, fuck I cut her out of my life once already and now after this is all over I will have to do it again." I mutter, my fingers tightening on the water logged railing.

"Do you plan on cutting all of us out then after this?" He asks, arching a brow.

"No," I give him an honest answer, then I pause. "Well, maybe Marcus and his stupid ass angelic face."

He snorts and shakes his head. "He gets kicked out because he is pretty or because you are jealous of his friendship with your ex-best friend?"

"Koda, you are asking too many questions." I groan, pushing away from the railing and turning to move back to my spot. As I twist around, I see Kyra standing in the doorway, leaning on the doorjamb with an emotionless face.

"Kyra," I say on a breath, and she focuses past me.

"I think the rain is letting up. My clothes are dry, so I am going to get ready. You made me a promise, so you better get dressed too if you want to get rid of me soon. Or I could just ask Marcos and his angelic face to tag along with me instead." She shrugs. Well, fuck. I guess she heard everything, and that just means she is going to be grumpier from now on.

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I slip on my still damp clothing, sliding an annoyed side eye over at Kyra. There is no way her clothing is even close to dry yet if mine is still this wet. I don't say anything. I already have to be wary of what I say now that she overheard me and Koda talking. Not that I didn't say anything I wouldn't say to her face. Well, maybe I wouldn't say all of it to her face, but the point remains the same. I didn't speak any mistruths.

"Remind me again why we are leaving now?" Nisha mumbles, unhappy about not staying out of the rain longer.

"Because we need to catch up to Ezra.,," Kyra says with a heavy sigh. "Do you guys even want to find this guy, or is this really just some cover to avoid helping with the war?"

"The fuck did you just say?" I Koda growls, his head snapping up as he glares at her. "You think this has been a damn picnic for us, sweetheart?"

Kyra doesn't even flinch as she reaches out and grabs her bag, slinging it over her shoulder.

"No, I questioned exactly what you all have been doing out here for two years. I never said it was easy, just that it seems like you guys are trying to avoid-" she says, gripping the strap tightly, the only show of her nerves.

"He heard what you said, Kyra." I break in, giving her a stare that pleads with her to shut up. The last thing we need is a group of pissed off lycans and werewolves at our backs. I know for a fact they will protect me, but I need to know they will protect her, too. She isn't making it all that easy.

"She makes a point," Marcos says, and Koda scoffs, shaking his head.

"Of course you would try to agree with her, you want in her pants," he grumbles.

"Marcos is right, Koda." I say, reaching for my bag. Koda scoffs and chuckles dryly. "Or do you think I want to get into his pants?"

He frowns at me and shakes his head as if this whole conversation is unbelievable.

"No, I don't get the vibe you want in Marcus' pants." He says finally.

"We should be jumping at every opportunity to get Ezra. We have become complacent in our failure. Clearly, we have forgotten what it is like to have a lead." I remind everyone, looking at Nisha, Dean and Koda especially.

"It's just rain," Dean says, trying to break the residual tension.

"Yeah, nothing like a wet dog," Nisha grumbles to herself as she slides a glance at Kyra and Marcos.

"Enough." I say, my voice low but firm. "This bickering and bullshit is done here and now. Do you understand me?"

Nisha nods like a child who has been scolded, and Koda mutters in agreement. Dean throws his hands up like he has had nothing to do with all of this while Marcos looks around, also trying to appear innocent. When my eyes land on Kyra, she is chewing the inside of her cheek, her face flushed and her grip tighter on her strap.

"Sorry," she whispers.

"Good. Now-"

"Woah woah..." Kyra says, cutting me off with raised eyebrows. "What about you?"

My nose scrunches in confusion as I look around at everyone, annoyed to see almost all of them nodding in agreement with her.

"What about me?" I scoff.

"Well, you kind of are part of the problem with all the bickering and stuff...no offense." Dean explains. I snort a laugh.

"I am the leader. I don't bicker."

"You bicker with Kyra all the time." Nisha points out, crossing her arms over her chest. "How are we supposed to trust her when you don't?"

I exhale, my annoyance morphing into an angry monster as I slide my tongue over my teeth.

"I will say this only once and then it will be dropped. Is that understood?" I grit out as they nod. "I trust Kyra with my life and yours. If you doubt her, then you are doubting me. Do you doubt me?" "No, of course we don't." Dean says, speaking for everyone.

"Then this conversation is over and the shitty attitudes are gone." I grunt, walking to the door and yanking it open.

The hinges snap and the door falls to the side as I realize I might be a little more frustrated than I thought. I clear my throat and let it fall to the side; the others following along behind me in silence.

No one speaks as Kyra guides us along with the point of her hand. I try to avoid her, lingering in the back to make sure I don't bicker or make a scene. After all, Nisha makes a point. My constant arguing with her does no one any good. So avoiding her seems to be the best thing I can do. Even if I feel like I should be up there with her. [Search the website](#) to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

"Did you mean it?" Dean asks abruptly, his words quiet as he frowns at me. My brows pull together and my mouth pulls to one side as I try to understand what the heck he is talking about.

