

## Chapter 28

### **Seq Day 34**

"You have to admit, it's kind of funny. One of us gets out of here and the other one gets put in," Meelo chuckled.

Meelo sat up in the same bed that I was in, just earlier that morning. I for one didn't find it funny how nonchalant Meelo was about his condition. He told me that Dooka was dead and so was the trader that beat the shit out of me, which I guess made me feel a little better. Still, he could have at least been taking it a little more seriously.

I didn't have say this out loud, since Meelo always could tell what I was feeling without me having to say a word. He always was good at that. "Oh come on, Seq. I mean, what are the chances? It could have been worse!"

I didn't smile or say anything, which I knew Meelo didn't like, since he rolled his eyes and sighed at me.

"I'm not even that hurt," he grumbled.

I felt my ears frustratingly twitch and I sat up in Sera's chair. "It's not your body I'm worried about. What I'm really concerned about is how you're feeling,"

Meelo groaned at that. "You girls always wanna talk about feelings,"

I got down from my seat and lightly slapped Meelo on his arm, which made him grin. I grinned, too. I got back into my seat and did a poor job of trying to seem offended. "My tits aren't that big,"

"No, but you got a pretty face," Meelo said.

"Oh," I said, placing the back of my hand against my forehead overdramatically and spoke with an airy voice. "My head is swooning. I think I might just faint,"

Meelo made something that was a hybrid between a purr and a chuckle. "I'd like to catch you my lady, but I'm still weak from my big manly fight,"

We both laughed together.

"So, how are you feeling?" I asked him, after our laughter had died down.

Meelo was silent for a moment. He looked down at his temporary bed with a smile. "Well, I'm going to be in here for a couple of days. So not great, I guess,"

He looked up to see my reaction. I didn't even smile. "That's not what I meant,"

The smile on Meelo's face finally faded and he lay down on his back in the bed. "At first I was kind of surprised. It's still taking my mind a while to accept that I killed him,"

I nodded, letting him know that I was listening and waiting for him to continue.

"It doesn't bother me, though, since Dooka and Riter always treated me like crap my entire life. He was gonna kill me anyways and I knew I couldn't leave you all alone. So, yeah. I'm okay,"

I sensed that there was more he wasn't telling me, so I moved my hand in a circle and nodded. "And?"

Meelo exhaled loudly, so I was sure that he did it on purpose to annoy me. "I wish things could go back to the way they were before the Kreq attacked us. Everything was going so well. I can't wait for the fighting to be over and have a normal life for once,"

My tail drooped off the side of the chair in pity for him. I kept forgetting that he never had a normal, well, anything. His family treated him like shit -except for Pytle- and he never even dated anybody before me. Those days, when he was settling in to our camp, must have been great for him, even if he was shy then.

"And you'll have a normal life, Meelo. I want everything to go back to normal, too, so we can start focusing more on our relationship. I promise you. When all this is over, we won't have to worry about being killed in our sleep. Everything is going to be fine,"

He looked at the ground, imagining all the things that I had just said. Meelo then looked back up at me. "I really hope so,"

My snow leopard sat there in that bed and stared up at me, waiting to see if that was enough for me to stop pestering him. It was.

I got down off my chair again and sat next to Meelo on the ground. I leaned over to kiss him on the lips. As I pulled back and broke the kiss, I whispered, "Promise me something,"

His eyes stared back at me and his ear twitched. I probably could have asked him to strip naked and do me right there. Not that I didn't enjoy the idea.

"What?" he asked.

"Promise me that you won't take stupid risks anymore,"

Meelo was quiet for a moment and stared back at me. He must have known that it meant a lot to me. "I promise,"

I finally smiled again and gave him another kiss, only this time I used the faintest hint of tongue. I then pulled my head back and got up from the ground.

"Now, get some sleep,"

Meelo groaned as he lowered himself down into his bed. "Yes, mother,"

I gave him a grin and left Sera's hut.

After stepping outside into the dark chilly air that night, I turned and walked towards my hut. I was happy that the snowstorm had gone away and that I could see the stars again.

I had only passed three huts when I noticed Grix sitting alone at the fire. I stopped for a moment and realized that we were the only ones not inside out huts, except for Sera, wherever she was. Grix seemed so lonely there, sitting in the middle of camp and staring into the flames that illuminated his face.

