

## **Chapter 17**

### **Meelo Day 13**

From where I sat in front of Seq's hut, I could see Seq enter camp.

Seq was still depressed since the day before. While I never knew how it felt to have loving parents, I pitied Seq. Aether had shown me nothing but acceptance and never once treated me unfairly. I was sure that Aether showed his own son more kindness than he ever had ever given me. So I knew that it would be a long time before Seq was happy again, or even able to talk about his feelings with me. That was fine. He could take as long as he needed.

I hated seeing him like that, though. All I wanted to do was lift him up in my arms and take all of his sadness away. But, it wasn't going to be that easy. We were going to need to talk things out if Seq ever hoped to move on. But, before we could talk, I had to let Seq mourn for a while. I already began to hate the waiting. It didn't help that I had to be quiet during the entire time we kept vigil for Aether. Then, this morning, when Aether's body was burned, Seq took his dad's ashes to spread them throughout the woods. It would have made me feel better if I went with him into the woods for comfort, but I wasn't allowed to. According to Kyan traditions, spreading a loved one's burnt remains was to be a solitary ritual, consisting of family alone. So, instead of being a supportive and loving boyfriend, all I could do was sit like a log in front of Seq's hut and wait until he came back.

When Seq finally joined me in front of the hut, I stood up from the cold ground that I had been sitting on and wiped the snow off my butt.

Seq didn't say anything. Instead, he walked forward and limply hung his arms at my sides while laying his head on my shoulder.

Seeing this as a chance to finally show my boyfriend some consolation, I returned the hug and held Seq tenderly. Seq didn't pull away, so I wasn't going to, either. The wind gently breezed against both of us and whispered tiny snowflakes onto our ears.

"You can talk if you want to," Seq muttered into my shoulder.

I gave a weak shrug. "I don't have anything to say,"

"I know you're probably wondering how I'm doing,"

I didn't say anything.

"Since you won't ask me how I'm doing and I know you want to know, I'll tell you anyway,"

"No," a growl accidentally came from my chest. I cleared my throat and spoke in a normal voice. "Not unless you want to,"

Seq was silent for a moment. Then, he started to open up. "I feel kinda numb. Yesterday, I was pretty miserable. But today I just feel...here. I'm not really sad or happy. And it doesn't feel like my dad's dead. It feels more like he's hiding behind a tree, waiting to jump out and surprise me...if that makes any sense."

It still bothered me that Seq was only talking about his feelings because he felt forced to, which was why I tried to change the subject. "So, why do the Kyan burn their dead again?"

*Damn it!* Was that the only thing I could think of? I couldn't have said anything that didn't relate to death? Now Seq was probably going to be even more upset.

"It's our way of staying in the forest," he said. Thankfully, he didn't seem to become more upset by my question. "We spend our entire lives hunting, sleeping and fighting inside these woods. So when our bodies are burned and our ashes are spread in the woods, we remain here with Taiya,"

"Does Taiya just walk around with them?" I asked, seeing the conversation as a perfect chance to distract Seq.

Seq gave me a shrug. "I don't know. Anybody who could answer that's dead," *Crap.*

"You know what the others are saying, right?" Seq asked.

My stomach began to sting with fear. "About what?"

"That the Kreq murdered my dad,"

*Shit.* I had hoped to avoid that topic as well.

I sighed and confessed, "Yeah,"

Seq nuzzled my neck gently. "What do you think?"

"Well," I began, as my tail nervously wrapped itself around me leg, "they can't really prove it. The marks on his body weren't from claws. There wasn't a scent or trail that suggested that the Kreq did it, either,"

"But?"

I was silent for a moment. "I don't know,"

Seq didn't push any further and silently stayed in a warm embrace with me.

"Do you want to take a walk?" I finally suggested.

"No," Seq said, pulling his head back and looking me in the face. "I just feel like going to sleep for a while,"

"Okay,"

Seq gently pulled free of my grasp and slowly walked towards his hut. After he pushed his door open, Seq turned his head and looked over his shoulder at me.

"You don't expect me to sleep alone, do you?"

Seq grinned and so did I.

I started to walk forward, but was stopped once I reached the door.

"Hey, Meelo,"

*This day cannot get any worse.*

I sighed and turned around. "Hey, Rye,"

At first, it was strange seeing Rye fully clothed, but I was thankful nonetheless. It was much better than the alternative.

"What do you want?" I asked, instead of telling him to go away.

