

146 SHE DIES AND YOU DIE

Xaden stopped in his tracks, his breathing suddenly tense and uneven. 1

He turned back to face Marie.

"What?" he asked.

"You could die," she said.

"I heard what you said," he responded through gritted teeth. "But I do not understand what you mean."

"Walk with me," she said as she led him forward.

She didn't look back, but when she heard him following behind, she breathed in. Once they reached the garden, she began.

"The Halo Festival," she started, "is a festival that one of the first gods gave as a gift to Selene. Selene fell in love with a mortal—the first wolf, Eurytion. They wanted to be together, but as the story goes, he lost her and died searching for her. So one of the oldest gods granted him a chance to see her once during the appearance of the Halo Festival. His soul would enter the body of an Alpha who is his descendant and capable of housing his immortal soul. Then he would search for Selene, and when they made love, their union would bring back the weather and refresh the



season for the wolves."

He was now walking beside her.

"I know this story," he said.

"And do you know that no bonded wolves have ever been with each other?" she asked.

"Does it matter?" he asked. "We were bonded because we had to be. I would have never been able to take her away from her pack if I hadn't bonded her to me."

"And that's where it gets complicated," she said. "You are already tethered to her. You cannot easily sever the bond. You are tied not just by the bond but by the gods. Their essence is still inside. I have never met an Alpha who mated with a bonded wolf. This is dangerous. If you hurt her, you might hurt yourself."

Xaden could not believe what he was hearing. After what Jasmine had done—after he had barely even hurt her and she had set him up—now he couldn't even sever the bond?

"So what can I do?" he demanded. "Am I stuck with her forever? My enemy's daughter?"

He turned around and raked his hands through his hair in anguish.

"Look, Xaden, I will find a way," she assured him. "But it is going to take time."



He turned around and faced her. "Take time? Goddess, what bloody mistake did I make bringing her here in the first place?"

Marie said nothing as he paced back and forth.

"Look, I will find a way," she repeated.

"How sure are you that any of this is even true?" he asked. "Tell me—how do you know that if she dies, I die too?"

She sighed and stretched out her hand to him.

"Give me your hand," she said.

He looked at her warily.

"Give me your hand," she instructed again.

He hesitated but eventually walked up to her and placed his hand in hers. She turned it over and pulled out a blade before slashing his arm.

"Ah!" he groaned in surprise.

Blood spilled out, and the cut was deep.

"When next are you meeting Jasmine?" she asked him.

"What was that for?" he demanded, withdrawing his hand.

The wound quickly closed up due to his Alpha status.



"When you see Jasmine," she said, "look at her arm. If you are truly tethered by your souls, she will have the same wound in the exact same spot."

He folded his arms.

"And if she doesn't?" he asked.

"Then I will return and carry out the disruption of the bond," she promised.

He nodded and started to leave, then remembered something.

"My wolf," he said. "It's getting stronger."

She sighed. "I will prepare something for you. When you have met Jasmine, come to my quarters."

With that, she walked away. Xaden turned and strode towards his men.

"Where is the slave?" he asked.

He had almost called her Jasmine but held himself back, referring to her by the name that best suited her.

"Loren took her to his quarters," one of the guards said. "Said it was orders from the Queen."

"I instructed that she be taken to my chambers after the farewell," he snapped. "Can I not give an order and have it obeyed?"



The guards became squirmish. Though they respected him as their Alpha, he rarely ever snapped at them.

"Loren turned Albert into a toad," someone murmured.

Then, stepping back, the guard revealed a brown toad that croaked.

"But we did put her in chains," another added quickly.

"Order for her to be sent to my room," Xaden commanded. "Even if she has to be dragged out of the room, do it!"

The guards nodded and hurried off. Xaden looked at Albert, who still croaked.

"For heaven's sake, someone take him," he said, annoyed.

A maid hurried forward, picked up the toad, curtsied, and ran off.

Xaden walked toward his chambers, and everyone steered clear of his path.

Fortunately, Aurora was nowhere in sight. Erik still hadn't shown his face since their argument the previous day.

He pushed the thought aside and stepped into his chamber. He pulled off his shirt and set it

aside. If there was one thing he was glad for, it was that the festival was over, and he no longer had to worry about which of his fellow Alphas might be trying to kill him.

The only good thing out of everything was that Alexander was dead. And he hadn't even had to do it himself.

But what he really didn't understand was why Alexander had been killed in the first place.

To cover up what? What did he know that was worth risking their life and killing his for?

The door opened, and Jasmine was brought in.

"My Lord, the slave, as you requested," the guard announced his head downcast.

Xaden turned and saw her standing before him, her legs bound with heavy chains. Her eyes were downcast, refusing to meet his.

"Leave us," he ordered the guards.

