

Good Cop, Annoying Cop

I walked out of the bedroom the next day with a sigh. I was still imprisoned here.

I didn't know where my family was or if they would attempt to rescue me again. I was just here, trapped.

"Good morning!"

I spun around to find a strange man standing in the center of the room with a tray of food.

"Who are you?" I asked, my eyes darting around the room for possible weapons to protect myself.

"I'm Ashton," he said with a friendly smile. He set the tray down on the table. "I've brought your breakfast and some company if you'd like it."

"Oh," I hummed as I walked cautiously to the table, remembering how Xaden had mentioned him yesterday. "Thank you. But I don't need any company."

He sat in the chair opposite mine with a shrug and motioned for me to sit.

"This is a new sort of interrogation," I said as I dropped into the chair and picked up my fork. I took a scoop of scrambled eggs and a bite of bacon. "What are you supposed to be? The good cop?"

Ashton chuckled. "No interrogation. I just have the first shift this morning."

"First shift?"

"To guard you. Xaden only trusts a handful of us to keep watch over you. I'm Xaden's third in command in our battalion." He leaned forward conspiratorially. "And his favorite friend. Just don't tell Leo that."

"Leo?"

"Xaden's second. He'll be here at one to relieve me."

I took another bite of my breakfast as I silently surveyed the man before me. He was close to my age and handsome, with warm hazel eyes and dark chocolate hair. And he seemed comfortable, relaxed, even though his eyes were constantly aware of their surroundings as he randomly scanned the room every few moments.

"He seems to have quite a lot of faith in you to protect his prisoner," I said pointedly.

"And I in him." His response was short and curt, showing just how unwelcome it would be for me to question his loyalty. "But you aren't just any prisoner, are you?"

An uncomfortable silence fell between us, and I searched my mind for something to say until the door to the suite swung open and a tan, honey-blond man strolled in, his black tee shirt stretched across his chest.

"Good morning, Aria!" he bellowed, earning an eye roll from Ashton.

"Umm, hello." My gaze flitted to Ashton, who just shrugged.

"Your shift doesn't start 'til one. You're four hours early." Ashton turned in his seat as the man, who I now assumed was Leo, patted his shoulder.

"I thought we'd take this shift together," he grinned mischievously. "I wanted to get to know our new Luna."

"NOT," I shot out, "your Luna."

"If you say so," he smirked before dropping into the chair beside me. "So, Aria, tell us about you."

I narrowed my eyes at him and his bright blue eyes smiled back at me. "So it's nice-cop-annoying-cop then?"

Ashton snorted as he tried to hold back a laugh. "She thinks we're here to interrogate her."

Leo grinned wickedly. "Believe me, an interrogation with us would go very differently for you."

I looked him square in the eye. "I know. I received your pack's brand of interrogation when I got here."

Leo's face dropped and he shook his head. "No. I'm sorry for that. It's not how we do things. The alpha... he..."

"Are you telling me you don't serve your alpha?" I dropped my head to the side as I stared at him.

"I serve my alpha," he replied. "Xaden is my alpha."

"Xaden," I huffed. "He's the reason I'm trapped here to begin with."

"Yes, well," Ashton cut in, rubbing the back of his neck. "Xaden is... complicated."

"Complicated," I scoffed. I finished my food and leaned back in my chair. "He told you, didn't he... about us?"

The both of them nodded silently.

"Can't you talk to him? Convince him that our parting ways is the best for both of us?" I pleaded.

Leo sat up straighter. "No. Contrary to how you both believe, I think it's great he found you. I think you'll save us."

"Save you from what?"

Ashton nudged Leo and gave him a dark glare as he shook his head.

Ashton cleared his throat. "Nothing. Are you finished with your meal?"

I nodded and watched as he took the plate and left the suite, leaving me alone with Leo.

"So I can't count on you to help me out of here then?" I asked quietly.

"Nope," he shrugged. "But you can count on me as a friend." He nodded toward the door. "Ashton too."

"Why?"

"Because things are going to probably get worse before they get better."

"Not sure they can get any worse," I muttered.

"They can and they will," he said darkly, his eyes distant as if recalling a memory.

"Leo?"

"Hmm?" he hummed as his eyes met mine, the sadness in them gone like a flash.

"If I were to write a letter to my family..."

"It would not be private. I would have to read it, but yes, I would send one note out for you."

My heart jumped in my chest. "I'll be right back." I walked to the bedroom and pulled a piece of paper and a pen out of the desk in the corner.

Dad and Mom,

I'm okay. I know you're worried and I'm so sorry for everything I've put you through. That day when I was taken, I did it so Connor would be safe. I couldn't live if I'd lost another one of you. Please don't have them send anyone for me; I couldn't bear it if our people died in any attempt to rescue me. For now, I'm safe and as cared for as I can be in the circumstances.

I will see you soon.

I love you, Aria.

I stared down at the paper and smiled before folding it up and walking out of the bedroom toward Leo. I placed it in his hand nervously. "You're sure you can get it to them?"

"I will," he said firmly as he opened it and skimmed through it. He gave a curt nod before putting it in his back pocket.

"Thank you." I smiled up at him before dropping to the couch and patting the seat beside me. "I guess if you're going to be here all day, you might as well be comfortable."

He sat down and stared at the door for a moment before looking at me. "Ashton will be back in a minute. Then we can get to know each other."

"So this is an interrogation," I chuckled.

"No, this is us trying to get to know a potential new friend," he shrugged as he leaned back against the couch.