Rye shrugged and held out his hands, "Grix wants a patrol to go check out the border. Usually, I wouldn't be on a patrol, but Grix insisted that I get some fresh air,"

I stared at Rye for a moment and blinked. "And...?"

"Grix said I could pick whoever came with me and I thought that, since you know every Kreq and how they fight, that would give us the upper hand,"

After letting out a sigh, I turned around and looked inside Seq's hut. Seq stood in the middle of his dark hut while staring at me in the doorway. I felt bad

about leaving him alone, but I didn't want Rye to go and run his mouth off to Grix. So, I didn't have much of a choice.

"I'll be back in a little while," I promised him.

"Okay," he said.

Seq gave a little wave and I returned the gesture.

Then, I stepped backwards and closed the door. As I turned around, I walked past Rye. "Let's go," While walking by him, I was tempted to bump against the fennec with my shoulder.

"Okeydokey," Rye chirped and followed me out of camp.

Eventually, the Kyan camp fell behind us and was replaced with the dense, snowy forest. I suddenly felt lucky that I had made it that far without Rye pissing me off. A moment later, I began to think I jinxed myself.

"So, how's Seq holding up?" Rye probed.

I didn't respond. It wasn't any of Rye's damn business. If he really cared, Rye would still be dating Seq. I sure as shit wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of wasting my breath.

"Hey, I'm not a snake! I won't bite!" the fennec joked from behind me, as the two of us continued to walk.

I still retained my cool silence.

Rye quickly sped up his pace until I found myself walking side-to-side with him. The fennec was certainly persistent to drive me crazy. "Has he been doing that thing where he cries himself to sleep as he holds you?"

My ears and tail twitched, as I snuck a quick glare at Rye. Then, I returned my eyes on the woods before me. Rye was going to have to do better than that.

Yet he still pushed me. "So, no? Damn, he must be taking his dad's death pretty badly then. Or, maybe... No, that can't be it!"

What a pathetic attempt to get a reaction from me. I actually almost laughed in the fennec's face. If this was Rye's way of getting into my head, he was surely going to be disappointed.

Rye didn't see his efforts as failing, so he kept talking. "I was thinking that you two might not be all that close after all, because, when he and I were still dating, he would *always* cry to me whenever something upset him. Or maybe you two have been having problems lately, so he hasn't been honest about his feelings with you. But none of those are probably true. You two seem really happy,"

*Seem.* I could almost feel the spitefulness in the word. I still held back the temptation to claw his face off and continued to walk.

Rye's tongue and mouth only seemed to move faster as time dragged on. "I remember not being able to get any sleep at all this one night. He just kept sobbing and all I could do was pat him on the back the whole time. But no matter what I said, he kept on crying, crying and crying! I kept wiping away his tears, and he would just cry more! I told him to tell me about what was bothering him, but every time he tried to talk, all he could do was sob and squeal! I mean, how can you have a healthy relationship if you can't talk and all you can do is cry and cry and-"

My left hand rose and wrapped itself around Rye's neck as I pushed him against the tree. The fennec was lucky that my claws didn't unsheathe. "Shut the fuck up!" I screamed, loudly enough for the whole forest to hear.

Rye's confident grin had melted away and was now replaced by a wide-eyed gaze of fear. I could see fennec's fear only increase as he began to struggle for freedom.

"I've had enough of your bullshit!" I roared, not caring to keep my voice down. "This entire time, all you've done is talk about just how damaged Seq is and I'm sick of it! And don't think for moment that I don't know what you're trying to do! You want Seq and I to break up. You just want him to leave me because you can't have him. It must really drive you crazy knowing that someone else can make him happier than you ever could! Well, I say *good*! A selfish bastard like you needs to learn that you can't always get what you want! So you can fuck off, you prick,"

I followed my speech with a deafening roar that slapped Rye across the face and the fennec hung his head in defeat. My body began to rush with power as I finally could show Rye how truly pathetic he was. He was at my complete mercy and there wasn't a single person around to stop me. I felt alive.

Rye started to laugh.

What? Had he gone crazy? "What's so funny?" I demanded, as I tightened my grasp on the fennec's tiny neck.

Slowly, Rye raised his head upward and stared me in the eye. His stupid little smile had returned. "You've only got it half-right, kitty,"

I gave a short and near silent growl.

