

It Will All Change

My alarm went off at exactly five in the morning. My eyes snapped open, and a mixture of excitement and anxiety surged through me.

My heart pounded in my chest as I sat up in bed. Today—the day had finally come. I would see my family again.

I was broken from my thoughts when Xaden's warm hand reached over and gripped my waist gently. I turned to face him with a smile. "It's time," I whispered before placing a soft kiss on his forehead.

He sighed sleepily and pulled my arm, forcing me back into the bed. He wrapped his arms around me and nuzzled his face in my hair. "Just one more minute like this," he whispered.

I closed my eyes and let myself breathe in his scent for a moment before pulling away slightly. "We need to be ready."

"It will all change after today," he muttered, pulling me in tighter.

"After today, your people and my people will be safe," I replied quietly. "It's good change."

"People will be hurt as well," he grumbled.

I sighed, knowing he was right. My heart ached at the thought of any of the people I loved being harmed. But I also knew they had a better chance at safety with Alpha Benedict gone.

"Let's go," I whispered as I placed a kiss against his lips and pushed up out of the bed.

He groaned before following me out of the bed.

Just before dawn, I stood in our suite beside Leo and Ashton, the two of them muttering quietly to each other as they prepared themselves for battle.

"Ready?" Xaden asked as he stepped out of the bedroom.

"Ready," his two friends replied in unison. They each hugged their alpha before listening to their orders and leaving the room.

Xaden approached me slowly and wound his arms around my waist. I pressed my hands against his

chest, absorbing the warmth of his body. He stared down into my eyes, his jaw flexing as he tried to find the words he wanted to say. "Are you ready?" he asked quietly.

I nodded. "I'm ready."

He cupped my face in his hands and placed a gentle kiss on my lips. "Just know, Emma," he whispered, "no matter what happens today, I love you."

My breath caught in my chest at his quiet declaration. I could feel my heart swell inside me, and tears grew in my eyes. "Xaden," I whispered back. "I will love you forever."

He kissed me harder then, his lips crushing against mine as if this would be the last time his mouth would taste mine.

He pulled back slowly and took my hand in his as he led me out the door and toward the fight that would soon begin.

As we waited for the signal, I stood beside Xaden, hidden just inside the tree line. I glanced up at him, frowning as I realized he was staring at me.

"What?" I muttered.

He brushed a finger against my neck. "When this is all over, this spot right here will hold my mark."

I scoffed. "That's what you chose to think about right now?"

"I hate that I can't mark you yet," he shrugged, his eyes dark.

"We're about to head off to war," I laughed.

"All the more important," he winked before pressing a quick kiss to my shoulder.

I shook my head at him, biting back the grin that tried to spread on my face.

I felt it the moment Green Ridge Pack crossed the border. It was as if the world tilted amid the chaos that quickly followed.

I could hear the shouts and calls for help as the Crescent Moon patrols were easily overwhelmed and my people pushed through toward the pack house of their enemy.

I beamed with pride as I saw my father and brother leading the pack that burst through the trees.

"Hey there, Ems!" Connor called through the mind link as they ran past.

I looked up at Xaden with a wild grin and bolted into a run, sprinting seamlessly into my tan wolf.

I listened to the howls that filled the air, raising the alarm to the pack. I watched as Green Ridge warriors were met by Crescent Moon in the center of the field beside the pack house.

In a clash of fur and fangs, the two packs collided in battle. I could hear the snarls and whines coming from both sides as warriors were injured or called for help. I could smell the blood being spilled.

I twisted around and fought beside Xaden as we made our way back toward the pack house.

Xaden had instructed his men not to kill, just to injure. I knew he would never live with himself if any of his own people were killed by his insurrection.

"Emmal!"

I spun around to find my father fighting behind me. "Dad!"

"You're okay?" he asked through the bond, his wolf's eyes scanning me intensely.

"More than okay," I replied.

His eyes narrowed at my words before they softened and he let out a sigh. "You're not coming home, are you?"

I shook my head. "No... I'm not."

"Your mom was right," he muttered.

"She always is," I laughed.

"Don't tell her that," he replied before turning back to the fight. "You keep yourself safe, okay? We'll end this fight quickly and head home. Where's Xaden?"

I turned around and realized with a gasp that he was gone.

"He... he was just here..."

In my distraction, I left myself wide open and grumbled angrily when a wolf barreled into me. I rolled

over and caught my footing in time to resist his second attack. I lunged forward and too easily disabled him before moving forward through the fight.

I ran through the chaos until I was beside Connor, and Aria yipped happily at our brother.

"Good to see ya, little sis," he bellowed as he knocked another wolf unconscious.

"How you feeling?" I asked as Aria tore her claws through another's hind leg.

"Back to normal," he said evenly. He stopped and turned to me, his wolf rubbing his head on Aria's. "You shouldn't have done what you did. You shouldn't have had to save me."

