



## 198 A QUIET NIGHT

### XADEN'S POV 1

Once they resumed their journey back into the forest, it got extremely dark and they could see the moon shining along with the stars in the sky.

Erik who was leading the team put his hand out and said. "Stop."

They all stopped.

He sniffed and then looked around.

"We rest here." Erik said. "We will continue the journey tomorrow."

And then he came down from the horse.

"Wouldn't it be better if we went on with the journey?" Xaden asked.

"No." Erik said and then he pointed up ahead.

"You see that dark path. That is inside the dark forests. This line here is literally the only thing that separates us from it and I assure you you do not want to be headed in there. It is dangerous."

Erik said as he led his horse to a tree and tied it up.

"Plus the horses are exhausted and they need to rest." He said.



Xaden felt tensed about even resting and then Erik walked up to him as everyone else came down from their own horses.

"You need to rest." Erik said. "We all need to rest."

"But is this not going to delay?" Xaden asked. "I do not even know how she is feeling. What if something has happened to her already?"

"God Xaden. You need to calm down." Erik chided. "Nothing has happened to Jasmine. I am pretty sure of that. You are alive. If something has happened then you would

Have dropped dead."

Xaden said nothing.

Then Erik added. "Moreover what good would it do if we walk into a death trap? We have already lost someone we can not lose another. You will be putting the other men into a bad situation. The dark forest is not something you can handle with ease."

"Rowan just died. I know you Xaden. You will never put your men in danger not on purpose." Erik assured. "Do not let your emotions override your logical thinking. And even if you choose to go to the dark forest, then how do you know you will not die? And if you die Jasmine dies. It will be all over for us all."

Xaden was now much calmer.



"I am here so that you can make other decisions. To assist you." Erik said. "Tomorrow we will continue tomorrow. I have no idea how safe being here is either."

Xaden was quiet for a while and then he very gently said. "Thank you."

Erik was seeing a much more subtle side of Xaden.

He did not know what was changing him, but he liked and welcomed it.

Or had Jasmine's sudden illness shaken him so much to the point that he was becoming soft. 1

Everyone knew that Xaden cared for his people, would die for his people.

He was a great leader and that was why they did not fear him but were loyal to him.

There was a huge difference with being feared and being respected. 1

But now Xaden was beginning to become affectionate. So much that he was apologizing and saying thank you. 1

Erik had never seen Xaden said thank you. He was always too proud to.

"Why have you not returned back here?" Xaden asked. "I know that it is a very shaky subject and



I have never bothered to ask. But I am afraid I must."

Erik's face fell and became ashen.

Xaden then realized that it was still not a safe ground for him to step on.

"You do not need to speak on it if you do not wish to." Xaden said wisely.

Erik smiled. "My memories there are not vague or they are not so pushed back in my head. They are vivid and to be quite frank I see them every day. See what had happened. It is not a place I ever wanted to return to."

Xaden paused. "And now I am making you return."

"You did not make me." Erik said. "I chose to come along with you. That is what friends do. Moreover I doubt they will remember me."

Before Xaden could ask any more questions Erik went off.

Then the men gathered around and set down their sleeping bags after they had fed the horses.

The fire lit and then they all ate from their pieces of dried meat and canned soup.

"This food tastes awful." Greg scowled.

"Then you should have cooked instead." Luli who



was the only one who knew how to cook said in annoyance.

"You needed to be there when Jasmine cooked for us." Silas said. "she made the best roast wild pig I have ever eaten." 1

The men who had been there began to nod and murmur in approval.

"Even though there was barely anything to use it to cook," Percy said. "It was perfectly made. I wish I could eat that again."

"Well too bad we are eating Silas's food." Erik said as he sat down and ate his own food.

"I still can not believe that Rowan is gone." Didi said and then a very uncomfortable silence followed the entire room.

"He gave up his life for me," Xaden said. "It is something that I should have done for him instead."

The foods became sour in their mouths, and then Xaden turned to his spread. "You should all go to bed. We have things to do tomorrow morning."

And then he closed his eyes to sleep.

All the men went on with their little discussions before eventually retiring .



The fire was turned off, and soon everyone else was asleep.

Snoring could be heard.

But Xaden remained awake.

His eyes wide open as he thought of what he felt.

Considered his feeling and how unsure of it he was.

After a while, he fell asleep.

Then he heard someone calling his name.

"Xaden."

He frowned.

It was a soft feminine voice one that he knew.

"Xaden."

He opened his eyes and the he saw no one.

He was confused and thought maybe his mind was playing games.

Then he heard it again. "Xaden."

And he saw a luminous figure standing near the path that led to the forest. 1

