

## 20 | Benefit Of The Doubt

### ONYX

The silence in the room became heavy as every single person was gnawing at us. If the earth could break underneath me now and suck me into the pits of hell, I would gladly take that option. Anything was better than this.

I tried to unclench my arms, but it wasn't working. My nails were practically piercing Ruhn's back in a grip of death. My panicked gaze locked with his garnet eyes, and we kept staring at each other like that for a few good moments.

"Onyx Tynan!" Jessica yelled at me, fisting her hands. "Are you drunk again?"

*Ouch. That hurt.*

"Sorry," I muttered, going through the struggle of my life as the wolf kept pushing me closer and closer to the lycan. It started

to hurt me physically at some point, and a little silent whimper escaped me. "I am not —"

"Don't pay us any attention!" Ruhn cast his heavy gaze on Jessica, and she closed her mouth, although it looked like she had a lot to say. "Onyx has these... episodes." His hands shamelessly slid over my thighs, back, and waist, grasping me and pressing me tighter against his chest. "When it happens, it's best to wait it out. Right, Onyx?"

I couldn't find the strength to say anything and only gave him a withering glance. That ... pr\*ck!

"Is she crazy then?" Jessica sneered, folding her hands over her chest and then glanced at her friends in an "I told you" manner. I was kind of starting to understand why Onyx was a villain. Her life just called to kill some people.

"No," Ruhn answered nonchalantly, his

fingers drawing circles on the bare skin of my shoulder. "Far from it."

Our eyes locked, and I noticed how his lips curled into a smirk. For the first time since I met him in this world, it looked like he was... enjoying himself.

The wolf inside of me growled angrily and forced my nails to dig deeper into the prince's flesh. I felt how something was changing, and Ruhn's garnet eyes darkened, confirming my wildest suspicions. I just pierced him with my wolf's claws. Deep. So deep that I could feel warm liquid on my fingertips now.

I had to give it to him. He didn't even flinch as I tried to get my claws out, probably only making it worse.

Shoot! I was going to pay for this, and it was shocking that he didn't tear me to pieces yet, considering his temperament.

I looked at him apologetically, with a mixture of terror and desperation, while my

wolf was cackling in my head. I knew very well that hurting an Alpha, especially a Lycan Prince, was punishable. Usually by death, and that was something I would really prefer to avoid at all costs.

But it was too late, unfortunately.

Ruhn leaned towards me so that his lips brushed softly over my ear, eliciting a rush of goosebumps. "Just so that you know, I am considering this foreplay," his voice was barely a whisper, so I was the only one who heard him, and my breathing hitched as soon as the words registered.

*What did he just say?*

*Why? How? Didn't he hate me?*

"Everyone out!" Ruhn growled, and people started leaving the tent in a hurry. Kalani gave me a strange look, and so did Enzo, while Jessica was the last one to leave.

She stopped on the platform's edge and glared at me. "Didn't you hear the Alpha,

Onyx?"

I did. And I wish I could leave too, but—

"Onyx stays," Ruhn finally spared her a glance. "And, please, put all the curtains down before you disappear. I want some privacy."

Those words made Jessica pale at first, but by the last piece of sheer fabric, she was already of a proper crimson colour from all the anger that she couldn't hide.

I did not know what Ruhn was going to do. My claws were still stuck in him, and there was no way to retract them. This time my wolf did manage to set me up! And it wasn't a good sign that we were alone now. Smart Ruhn probably wanted fewer witnesses of my murder.

However, despite everything, he still did not move. The lycan prince was carefully studying my face, and I tried to take my emotions under control.

"It's not what it looks like," I blurted out the first thing that came to my mind. It was a stupid explanation, but what else could I have said in the given situation?

"It looks like your wolf is out of control," Ruhn cut me off.

*O-kay, it was exactly what he thought.*

He stood up with me still in his hands, then walked towards the table and placed me on top of it with my claws still in his back.