"There isn't anything that I would like more in the world than to see him leave your sorry ass. In fact, the more you two hate each other, the better. But there is something else that I want," Rye confessed. I noticed the fennec's eyes began to water. Even a single droplet crawled over Rye's eyelid and began running down his cheek. "I want Seq to come back to me,"

"What?" I said, almost laughing. "Why would Seq come back to *you*?"

The fennec's ear twitched, most likely from frustration. "Do you know why he and I broke up?"

I only stared back at Rye.

Now it was Rye's turn to laugh again. "Really?"

Rye shifted in my hold and placed his hand on mine. "One night, after I had come back from a really late patrol, I couldn't find Seq. No matter where I looked, I couldn't find him. I even stayed up for a while in my hut, thinking that he might show up soon. He didn't. Eventually, it got so late that I decided to go to sleep. I figured that I'd ask him in the morning where he was. The next morning came and-"

Rye then swallowed and sniffed. His eyes became more drenched with fresh tears as he continued. "Seq still wasn't there. I figured, maybe he just decided to sleep in his hut whenever he got back. So, I got dressed and headed outside. That's when I saw him. He just closed the door of Grix's hut and began walking away. I was curious as to why he had come out of Grix's hut, so I decided to check it out. When I peeked into Grix's hut through the window and saw Grix lying in bed, naked..."

The fennec sniffed again and continued. The tears had become more persistent. "I barely made it back to my hut before I started to cry. And, I sat in my hut, thinking. Why would Seq cheat on me? Hadn't I been caring and honest? If there was anybody I thought that I could've trust, it was him. Then, I got angry. I felt like breaking everything in my hut, including the weapons that I had been working on.

I...I just wanted to make him suffer. I needed him to feel the shame and betrayal that he made me feel. So, I decided to fight fire with fire. I went over to Basil's hut and told him that Seq broke up with me. He started to comfort me and asked me how I was feeling. I told him that I just needed someone to fool around with for rebound sex. At first, he was hesitant, but my tongue shut him up. Eventually, we got undressed and..."

I wondered who Basil was, but then I remembered the tainted meat that had killed a lot of the Kyan. I guessed that Basil had been one of the unlucky ones.

"All I could think about the entire time was how Seq betrayed me. Whenever I remembered him walking out of Grix's hut, I only became encouraged to...move more. Then, in the middle of fooling around, Seq walked in on us. At first, I was happy when he caught us. The shame in his eyes made me want to laugh in his face and ask how it felt. But then, he started yelling and he told me the truth. He...had taken a walk the night before to look at the stars, like he always used to. He sat down under a tree and accidentally fell asleep. When he got back to camp the next morning, he told Grix what had happened because he thought that everybody must've been worried. Seq told me that the only reason Grix had been naked was because he had a fever and didn't want to get hot during the night,"

Rye began to sob uncontrollably. He shook in my grip so much that I thought that he might actually have broken free.

I let go of the sobbing fennec and stepped back as I stared at him. In that moment, I began to realize how much of a broken mess Rye truly was. Here he was, in the middle of the woods, crying in front of the guy that was dating his ex-boyfriend. He must have been miserable in order to do that. It was strange to feel pity for Rye, no matter how small it was.

"Sometimes," Rye said, "I dream about him catching us in bed. Every time, I try to apologize and say how stupid I was. But it always ends with him leaving in tears as I stand naked in the doorway, ashamed of myself,"

He stopped talking and cried for a few more moments without saying a word.

Then, he began to scream. "That's why I've tried to make him hate you, just like I do! All because he...he's letting you fuck him! At night, I go to a hut with some cold tools and pelts. You go home to a warm bed and Seq! That's why...I hate you...that's why I wish the Kreg killed you,"

Both of us grew silent once again.

Rye finally wiped away his tears with his arm and lowered his voice. "But I don't need your damn pity. I know that Seq will come back to me. You two are just fooling around. It's fun right now, but soon enough you'll get sick of each other, even if you think you are boyfriends. And when Seq does come back to me, I won't let him down again,"

Then fennec finally stopped his whining and began to walk.

After he brushed by me, I realized that Rye was right, well, partially right. I was lucky to have Seq. To be able to hug and kiss him were blessings I took for granted. But, while I could be more grateful for having such a wonderful boyfriend, even if Rye thought we were just having sex, Seq wasn't going to go back to Rye. I could see that Seq hated Rye with every of his being whenever Seq spoke of him.

I turned and followed Rye further into the woods.