I sighed, knowing he still felt guilty for everything. "It all worked out, Connor. And I would have done the same for any of you. I love you all too much."

"I know," he said before running back into the fray.

I searched around the field for Xaden and frowned when I was still unable to catch a glimpse of him.

"Maybe he ran up to the house," I muttered, realizing I didn't see Alpha Benedict either.

I began moving toward the pack house, suddenly anxious to find my mate when a figure moved through the shadows beside the house. I watched as the short, round man peeked around a corner, obviously trying to hide from the fight.

"Eli..." I growled, my fury burning inside me at the sight of that monster. "For Grandpa... he's ours!" I bellowed to Aria. She snarled in agreement as she sprinted toward him.

He turned and let out a yelp just as Aria tackled him to the ground.

Without mercy, she bit and tore into his skin, refusing to spare him even the briefest moment to shift into his wolf. He would not have the honor of dying well. I tuned out his screams as Aria ripped muscle from bone. When the torturous yells finally stopped, Aria stepped back, her muzzle dripping with blood and sinew as she stared down at the massacred man on the ground. He was no longer recognizable, his body torn to ribbons.

And I felt no remorse.

I'd never once killed for revenge, but this kill—it was for me and it was for my grandfather. This monster would not darken another day in this world.

Kai stalked slowly through the pack house, following my father's scent until it led us out the back.

He stood in silence, his back to me as he stared out at the trees.

Kai let out a low growl.

"I should have known it was you," my father replied, his voice even and cold. "You're too soft. I went too easy on you."

"Soft?" I scoffed. "You haven't been soft on me a day in my life."

He clasped his hands behind his back as he turned slowly to face me. "You've betrayed your own people. For what? A hot piece of ass?"

Kai snarled, his teeth bared at the insult leveled at our mate.

"This was a long time coming," I replied through the mind link.

My father shook his head. "After everything I've done for you, for our people." His eyes darkened with fury, and he surged forward, shifting violently into his large salt-and-pepper gray wolf. He was big, but I was bigger.

"I raised you to be a warrior, a true alpha. Not this sniveling pup that follows after the teat."

"You didn't raise me. You created me," I replied darkly. "You broke me over and over until I became this. You truly think after everything that I would hold any sort of loyalty to you?" I scoffed.

"I am your alpha!" he roared.

"You are not my alpha," I ground out. "You are just the asshole that kept my seat warm."

"Is that a challenge?" he growled.

"It is," I shot back. "I challenge you, Alpha. For me, for Ginger, for every single person you've killed mercilessly to get to where you are."

"You ungrateful little—"

I didn't let him finish as I launched myself forward. We collided in a heap of teeth and claws, both of us scratching and biting for purchase as we rolled in the dirt. Kai let out a whine as my father's claws dug into our skins. I could feel the sting of the scratches, and I knew there were deep ones.

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I rolled over and lunged toward him, overpowering him in his surprise and locking my jaws around his leg. He let out a yelp and struggled out of my grasp, limping away slowly as blood trailed behind him.

I could see his wolf's eyes widen in shock as I slammed him into the ground. I stood above him, my claws digging into him as I forced him to submit.

"Submit," I growled.

"You... how?" he asked, his voice raspy.

"Do you really think you've beaten me all these years because you're stronger?" I hissed. "I let you win. I let you think you broke me. I've been stronger and faster for years."

"You can't do this..." he growled, struggling under my grasp. "I am the Alpha! I will—"

"I am the Alpha!" I snapped. "I will care for our people and protect them, even if it is from you! You have forgotten your duty and put all of us in harm's way just to get a few more acres! When will enough be enough, Father?!"

"It will never be enough!" he boomed.

"And that is why you have lost," I replied, digging my claws deeper into his flesh. "You made a mistake the day you beat that girl. You should have left her alone."

My father looked up at me with confusion. "No... she can't be..."

"My mate," I said coldly, my empty facade I'd always held in his presence coming back.

"Impossible," he growled.

"Don't you think our scents mingle nicely?" I grinned darkly.

"What are you going to do with me?" he spat.

"That's entirely up to you," I replied. I released him slowly and stood over him. "Take him away and lock him up."

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I turned and began walking away, sighing as I heard him struggle and break free from the warriors. He sprinted toward me with a snarl, and I shifted back quickly, spinning around instantly to meet him.

In a moment, my teeth found their hold and I bit down with a twist, snapping his neck.

He fell to the ground, his lifeless body unmoving. The world seemed to still as I realized I had done it. I had killed my father.

It was over.

I winced as I held my hand to my ribs, knowing they would be healed before I'd even find bandages to wrap them—and limped through the house and out to the front porch.

I watched as Green Ridge Pack overpowered my people and surrounded them, pushing them slowly toward the pack house.

For a moment I panicked, realizing I had lost sight of Emma. I turned to the side and smiled as I caught sight of her—with barely a scratch.

She was incredible.