

His Hand Gripped My Throat

"There you are."

I looked up from my place on the bed to find Alpha Benedict standing in the doorway. I swallowed nervously, my eyes darting around the room.

"I don't think you're supposed to be in here. Xaden, he—"

"I am alpha," he growled. "I can go wherever I wish."

He stepped into the room, and I could feel my whole body jolt into awareness.

"I am growing impatient. Have you decided to finally open your mouth yet?"

I shook my head and stood slowly from the bed, inching my way across the room as far as I could get from him.

He picked at his nails for a moment, acting innocent enough for me to know he had ulterior motives.

"I thought you'd like to know that your pack just led an attack on my border moments ago. They failed, of course, and at such a great cost."

I could feel my heart stop and my mouth go dry at his words. Someone had been hurt. "They won't come for me."

"Why else would they attack unprovoked? Unless my son really did manage to kill that idiot alpha's son and they've come for retribution, the only reason they would come across our border is for you, my dear."

I swallowed nervously, knowing he was right. And I prayed in this instance that it really was for me and not because I had failed and Connor was dead.

"Anyway, they learned their lesson and lost two of their little warriors." His eyes flashed to mine, and his voice lowered to almost a growl. "Tell me what I wish to know, and no more of your people will suffer."

"No..." I whispered.

He rushed forward and grabbed me, forcing a gasp from my mouth as his hand gripped my throat

tightly. He leaned forward and inhaled. "Your scents are mingled nicely. I see you are enjoying his company. This ridiculous situation may prove useful after all." He let out a dark chuckle.

I pushed away from him in disgust, whimpering as he gripped my throat tighter and lifted me off the ground.

"Tell me what I want to know, or I'll kill you and your family, even Xaden if I have to, since you seem to enjoy him so much."

I shook my head as tears flowed down my cheeks. I scratched at him, my lungs begging for breath.

"Father, what an unexpected surprise to find you in my rooms."

I knew my eyes held a mixture of fear and relief as they met Xaden's cool gaze. My hands still gripped the alpha's hand, letting go as he slowly lowered me to the ground and released me.

I dropped to the ground and coughed loudly, my throat and lungs burning and desperate for air.

"Xaden, my boy," Benedict said as he turned away from me to face his son. "You've been hiding this girl away for a week. I was beginning to wonder if she was still here."

"Of course she is," he replied stiffly. He gave his father a conspiratorial look, "And she is under my protection, Father."

"Of course, of course. We were just having a little talk, she and I."

"And what did you talk about?" he asked slowly, his mouth curling up into a dark smirk.

"Not much, I'm afraid." He turned back to me with a glare. "You might not be willing to open your mouth, but I see you have opened your legs. That's a start."

I glanced to Xaden and could see his whole body tighten as if he had to hold himself back. As quickly as it happened, it was gone and his face was back to indifferent, his eyes staying glued to his father.

"Now, now, Father. That's no way to speak to our friend."

"Right," he chuckled. He slapped his son on the shoulder, offering a smug grin as he left the room. "I'll leave you to it."

He turned back to me with a scowl, "Think about what I said, girl."

The moment the outside door to the suite clicked shut, Xaden was beside me on the floor.

"Are you okay? Did he hurt you?"

I pushed away from him, hot angry tears still falling down my cheeks. "Leave me alone," I coughed.

"Aria, please. Tell me you're okay." Although his words were pleading, his voice was dark and filled with unbridled fury. I looked up at him and could see him barely staying in control.

"Did you know?" I whispered.

He lowered his head slightly as if defeated. "I only just returned from the border. I was too late, I'm sorry—"

I pushed away from him weakly as tears filled my eyes. "Two of them killed for me? L... I can't bear it... this can't..."

Before I could object, he scooped me up into his arms and carried me to the bed. He set me down gently and knelt before me on the floor, his hands brushing my neck softly as he inspected the red marks left from his father's hands.

"I'm sorry. I didn't think he would ever come in here. Where were Ashton and Leo?"

"Who?" I asked, my voice a little hoarse as I wiped the tears from my cheeks.

He shook his head. "Your guards. They should have been here."

"I'm okay," I said quietly.

"No, you're not," he growled. And as if something came to him, his whole body tightened and his face jerked up to mine. His hands gripped my knees tightly as he leaned forward. "Does he know? Did you tell him?"

"Tell him what?"

"Did you tell him we're mates? Aria, did you tell him?!"

And in that moment, I realized he was ashamed of me, and I hated how much that hurt. I shook my head. "No, I didn't tell him."

He sighed in relief and ran a calming hand through his hair before looking back up at me. "What did he want?"

"The same thing he always wanted."

Xaden handed me the glass of water on the nightstand and watched as I drank. "It won't happen again, I swear it."

"It will. He wants what I know. But I'm not going to betray my people, no matter what you do."

"I'm not asking you to," I replied.

"He thinks we're sleeping together."

"We are."

I looked down at him with a furrowed brow. "You know what I mean."

He offered a guilty smile in return, making his handsome face seem less angry and dark, almost mischievous. "If he thinks that, he will back off. He will think I'm getting somewhere with you and leave you alone. He's not a patient man. This was him telling me to hurry up. He came here to threaten me through you."

"I see," I said quietly. I looked away from him, suddenly unable to look into his eyes.

He stood from the floor and took a step back. "I will let you get some rest. I need to do something."

Twenty minutes later, I heard voices in the hall outside. I stood beside the door and listened as the same three men talked in heated voices.

"Where the hell were you? He was in this suite!" Xaden hissed.

"Crap."

"It was my shift, Xaden. I take full responsibility."

"Where were you?"

"I should have known something was up. A guard called me out into the hall for something, and I left her. It was only for like five minutes. I had no idea he slipped in."

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"Five minutes was enough!"

"I'm sorry..."

I could hear Xaden groan. "We can't let things like this happen. He can't get to her. He'll..."

"We know."

I backed away, realizing where his fear had come from earlier. He wasn't ashamed that I was his mate. He was afraid that I was his mate. He was terrified that his father might find out. But why?