

Questioning Her

I stormed into my suite and slammed my fist into the wall, cursing loudly at the idea of my mate sitting in a cell in the basement instead of lying in my bed. But what was I to do? She was the enemy.

She would ruin all of the plans I had worked so hard to put into motion. I shook my head. I should have let her reject me. Scratch that, I should have rejected her myself.

I dropped to the couch, my head resting in my hands as I tried to gather a sliver of control. "We shouldn't have even taken her! What were we thinking?" I roared. "And once we did, what else were we to do?" I grumbled.

"Father would have never let her walk around free in this pack. At least in the cells, she's safe... and far away from me." *She smells nice...* I rolled my eyes. *"That's not the only thing that is important here."* Leave it to a wolf to only focus on how she smelled.

I took a deep breath as my mind instantly went to sitting above her in the forest, her scent of citrus and vanilla filling my senses. It had been intoxicating. I shook the thoughts away. "We have plans. Plans that she will completely ruin."

Kai grumbled before finally leaving me in silence. I leaned back on the couch and ran my hand through my dark hair. "I don't know what to do." I slapped my thighs and stood from my seat, leaving my suite behind as I went in search of my father.

I walked into his office, stopping just inside the doorway as I watched him speaking with two of the pack's captains and his Beta, Eli. I never liked Eli. He always gave me the creeps, his beady little eyes always watching and roaming.

"Alpha," I said, bowing my head. My father looked at me with a scowl, clearly not amused with my interrupting his meeting. He waved the captains away dismissively and dropped into his chair.

"I saw the girl you brought in from the border," he said coldly. I nodded. "And?"

"I questioned her, but she seemed a bit... upset. So I will let her be until tomorrow. Eli and I will go in and question her." I could feel my pulse rising. What if she mentioned me? What if she let slip that she was my mate? My father would kill her immediately.

Oh, NOW you're worried about her? Kia grumbled in the corners of my mind. "Just question her?" I asked. My father gave me a sideways stare. "Of course. We are not barbarians."

I gave a stiff smile and leaned back in my seat, knowing exactly what type of man my father was and also knowing I couldn't push the matter further. "Whatever will help our pack finally force those Green Ridge dogs to submit," I said darkly.

"Exactly," my father grinned. "What did you need?" I stood from my seat with a shrug. "I was going to give my report on what happened at the border."

"That alpha scum and his little warrior woman slaughtered four of our warriors," my father growled. "And yet they do nothing. I thought for sure when we killed alpha Daniel last week they would finally make a move. But nothing."

"Provoking them doesn't seem to work," I muttered. "I am hoping the girl will enlighten us on the inner workings of the pack."

"Smart," I nodded as I walked to the door. "I expect after a few days alone in a cell without any meals, she will sing like a canary." I didn't see the sly look Eli gave my father as I left the room.

Two days later, I walked through the pack house and outside to the training fields. I could feel Kai pushing at me, begging to be set free. At least he wasn't on his usual string of begging to go see the girl. We had been on edge since the moment we found her at the boundary.

I shook the thoughts of her from my mind. I didn't want to think of her or her beautiful eyes. I didn't want to think of how she smelled or the feel of her skin against mine.

"Xaden!" the head warrior bellowed from across the field. "Come to train with your men?" "Don't I always?" I smirked as I broke into a sprint and let Kai take control. He bolted into the group of waiting warriors, earning excited howls from our men.

At the end of training, a handful of our men followed me to the bench in the shade. I shifted back and wiped the sweat from my face with my shirt. "I don't know why you always go easy on them," my second in command, Leo, chuckled as he dropped to the seat next to mine.

He grinned as a group of women passed by us, ogling his tan shirtless form. He ran a hand through his dirty blonde hair and gave one of them a wink. "It's frowned upon to kill members of the pack," I shrugged, looking out at the field.

"Doesn't stop your dad, does it?" my third, Ashton, muttered as he sat on my other side. He leaned forward and rested his elbows on his knees, his dark chocolate brown hair falling into his face slightly, his eyes scanning the area as if he wanted to be certain he covered his surroundings.

his eyes never staying in one spot as he constantly observed his surroundings.

I lowered my head. "I know." "How soon?" Leo asked. "Not here," I replied sharply, turning to Ashton. "The borders?"

"Fine. I've relayed to our men that they are not to engage with the surrounding packs. If attacks happen, it's not on our watch." "Good." I watched as the head warrior approached us, ending our conversation before he overheard.

"Xaden, I heard you had a little skirmish at the border a few days ago." I stood from my seat, my tall frame towering over the captain by at least half a foot. "Are you questioning my leadership, Captain?"

"Not at all," he said, smiling diplomatically. "Just wondering how four of our warriors could have died on your watch." Leo leaned back against the bench casually, his arm draping over the bench behind me. "Those four warriors crossed the boundary unprovoked. A mistake none of the warriors in our battalion would ever dare to make. You were lucky Alpha Xaden was there to tie things up for you."

Ashton sighed and picked at his nails behind me. "Perhaps if our future alpha was given command over all of the pack's battalions, we would not have even lost those four warriors." The captain's eyes darkened and a growl escaped his lips. "Our warriors are the best there are."

