

494 Don't Die

Kael 1

Her wetness flooded my tongue, my eyes rolling back from the rawest taste of her. My hardness begged for it, turgid. My knot pulsing with bond in my chest, wanting nothing more than to claim her and let her claim me.

When I raised my head, I expected to see her panting, still recovering from her orgasm, only for my heart to skip a beat when I found her with her arms outstretched for me, waiting.

"Come to me, Kael" She murmured breathless, parting her legs again. She was ready for me, so I obliged.

I trailed my mouth up every curve of her body until I reached that insatiable mouth. We breathed in each other as I lined myself up with her core.

She gasped against my mouth as my crown slipped past her folds.

I paused, clenching my teeth as I slowed my pace as I slid in deeper, making sure to listen and feel for any discomfort. With each itch deeper, I felt

her tense and relaxed, gripping me tighter.

I fed myself into her, bit by bit, she enveloped me in her warmth and I groaned when I finally hit her hilt. I waited for her to get used to the fullness but she had other plans.

She rolled her hips, my length moving at her insistence, I hissed.

She arched her back, as I began to move.... slowly at first. Dipping my head, caught her peak again, sucking as I thrusted into her. With every roll of our hips, every moan, my restraint wore down until I found myself pounding in her like a wanton man in heat.

Her walls held me captive, a cage I never wanted to unlock.

"Oh baby, you can't do this to me," I whispered, harshly against her skin. "You...are driving me crazy." I groaned. My cock jack hammered inside her, unable to hold on to any shred of control.

I felt her clench tighter, while her walls pulsated in a rhythm that would forever be engraved into my mind. She tensed even more. "Kael, please..." She stuttered, breathless, "I can't...hold..."

I bit the sensitive shell of her ear. "Let go,

darling. Come for me." I captured her lips again, so I could speak to her against them. "Let me feel you. Let me hear you." My teeth found its mark on her neck as I marked her.

She obeyed, her body freezing before she let out a strangled, broken scream, her words incohesive as she hit her climax, spasming around me. Her sound and feeling did not lull me over the edge, it rammed me off it. My knot swelled as I came, coating her walls in hot spurts. 2

I melted into her, she held me as we came off our high.

Panting, I rolled off her and shifted so we were on our sides. I looked into her eyes, still moist from the tears that escaped from her eyes when pleasure had engulfed her.

She spoke first, as always. "Don't die." She whispered.

"Don't die," she whispered. 1

The words hung in the air between us, fragile and desperate. My heart, still racing from what we'd just shared, clenched painfully.

I brushed a strand of golden hair from her face,



my thumb tracing the path of her tears. "I won't."

"Promise me." Her azure eyes searched mine, still glassy with emotion. "Promise me you'll come back."

I wanted to. Gods, I wanted to promise her everything—forever, safety, a life without war or bloodshed. But I'd learned long ago that some promises were cruel to make.

"Thea—"

"No." She pressed her fingers to my lips, silencing me. "Don't give me statistics or odds or careful words. Just... promise me you'll fight. That you won't give up. That you'll remember this—" her voice broke, "—remember ***us*** when it gets hard."

The bond between us pulsed, golden and warm, a living thing that connected us now in ways I was only beginning to understand. Through it, I could ***feel*** her fear, her desperation, her love.

"I a

"I promise," I said, and meant it. "I'll fight. I'll survive. Because I have something to come back to now."

She let out a shaky breath, her hand sliding from



my mouth to rest against my chest, right over my heart. "The bond..."

"I know." I covered her hand with mine. "I can feel you. Here." I pressed her palm harder against my chest. "It's like you're **inside** me now. Part of me."

"Does it always feel like this?" she asked softly. "Like my heart is beating in two places at once?"

"I don't know." I'd never had a mate before. Never thought I'd **have** a mate. "But I hope it does. I never want to forget this feeling."