Out of pity, I walked over to him. When I neared the lone wolf, Grix looked away from the fire and up at me. At first, his eyes were full of surprise, but they soon eased.

"Want some company?" I asked him.

"No. I don't want to be any trouble," Grix said.

"Trouble? I was just going to my hut for the night. Here," I said, before sitting down on the opposite side of the fire to show Grix that I was being sincere.

The wolf was quiet, so I stared at the golden embers that crackled and bounced upwards into the air, just before fading at the end of their brief lifespans.

After sitting there for a while, I looked at Grix, who was now staring back into the fire, silently. I could see the flames twirl and dance inside his eyes, showing me that he was so lost in thought that he had probably forgotten that I was there.

"So," I poorly tried to break the silence, "what's new with you?"

Grix rubbed his hands together slowly and didn't take his eyes off the fire. "Still wondering where the Kreq are hiding,"

I nodded.

"I don't know where they could be," he continued. "I've sent patrols everywhere! They're nowhere near our camp or their old one. I still can't believe those traders didn't know where they're hiding,"

I leaned in closer to the fire and looked across the flames at Grix. "You just have to be patient and wait. We'll find them,"

He made eye contact with me for the first time since I had sat down. "But that's the problem! Either two things are going to end up happening. We'll find them and attack or they attack us before we even get a chance of finding them. Even in the best case scenario, people are going to die on both sides,"

It was strange seeing Grix so frantic. He usually had it all together, but I could tell that this had been eating him up for a while now. "Well, that's to be expected. Whenever a war happens, things usually aren't ever clean. It's like that old saying. If you hit a beehive, you'll get stung,"

"I know, but," Grix said, shifting in his seat as his eyes grew weary, "I tried to avoid all this in first place. I did *everything*! I talked to the Kreq and I warned them, but they didn't listen. They just kept antagonizing us. Then, when Sebastian and Dew died, I... I knew there wasn't any other choice,"

Grix placed his hand against his cheek and leaned his elbow against his thigh. His eyes returned to the fire. "Have I been a good leader, Seq?"

The question made my ears shoot up and my tail flick. "What?"

Grix swallowed and looked up at me, lowering his hand. "Do you think I made a mistake? Was there anything else I could have done?"

I shook my head. "Taiya, no! You didn't have any other choice! The Kreq murdered Sebastian and Dew in cold blood. If you didn't do something, the Kreq would have probably just attacked us again. Grix, you did the right thing,"

The wolf sighed and gently let his eyes fall back onto the fire. "I can't sleep at night, not because I'm afraid the Kreq will slit my throat, but because I still see them. I still see them, Seq. Sebastian and Dew. I remember when the patrol brought their bodies into camp, all bloody and torn. They were good warriors and even better friends, and I..." Grix choked on his words for a moment. "I could have saved them. It was really early to send a patrol out to hunt and I could have told them to wait a while. Their blood is on my hands,"

Grix released a sigh and heaved his chest. His gaze drifted down to his left paw, which began to stir the snow on the ground. "I wish I wasn't the leader sometimes,"

"Grix," I said, "you did nothing wrong! Nobody blames you at all for what's happened! How would you suppose to know that Sebastian and Dew would be killed? It's the Kreq's fault, not yours. Ask any other Kyan and they'll tell you the same exact thing,"

When I finished speaking, Grix looked up at me in silent amazement.  
“Really?”

“Really,”

Grix looked down at the fire. “Thank you,”

“No problem,”

Grix sniffed again and looked back up at me. “So, how’s Meelo doing?”

He was obviously trying to change the subject. I didn’t blame him, though. So, I decided to play along, as if nothing happened and even tried to make him laugh.  
“Still running his mouth,”

Grix cracked half a smile at that. “That’s a good sign. If he was quiet, I’d be worried,”

I tried imagining Meelo being that same silent mess he was when he first got here. Taiya, he had changed so much. He was still a mess, though. Honestly, everyone’s a mess if you dig deep enough. Still, it was hard to believe that he was the same person. I mentioned this to Meelo once before and he told me that I was the one who changed him. Did I really have that much of an effect on him? I only did what any other good boyfriend would have done. I gave him encouragement from time to time, but, then again, nobody ever did that for him when he was a Kreq.