I did not expect him to be this discerning. If anything, the Ruhn from the book was anything but. Melody had to explain to him a lot about how the world worked. Especially human emotions and interactions. However, this was a wolf thing. And he was an expert there. This may be why he guessed it correctly.

"So, what now?" I swallowed uncomfortably, looking away to avoid his gaze. "Are you going to kill me?"

A growl left his chest, and I started trembling uncontrollably. This was definitely it!

Filin flew into the room, flapping his wings loudly. He knocked down a vase, and pieces of glass were now scattered over the floor. This was a nice distraction, and if I could run, I so would right now, but unfortunately, I still couldn't separate myself from the prince. I was stuck.

"Order him to be quiet, or I will take care of it for you. The cooks are about to start the barbeque anyway," the lycan snarled, and I felt sorry for the little white owl.

And apparently, so did he because he stormed out of the tent as rapidly as he entered it, leaving me alone with the one who was destined to kill me.

Coward!

I couldn't believe I was worried about him just a few seconds ago!

"So, Onyx, how about at least a word of truth this time?" Ruhn offered, taking my chin in his large palm and making me look at him as my heart raced and adrenaline rushed through my veins. "What are you playing into? Tell me honestly."

"What's the point?" I arched my eyebrows at him super daringly for someone who held him pierced with deadly claws. But it looked like Ruhn was game as he tilted his head with a curious glint in his eyes. "If I tell you everything, will you even believe me?"

"You attacked a member of the Royal Family, I covered for you, and you are still alive," he reminded me. "I think I deserve the benefit of the doubt. I can—"

"A benefit of the doubt?" A nervous laugh escaped me. "You must be kidding me! You hate me! You always did! And frankly speaking, you would be the last man I would come to for help."

Finally, Ruhn's lips parted in slight surprise.

The lycan did not like my response. It was clear from the way he furrowed his brows at me, and I thought that maybe I slightly overdid it this time. But this was me. I always said the worst thing at the worst time.

"But you believe that Zion would help you?" Ruhn gritted his teeth. "Do you know what he is? Are you dumb?"

"Are you?" I must have lost the last bits of my brain if I had said that out loud. He did not expect that either, judging by how long his face suddenly became.

"You never dared speak to me this way," he muttered, and I rolled my eyes.

"Well, maybe I should have done this years ago instead of wasting them on running after you. You obviously enjoy this more!"

"And now you're done running?" He asked in a slightly different tone.

"Definitely!" I snapped, tired of pretending. "

I'm shocked I lasted that long in the first place. Wasting so much time on someone who never wanted anything to do with me is ridiculous! Not to mention that you aren't exactly a ray of sunshine, are you?"

Memories flushed my mind. They weren't mine, but I could feel the pain they evoked in the wolf hidden inside me. First, there was little Onyx with two long dark ponytails, making an elaborate origami wolf according to instructions from a book again and again until she got a perfect result, only to present it to the grumpy little prince, who threw it on the ground and stepped on it. Then there was a slightly older Onyx, not even a teen yet, who brought Ruhn a birthday present to a party at the palace. It had taken her weeks to choose the gift, and she had added a letter confessing her feelings to him because she couldn't hold her feelings back anymore... because she hoped... He did not even look at it on the day, ordering his Beta to add it to the pile and then did not say a word to her during the whole day. However,

within a week of the party, the whole royal school somehow knew the contents of the letter, and she became the laughingstock for everyone. Then there was a teen Onyx, who got bold at some palace event and invited Ruhn to dance. Their fathers were near, and the prince accepted her invitation. It was the happiest moment of her life, and she smiled for the rest of the evening, but at the afterparty without the parents, she found Ruhn kissing another girl. Moreover, it was one of her friends. He noticed her, and she knew that he was drunk, but it did not make her feel better. He took her friend's hand and led her upstairs while the blonde threw a superior look at her. In the morning, the whole class discussed how that girl lost her virginity to the Crown Prince. This was the first time when Onyx felt that what her father had taught her for so many years could be useful...