She was quiet for a moment, her fingers tracing idle patterns on my chest—over scars, over unmarked skin, treating both the same. "I was so scared," she admitted. "When I came here tonight. I thought... I thought you'd only want..."

"Sex," I finished for her, the word still tasting bitter. "I know. And I understand why you thought that. We haven't exactly had time to... court properly." The word felt absurdly formal given what we'd just done, and I felt my lips twitch despite everything.

She caught the almost-smile. "Court? Is that what you would have done? Brought me flowers and written me poetry?"

"Terrible poetry," I confirmed. "Ajax would have helped. It would have been embarrassingly bad."

She laughed—small and soft, but real. The sound loosened something in my chest.

"I would have liked that," she said. "The terrible poetry. The flowers. All of it."

"When this is over," I said, and felt the weight of that promise, "I'll write you the worst love poems you've ever read. Daily. You'll beg me to stop."

"Never." She shifted closer, tucking herself against me until there was no space left between us. "I'll frame every single one."

I wrapped my arms around her, holding her as tightly as I dared. She fit against me perfectly, like she'd been made to fill the hollow spaces I'd been carrying.

"Forty-eight hours," she whispered against my skin. "And then..."

"And then we fight." I pressed my lips to the top of her head. "Aegis deploys. Ellen takes her position. The Bloodmoon rises. And we hold the line for seventy-two hours."

"Three days." Her voice was so small.

"Seventy-two hours of hell."

"But we'll survive it." I tilted her chin up so she had to look at me. "All of us. Ellen will hold the shield. Cain will protect her. Eve and Hades will lead the fight against Darius. And I—" I traced the line of her jaw, "—will come back to you."

"And I'll be here," she said. "Waiting. Working. Doing everything I can from the labs to help."

Ajax stirred in my mind, content for the first time in years. *Mate safe. Mate ours. Protect.*

"He loves you already," I said. "Ajax. He's been... restless for so long. Lonely. But now..." I shook my head, struggling to find words for what I was feeling through the bond with my wolf. "Now he's settled. Because of you."

"Tell him..." She paused, a faint blush coloring her cheeks. "Tell him I love him too. Both of you." 1

The words hit me like a physical blow. "Thea—"

"I know it's fast," she said quickly. "I know we barely know each other. I know there's a war coming and everything is chaos and maybe I'm just caught up in the moment, but—"

I kissed her. Soft. Slow. Pouring everything I couldn't say into it.

When I pulled back, her eyes were bright with fresh tears.

"I love you too," I said simply. "I have since the moment you tried to kill me. Maybe even before that. And I'll love you after this war. And after the next one. And after everything."

She smiled—tremulous but real. "That's a long time, Beta."

"Not long enough." I pulled her closer. "Never long enough."

We lay there in the darkness, wrapped around each other, the bond humming between us like a song. Outside, the world was preparing for war. But here, in this moment, there was only us.

Eventually, her breathing evened out, deepening into sleep. But I stayed awake, memorizing the feel of her against me. The weight of her head on my chest. The warmth of her skin. The steady rhythm of her heartbeat.

Don't die, she'd said.

I wouldn't. I *couldn't*. Because she was waiting for me now.

And I'd fight through hell itself to get back to her.



Ajax rumbled in agreement, a promise and a vow.

Mate. Ours. Protect. Always.

Always.

I pressed one last kiss to her hair and let myself drift, holding tight to the lone flicker of light in my darkness.

Knowing that when I woke, the countdown would begin.

I woke up to the ringing of my comm, night had fallen and I could see the red blinking light of my comm through the pocket of my discarded pants.

I quietly retrieved it and answered. Hades's voice filtered through. "Cain has had Ellen positioned."

"Alright," the line died.

I turned to my mate, still peacefully sleeping. I memorises her face like there was a chance I would ever forget it. The high slope of her nose, it's bump. Her lashes, her pouty lips...

I kissed her, long and soft. She stirred against me, a soft moan escaping her but she didn't

494 Don't Die

wake.

I rose.

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