"Could you maybe be a little more specific?" I ask him, and he lowers his voice.

"When we started this mission, you told me your goal was to find Ezra and die in battle. Did you mean it?"

I scrub my hand down my face, clearing it of rain for a mere second before it runs down my face again.

"Of course I meant it." I say, giving him a curious look. "Why do you ask?"

"Is that still your plan now?" He asks, and it feels like he has something more to say, like there is something hidden between the words, a reason for his curiosity that makes my alarm bells go off.

"I plan to catch Ezra and ensure the

egg is returned." I say, feeling more

guard around Dean than I have before. He seems to weigh my answer, his mouth opening and closing before it presses together in a tight line of indecisions. "Dean, Why do you ask?"

"Do you still want to die, Hayes? At the end of all of this, is your goal to die in this battle and leave us with the remains to deliver to our Alpha?" He asks, coming to a halt.

I stop walking as I turn to look at him, my hands on my hips as I shake my head and look at the mud where my feet sink into an inch of water, the drops sending tiny waves through the small puddle.

for a moment, it's like I can see clearly, a solid moment where my grief and anger don't cloud my judgment and I understand now why no one has felt a sense of urgency to find Ezra the way I have. "Merikh set you up to this, didn't he?" I ask, my chest burning with an unfamiliar feeling of regret as my self hatred grows. Dean clears his throat and looks away as I lift my gaze and scowl at him. "Alpha Merikh...expressed concerns," he says after a moment and I dryly chuckle, pacing away from him as I lick my lips and smile at no one but myself.

"So this whole time, all along, you have been what...? Ensuring I don't find Ezra because you are worried I will kill myself?" I scoff.

"No!" Dean says firmly, his face full of truth as I realize the others have come back for us.

"Then what? Merikh asked you to watch me for him? Hmm? Make sure I don't allow myself to die?" I scoff.

Dean glances behind me and I spin to see that no one will make eye contact with me. Nisha rubs the back of her neck and Koda clears his throat.

"I see," I say, defeated and betrayed. Two years with this group, two years and now their occasional laziness makes sense. The need to find Ezra has always been there, but the urgency has only recently come. "We have never done anything to keep us from finding him, but it worked in our favor when you didn't want a tracker...In a way, we thought it was you subconsciously not wanting to die," Nisha says in a small voice.

"Noted," I clip out. "What happens after we accomplish our mission concerns none of you. We will Find Ezra and do what we must in order to end the war for our kinds sake. That is the mission. That is all any of you need from me." There is a silent stare off between everyone and me before Kyra clears her throat and points northeast.

"I think we should head that way." She says and after a long moment, everyone seems to agree as they turn and walk in that way.

I stay behind, collecting myself and

my thoughts It shouldn't come as a

shock for me that Merikh informed them of my wish to die, and it shouldn't be a shock to them either. When selected my group, I took the

ones I thought had a set

toomine, ones that would

I have nothing left to live for.

Even in my moments of clarity where I realize the errors of my misplaced emotions towards my only family, I still don't want to be here anymore. My intentions have not changed because my brother's Alpha order remains fully intact.

I can not allow myself to die unless it happens naturally. Since he refuses to put me on the front lines, this was the closest I could get, and even here he has his pawns ensuring I fail at my one true mission.

My death.

"Hayes," Kyra says softly next to me, making me jolt in surprise.

"Are you going to question my motives, too?" I ask her and she tilts her head, a sadness in her eyes.

"No, just letting you know we should try to catch up with them. That's all." She gives me a gentle, encouraging smile, and yet behind it I can see pain.

I am not the only one living with the agony of survivors' guilt. Is that the reason she accepted this mission? Has she been lying and have the same idea as I did? Die in a battle to save ourselves the punishment from the heavens for destroying our gift of life? "You're not going to lecture me on wanting to die?" I scoff at her as I follow the path of the others. She laughs, light and yet eerily hollow.

"Nah, I promised I wouldn't bicker with you anymore. Which basically means I have to avoid you." She says, her tone changing to a more cheerful one. "I really enjoy bickering with you. It's like I am getting you back for all the times you strong armed me into doing things I hated."

"Like what?" I ask her, shocked she ever felt that way.

"Like when you used to make me eat lemon bars with you?" She scrunches her nose, her freckles dancing on her delicate skin as I swallow a lump in my throat and look away.

"You like lemon bars." I remind her, and she clicks her tongue against her teeth.

"No, Hayes, YOU like lemon bars. I just liked you."

I can't help but break into a smile, holding onto a secret that I don't think I can ever tell her. Lemon bars are my least favorite food on the planet. All that time I was convinced it was her favorite, so I always had it made for her by the pack cook.

And now, at the strangest time in the world, I find myself craving that tangy sweet flavor on its buttery cookie, just so I can have a moment with her like we used to. Just one more time before our inevitable parting.