"Make him hurt!" the wolf's voice sounded, and I realised that the claws in Ruhn's back weren't there to punish me. At least, not

only me. They were for Ruhn, who hurt the real Onyx so many times in the past. However, even those visions did not make me hate him enough. Unrequited love is sad, but it wasn't like he absolutely had to reciprocate Onyx's feelings. Although, he could have handled it so much better.

Then again, it was probably my fault partially for writing him this way. His childhood was far from perfect, and there wasn't anyone he could trust for quite a while. Not to mention the dead mother, absent father, many stepmothers and zero role models. Just why did I have to do all this to him?

"You are looking for excuses!" the wolf hissed and deepened the claws into his flesh. This time even I could tell that Ruhn was in pain.

I gasped as he arched his back, and he pulled me closer, digging his face into the crook of my neck.

"I am sorry!" I squeaked. "I didn't—"

"I know," he groaned, and for some reason, I felt better that at least he was not accusing me of anything now. This could have been the death of me, but he... he wasn't calling for help, and he was totally taking one for the team.

"I don't know what to do," I confessed as his arms wrapped tighter around me. "I—"

"I will help," he promised, and for some reason, I felt relieved. Would he really? Was it in his power?

His lips found my ear and I couldn't understand at first if he was whispering or kissing my earlobe gently. But then I heard his confident voice, "**Give the control back to her!**"

Each word resonated within some deep feral part of me. The metallic resounding voice echoed through my mind, and I felt how the claws retracted and turned back into normal nails.

It took me a few moments to understand what had happened – the lycan used his Alpha command on me. And it worked!

Ruhn's body relaxed, and now I was the one to catch him in my arms as, for a second, it seemed to me that he would fall down.

"See? I told you I'd help," he chuckled, and his body flinched from pain. Just how deep did I cut him? Guilt was washing over me.

I was afraid to move, and we stayed like that, hugging each other tightly for quite some time. Until someone cleared his throat, which made me finally push Ruhn away. For a second there, it seemed like he was disappointed, but then his usual mask was on and he turned to glare at Zion lazily.

"Who told you that you may come in?" he asked in a menacing tone.

"I had to break the rules seeing that my plus one was held hostage here!" the warlock retorted, every muscle on his face tense.

"Hostage?" Ruhn moved forward, and it wasn't a movement of a man. There was something animalistic about it. "Choose your words! You are just a mere guest in my kingdom!"

"This is something for your **father** to decide!" the Scorpion held his posture but then stretched his hand to me. "Onyx, we are leaving."

"Are you implying that my father would choose you, a stranger, over his own son?" Ruhn growled, and I felt bad for him. It was one of the main themes of the book. His father never saw his worth in him other than the beast who could slaughter his enemies. It was a miracle Ruhn had his position in the first place. Mostly because he couldn't be challenged, thanks to how strong his Shadow Wolf was.

"Your father has many sons," Zion's words sounded cruel, "but only one advisor who could bring the neighbouring kingdom he hates so much to their knees. That advisor

is not you.”

Ruhn was about to reply, and I knew this would quickly escalate into something ugly.

“I think it’s best if we go,” I glanced at Ruhn apologetically. He had to understand that we came together and would have to leave together. This was how these functions worked.

But he did not say anything, and I felt guiltier than I should have. The only thing helping me stay calm now was that he would soon find his mate, and all this would be over.

Zion offered me a hand, and I accepted it. We had already walked out, when Ruhn rushed after us.

“Onyx, you forgot something—” He did not get to finish as some young woman in a delicate blue dress bumped into him and fell onto the ground. She lifted her eyes at us, and the world around me stopped.

I knew that girl. I knew who she was.

I finally met Melody.



Marion Artwood

“

Hi, Bookdragons! I am a few hours late again. And I couldn't fit in the floating update. It's possible that they will start after Christmas as I have a very busy next couple of weeks as probably do most of you. But I will try to keep up with the main schedule Mon/Tue and Thu/Fri. I am also trying to finish the Emerald Seer by the end of the year and editing the second book of the Dark Selection.

But if I will be able, I will write an extra update.

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