"If you say so," Leo shrugged. The captain looked up into my eyes, his hardened gaze softening with a measure of fear as he looked into my glare. "Yes, I was lucky to have gotten there in time to take one of them captive." I gave a dismissive nod. "You should tend to your duties. We'd hate for more of your men to disappear. It seems to happen so often."

I knew my words had struck their mark when the captain's jaw clenched tightly, clearly biting back the urge to challenge his future alpha. I watched as he walked away before turning back to the bench where Ashton and Leo lounged in the shade. "He's going to report that back to the alpha."

"Let him," Ashton shrugged. I shook my head at them. They didn't understand what my father was truly capable of. I wasn't sure I even understood.

"Xaden!" My face jerked around to find one of my warriors running toward us. "What is it?"

"This was just dropped off at the border. I thought you should see it first... before..." he trailed off, fear making him unable to finish his words. I nodded as I opened it. "You did the right thing. Leave us."

I read the note and shook my head. "They've demanded we give back the girl." "Took them long enough," Ashton muttered. "I've been watching the border for days and all they've done is triple their patrols. No sign of a mounting attack or negotiations... nothing."

"I have a feeling they were waiting for us to make the first move," I replied, handing the note to Leo. "They must be getting anxious if they've decided to break their silence." Leo skimmed over it, a scowl setting on his features. "I wonder why the girl is so important to them."

"I have a feeling she is one of their alpha son's... playthings." Leo and Ashton both perked up at that. Leo scoffed. "They wouldn't make such a fuss over a mistress. If she was his mate, that would be different. But a fling?"

"Maybe their pack is different. Maybe they actually care for their people," Ashton shrugged. "She's definitely not his mate..." I muttered, earning a warning growl from Kai. "We should have questioned her before we handed her off to the alpha," Ashton continued, forever vigilant in his desire for information.

"I know. But I kind of... panicked," I grumbled as I ran a hand through my hair and stood from the bench. "You never panic." Leo straightened and I knew he would push the matter further. "What is going on, Xaden?"

"L... I can't say." "Spit it out," Leo shot back. "No."

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I turned to find Ashton giving Leo a warning glare, and I rolled my eyes. If I knew Ashton, he already knew my secret. I waved my hand at him, and he leaned closer to Leo, whispering in his ear.

"SHE'S WHAT?!"

"Shut up, Leo," I ground out.

"You mean to tell me that girl in there is your..." he leaned closer, his voice merely a whisper, "...mate?"

"Yes."

"And you let her be taken?"

"I didn't know what to do!" I spat. "Was I supposed to just let her go back to her pack? I'd never see her again!"

"And so you thought the best option was to bring her here as a prisoner?" Leo looked around the empty field before he stepped closer. "Xaden, you know we are your best friends and will always support you but... you're an idiot!"

Ashton coughed as he choked on a laugh.

"I'm serious," Leo continued. "You need to go get her out of that cell. Tell your father. Surely he won't..."

"Kill her?" I growled. "That's exactly what he'll do. You know he would never allow a female from Green Ridge to be our Luna. He would rather kill her and choose a mate for me than allow that. He did it for Ginger; he'll do it for me."

Ashton and Leo both lowered their eyes sadly as their thoughts were brought back to my sister.

I pinched the bridge of my nose as I realized what I'd said. "I'm... I'm sorry, Ashton. I know you—"

"Forget it," Ashton said, his features dark. I knew he had loved my sister, that he would have done anything for her. But if my father had known how he cared for her, he would have killed Ashton. The day my father had killed her fated mate and sold her to a neighboring alpha as a sign of goodwill was the day I knew just how far my father would go in his designs.

I turned to the pack house sitting atop the small hill. "Let's take this note to my father. There's nothing on here that would betray us. And after we meet with him, we will figure out how to move forward."

It had been five days since I had brought that girl from the border.

I knew my father hadn't gotten any information from her. I could see his frustration growing each day she didn't give him what he wanted.

Once again, my thoughts turned to her. The feel of her skin against mine, the smell of her. I could feel my mind wandering how she tasted and how she would feel in my arms. I growled and shook the thoughts away with a growl.

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I walked past my father's office, past mine, and toward the place where the guards should have been standing. "Where are they?" I muttered, wondering what might make them leave their post.

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I continued toward the door at the end of the hall that led to the cells below and stopped. "What am I doing?" I growled before turning back.

I made it halfway back down the corridor before turning back again. I stared at the door, the longing inside me growing to new heights as I thought of what lay just beyond it. I had waited years for my mate, split between hoping I'd find her and she would be my salvation—and hoping I'd never find her so she might never have to know the darkness like I did.

With one final jolt of determination, I walked to the door and tore it open. I walked down the stairs, curious to find all of the guards still missing.

I flinched as I smelled the coppery tang of blood.

"No..." I whispered, my wolf panicking alongside me as I wrenched the cell door open.

I saw her sprawled across the bed, her body bloody and beaten. Her skin was covered in gashes and bruises. I could hear the pained, labored breaths she took in and the soft whimpering every time she exhaled.

I could feel Kai pushing forward as my fury grew. I could feel the anger burning inside me at the sight of my mate lying on the cot, broken.

What had I done?