I smiled back at Grix. “Me, too,”

“At least Dooka’s dead. One less Kreq to worry about,”

“True, but Riter’s probably going to be more ruthless now that her mate’s dead,”

Grix gave an acknowledging nod. “I’m still wondering why she hasn’t attacked yet. Maybe she’s planning something. I probably would if my mate was killed,”

“They might not know that Dooka’s dead, though,” I pointed out. “For all they know, he’s just missing. They probably won’t even figure out he’s dead for a couple of days, since we burned his body. And, even when they figure out he’s dead, they have no proof we killed him,”

The wolf shook his head. “Once they assume that Dooka’s dead, they’ll blame us. I doubt Riter would ignore that possibility. She’s too smart to think some bear made off with Dooka’s entire body. This whole thing’s a giant mess,”

“It’ll pass,” I told him.

“But how many people will die before it does?”

“I don’t know,”

A silence hung over us for a moment.

Then, Grix said something that I never expected him to ever say to me. “Do you...believe in Taiya, Seq?”

I had never pictured Grix as the religious type, but I never heard him say that he wasn’t. Now that I thought about it, I never once remembered him discussing Taiya with me before. “Um, well, the Kyan are still here and fighting. We never go hungry, which is nice. But...I’m not sure. I’d like to think there’s some god out there, watching over us and loving us no matter what we do. It would sure make me sleep better, but I can’t say for sure,”

I took a pause for a moment and thought carefully before continuing. “Mostly, I just worry about being with my loved ones when I’m dead. I guess that’s why I’m

scared of dying. What about you? Do you think Taiya's sitting on a cloud somewhere looking down at us?"

Grix sighed and scratched the side of his head for a moment. "I like to think so. Well, not the cloud part. I think she's all around us and not far off somewhere. Taiya, I believe, is in the snow, the trees we cut down for our huts and in the animals we hunt. She's in everything so she can watch over and protect us. At least, that's what I think,"

I sat there, pondering what Grix had just told me.

"I know it's weird and it kind of seems pointless to have an afterlife if Taiya's not there, but I think, in some way beyond my understanding, she's able to be everywhere,"

"No, no! It's not weird at all! I..." I thought for moment. "I like that idea. It's really nice, Grix,"

"Thanks," he whispered.

For some reason, I thought about Pytle and how he slit his own throat in front of Meelo. Every time Meelo brought up the subject of his brother, I could see that he was still hurting. Did Meelo think his brother received some horrible punishment because he killed himself? I never had the nerve to ask him. It would be interesting to see what Grix thought. "What do you think happens to people that kill themselves?"

Grix's eyes locked onto me and I felt as though his very arms wrapped themselves around my chest. "Are you asking because of what happened to Meelo's brother?"

I gave an almost unnoticeable nod. It felt strange talking to Grix about it, almost as if I was going behind Meelo's back, but, since Meelo already had told Grix about Pytle, I figured that it was okay. "Yeah. I won't ask Meelo what he thinks, since it would probably bother him.

"True," Grix said, only slightly louder than the crackling mouth of flames that lay between us. His ears stood up, so I knew that he was thinking about my question very deeply. Finally, he shook his head. "No. No, I don't think any god or goddess could feel anything but pity for people that are that miserable. If someone is so unhappy that they take their own lives, they should be given peace, not a punishment,"

The idea seemed reasonable, but, unless Taiya descended from the sky to answer my question herself, we weren't going to find out.

I rose from my seat and stretched my arms up into the air, groaning as I did so. "Well, I think I'm gonna go to bed,"

Grix stared up at me, not moving from his seat. "Okay. Goodnight, Seq"

"Goodnight, Grix,"

I turned to walk away.

"Seq?"

I stopped and faced back towards the wolf. "Yeah, Grix?"

"Thanks for listening,"

I gave him a smile. "No problem. Sometimes, you just need someone to talk to,"

Grix nodded silently and stared back into the fire.

I made my way to my hut, leaving Grix sitting there alone with the fire and in the blackness of the night.