

Threat To My Pack

"What?" All thoughts cleared from my head at his words. My grandpa met with Xaden? Impossible.

"Why would he be meeting with you, the enemy?" Kyle scoffed as he shifted back, along with my mother and Connor.

"Because Crescent Moon Pack is not your enemy. Its alpha is," Xaden replied. "That day he died was the third time we would have met to talk about a secret alliance between our two packs."

My father frowned. "Why would he do such a thing?"

Xaden looked around and listened for a patrol before he spoke again. "I can't say much. But he and I were working to have your warriors join my battalion to infiltrate Crescent Moon and take my father and his council down. They... well, you can ask your daughter what they're like."

He motioned toward me and all eyes turned to me. I shrugged. "They're horrible," I said quietly.

My mother moved closer and leaned toward my father. "Zane, we should go before a patrol comes by. It's not safe out here. We can't risk losing her again."

My father nodded and looked to Xaden. "If what you said is true, let us take our daughter home and if you reach out, we will consider answering."

Xaden stepped forward. "That's not good enough!" he roared.

"You just threatened to kill my daughter! It's going to have to be," my father shot back.

"No! She has to return with me. If I lose her, he'll kill me and then my pack is doomed!"

"Your pack was doomed the moment your alpha chose power over his people," my mother yelled, surprising the group with her fury.

Xaden stepped forward, his foot skimming the edge of the border. I could see the wheels turning in his mind. There was no way he would let me go.

"You take my mate away from me and I will not be responsible for the destruction I bring down on your pack," Xaden hissed, his body tensing with anger.

I shut my eyes tightly and sighed, knowing my entire family was staring at me in shock. Why did he have to say that?

"I'm sorry, your what? Did you say mate? Did he just say mate?" Connor stammered.

"Reject him, now," my father demanded.

My eyes shot open and I looked from my father to my mother. My mom shifted anxiously, twisting her fingers. "What?" I asked.

"You heard me," my father replied.

"Don't you dare," Xaden growled, turning to me.

"Zane..." my mother said softly, placing a hand on his shoulder.

"Stay out of this, Ella," he grumbled.

I had been waiting for this moment, for the opportunity to reject him. I didn't want him, and he didn't want me. He was my enemy. And yet, I found myself hesitating.

Even if I wanted to reject him, I knew the moment those words came from my father's mouth that he'd made a mistake. By the look on his face, he knew it too.

"Excuse me?" my mother growled.

"Ella," my father sighed.

"Please, tell me, Zane. How did rejecting a mate work out for you? Hmm?"

I bit back a smile, and Kyle snorted from off to the side. Years ago, when my parents found each other, my dad rejected my mom. And then, when they met again years later, his wolf still recognized her as his mate, never letting the mate bond go, and he had to fight for her and fix the bond he had broken.

"It's the only way," my dad grumbled. "Now hurry, Emma. We don't have time for this."

"Maybe we should listen to what he has to say and then let them decide," my mother said firmly.

Xaden shifted nervously. "As much as I'd love to stay and chat, a patrol is on their way." His eyes shifted to mine, and I could feel the pleading in them. He reached out a hand to me. "Please, Emma."

I knew what he was asking. He was asking me to trust him, to sacrifice myself for my family. He was asking me to leave the ones I loved to help him save his people and mine. And in that moment, I realized that as much as I hated his father and his people, we needed each other.

I stared at his hand for a moment and then looked at my family. "L... I'm sorry."

I could see the pain in my mom's eyes and the fury rolling off my brothers. I leaned in and hugged my dad. "I promise, I'll be okay. But if Grandpa was meeting with him, he must have trusted him to end this conflict. I'm so tired of death." I turned to Connor. "I can't lose anyone else."

My family moved closer and gathered in a group hug that felt too final. I pulled away from them, my eyes glassy with tears as I crossed the border.

I placed my hand in Xaden's and waved goodbye to my family before allowing him to pull me back through the trees toward Crescent Moon Pack.

"I'm sorry, Emma," he said softly as we walked into the suite.

I walked through to the bedroom, ignoring his words as I made my way into the bathroom and closed the door. I absently turned on the shower and climbed in, letting the water soak my clothes and skin as I stood under the stream. Numb, I was completely numb.

I closed my eyes and pictured their faces, praying all this would end and I would see them again. And in that moment, I broke.

I cried every tear I held. I cried for the torture and the abuse and the confusion and the pain and the fear and the anger. I could feel my body shake as the sobs took control of me.

Then suddenly warm, strong arms surrounded me and I knew who it was. I didn't pull back as he stood in the water beside me, his own clothes soaked as he held me in his arms. He stood there as I cried into his chest, not saying a word as I let out every tear inside me.

When the tears finally stopped and the exhaustion from the day caught up with me, he scooped me into his arms and carried me into the room. I sat on the edge of the bed, my clothes and hair dripping wet as I stared at the floor. He returned to me and knelt down beside me.

"Emma," he said quietly, his voice unusually gentle. "I have to take off your wet clothes." He stood and pulled off the thin cotton t-shirt that stuck to my skin and replaced it with one of his large dry tees. Then he knelt down again and shimmied off my wet shorts before pushing me down and tucking me into the bed.

I pulled the blankets up to my chin and rolled over.

A few minutes later, after changing his own wet clothes, I felt the bed dip as Xaden climbed in. A moment of silence followed, and I opened my eyes to find him staring at me.

"I know you don't want to be here. I know you don't want me. But I think we are meant to stop all of this violence. I need your help, Emma. I promise I will keep you safe, and when it's all over, if you want to leave, I won't stop you."

Without thinking, I reached up and let my fingers brush against his cheek. A slight smile curled at the corners of my mouth before I rolled over and fell asleep, hoping he would keep his word.

