



201 BEHEADED

The blood spattered across the floor and then over their faces as the head became still. 1

He just stared in absolute horror and gore. 1

To think that this had been Jasmine.

He felt his stomach twist with uneasiness, and he held it.

"Do not throw up," Erik said as he stepped back from the dead creature.

Xaden manned up and swallowed it to ease any nausea.

"W-why did it come for only me?" Xaden questioned. "All the men were still asleep, and I was the only one who wandered away, was I not?"

"The Ryilat feasts on your deepest desires. Your desire to see Jasmine and have her with you was obviously powerful. Stronger than all the other wolves around." Erik said as he crossed over the decapitated body.

"It was going to lure you into the forest," Erik said. "Thank the gods that I got you on time."

"How did you know I was in trouble?" Xaden asked.



"Elyon and I were on the night watch, and when I returned, you were already gone". He informed him. "I made Elyon stay and watch over the others while I went after you. It is rare for the beast to come out of the forest."

Then he turned to the line that separated them from the forest and pointed it out.

"You see that?" He asked Xaden. "That is the only thing that protects us from things like the Ryllat. They cannot cross out; we can only enter. But in rare cases, one's desire for a lost one can lead one to come across them. It is rare, but it happens."

Xaden was quiet.

"Come on." Erik tilted his head towards a different angle of their own forest. "That ryllat blood can stick if we do not wash it off. There is a stream nearby."

Erik led the way, and Xaden followed him behind.

They walked down a path that did not cross towards the dark forest and descended a small, steep hill.

Then they saw a lake.

Erik followed the other side, and Xaden went down.



The moonlight shone on the beautiful, quiet lake, glistening like diamond sparkles.

He knelt by the lake and set the water against his face.

"You care for her very much, Xaden," Erik informed him after a short silence.

"I have no idea what you are talking about," Xaden said, feigning confusion.

He rubbed the water over his face and washed the rylat blood off.

"God, this smells so bad," Xaden swore.

"I told you," Erik said with a laugh, then he cleared his throat. "Do not skip the question. You care for her. Before you pretend like you have no idea who I am speaking of, it is Jasmine. You care very much for her more than you are willing to admit."

Xaden said nothing as he resumed washing the smell off his face.

"You care for her, Xaden. You can not keep

On denying it." Erik said

Xaden cut him short with an exasperated sigh.

"By the Gods! Yes! Yes ERIK! I CARE FOR HER! I CARE FOR HER BECAUSE THAT IS MY LIMITATION, AND I FEAR THAT IF I HAD A HEART, I WOULD LOVE HER!"



Xaden breathed heavily, then sat dejectedly on a rock, filled with a sense of relief.

It was like he'd been harboring those feelings for a very long time, keeping them all choked in.

Erik, who had just been the center of the words' onslaught, went quiet and stared at Xaden.

Then he walked up to him and sat down on the rock beside Xaden.

Both men were quiet for a while.

Then Xaden spoke up. "I care for her. And that is what scares me. I feel for her. I do not understand it. I always pushed it, until I held her bleeding in my arms."

Then Xaden gave a bitter laugh. "Can you imagine that? How can a heartless man, literally heartless, feel to this extent?"

Erik aided him. "There is nothing impossible. You might not have a heart, but that does not mean you will be unable to feel. I feel it is perfectly okay to have exceptions."

"How can I care for her?" Xaden asked. "She is the daughter of my worst enemy. I am expected to hate her. That is how it is supposed to be. I am not supposed to have such feelings for her, or for the love of the goddess, even care for her? How do I answer my pack? Everyone in that pack



hates Bale; it is expected that I follow up. I lead them all. I am not supposed to feel anything for her."

Xaden sighed and rubbed his fingers through his hair.

"It does not matter," Xaden said. "Nothing can ever come out of it. Once I end Bale, I will get rid of her."

Xaden came off the rock, and Erik held him Back.

"Do not suppress your emotions." He advised. "It will not get anywhere."

"So what do you think I should do?" Xaden asked. "Restore her from being a slave and welcome her into the pack as our own. Marry her?" 2

"Technically, you are already married." Erik pointed out with a laugh.

Xaden gave him a blank stare that wiped off the smile from her face.

"But I want you to think about it," Erik said. "On a more serious note. You should not care about what anyone says or how anyone feels. To bell with the pack."

"I am their leader. My uncle, and then there is my mate Lily, and-



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"I do not trust your uncle, but that is a story for another day. At the end of the day, how long will you keep on living for everyone and live for yourself?" Erik asked. "You have already disappointed your uncle so that you might go ahead with it. But it is your life. Do not do something that is your responsibility. But do it because you want to."

And then Erik came down from the rock and walked back towards the men.

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