He sat in silence for a moment before giving an awkward cough. "And I'm sorry... about yesterday. I was on guard when the alpha slipped in. It's my fault he hurt you."

My hand absently moved to my neck, brushing along the bruises lightly.

"I brought snacks!" Ashton hollered as he opened the door. He met my eyes sheepishly as he set his armful of food on the table.

"Good!" Leo grinned. He stood and grabbed a bag of chips off the table before returning to his seat.

Ashton sat on the floor across from us and leaned back. "I'd take guard duty like this any day," he sighed.

"Crescent Moon's warriors really are as lazy as the rumors say, hmm?" I said with a smirk.

They both gawked at me, their mouths open in surprise.

"I find great offense to that statement," Leo said in mock offense.

"Here, here!" Ashton added. "Off with her head!"

Leo leaned forward with a sly grin. "What else do they say about us?"

I laughed and pushed him away. "Nothing good, if that's what you're wondering."

Ashton nodded in understanding. "We get that."

"Why are you trying so hard to take over the surrounding areas?" I asked curiously, knowing they probably wouldn't answer.

Leo shrugged. "Honestly, we don't know. Our alpha keeps his plans close to his chest. But our battalion doesn't take part in any of that."

"What does your battalion do?"

"Ha!" Leo barked. "Like I'll tell the enemy of our movements! Nice try!"

I shrugged innocently. "Hey, just because you aren't running an interrogation doesn't mean I can't."

Ashton and Leo both laughed loudly, their heads tipped back.

"She's going to give Xaden a run for his money," Ashton chuckled.

"I'd pay an obscene amount of money to see them go head to head in a battle of wills," Leo winked.

I gave them an unamused stare. "Xaden and I aren't going to be doing anything."

Leo wiped the grin off his face. "You have to at least give him a chance."

"I won't ever do that. Your pack has taken too much."

"But that wasn't Xaden," Ashton explained. "He has our battalion under strict orders to never cross the border or engage with your warriors unless in self-defense."

I shook my head. "I don't believe that. And even if I did, that's not enough. It doesn't fix enough."

"Then what will?" Leo pushed. "You keep saying you'll never forgive us for what our pack has done. It was all done at the command of our alpha. What can we do to fix it?"

"Why do you want to fix it? How could that even be a possibility?" I asked.

Ashton sat up slightly, his face serious. "Because at some point, an alliance with your pack might be the only thing that ensures both of our packs survive. You just might be the key to that alliance, Aria. Whether you like it or not."

I frowned at their words as I understood what they meant. I accepted Xaden as my mate, and the war might just end. I'd have to sacrifice my own happiness and future for that of my people. Sacrifice for the ones I love was nothing new to me.

They spent the entire day with me, both of them deciding to share their shifts. We watched movies, ate snacks, and they talked about life in their pack growing up with Xaden.

I knew they did it to try and endear me to him, but nothing would ever help him win me over.

In the evening, the three of us sat on the couch eating our dinner, laughing at something stupid Leo had said when the door slammed open and Xaden walked in, making each of us turn toward him.

My eyes widened as I saw his features darken the longer he stared at us.

"Where the hell have you two been all day?" he growled.

Leo slowly lifted his arm from where it rested on the back of the couch, and Ashton sat up from his spot on the floor. "Guarding Aria."

"It took both of you to do that?" he grumbled.

"She's a lot of work," Leo chuckled, and I elbowed him in the ribs.

"Get out."

Ashton and Leo stood from their seats and strolled past him, each one patting his shoulder as if he hadn't just growled at them.

"Leo?" I called out, looking past Xaden's broad shoulders to the door.

He waved my letter up in the air. "I got it."

I smiled at him as he left the room, that grin disappearing as I looked up at Xaden. I scowled at him as I stood from the couch and walked to the bedroom, giving him the cold shoulder.

"What was that?" he asked, his voice still rough.

"Nothing."

"Didn't look like nothing."

I glanced over my shoulder. "And what did it look like, alpha?"

He scoffed. "Are you... friends now? Did you have fun with them?"

I spun around to where he stood in the doorway. I frowned up at him, and he almost looked... jealous. "They aren't moody, pretentious bastards that lock up their mates as prisoners and kill her people. Of course I had fun with them. As much fun as a prisoner can possibly have."

"Then maybe you should stay in one of their rooms." He glared down at me, his chest almost pressing against mine.

"Don't mind if I do. I'd love to see more than just your stupid bedroom. Maybe we'll cuddle." I walked past him and made it to the doorway before I felt Xaden's hands on me.

I twisted out of his grasp and kicked away from him, sending him stumbling backward. He caught himself and launched toward me again, this time putting his whole weight behind it as he gripped me tightly and shoved me against the wall, pinning me in place.

Our chests heaved as our breaths collided. His honey-brown eyes flashed to black and back again as he looked down at me. "Why?" he growled.

"Why what?" I spat.

"Why what?" I spat.

"Why them? Why not me?" he bit out.

I could feel my heart pounding in my chest as I listened to his words. He wanted me to want him. And like me, he hated himself for that fact.

"They took the time to know me," I said quietly. "They spent the entire day making sure I was safe and happy and cared for."

"They had the luxury of time. I can't be here all day—that's why I assigned them to you. They're the only ones I trust."

"In your entire pack?" I asked, my brow furrowed. "Surely you trust your people."

"Not with you," he said quietly. "What did you give to Leo?" he asked, his grip softening slightly as he relaxed.

I stared at him, surprised at his confession. I realized he was waiting for my answer as the silence between us continued.

"A letter. For my family," I replied. "They're probably going crazy."