

Chapter 42

Meelo

Day 47

Since I had guard duty early the next morning, I had to sneak out of my hut without waking Seq up. Fortunately, he rolled over to the far side of the bed, away from the door, so silently getting dressed and tiptoeing outside wasn't as much of a challenge as it could have been.

I made my way towards the side of camp that was closest to the border between our camp and the Kreq's old one. While walking, I wondered who it was that I was replacing.

My question was soon answered when I found Vern, facing towards the empty forest ahead of her with a gun held by both hands.

"Hey," I called from behind Vern as I drew close. "Ready for some shut-eye?"

Vern's ears perked up and she turned around so that her side faced me. Her eyelids were droopy and seemed as if they were weighed down by rocks. It didn't surprise me, since she had been awake since moonhigh. "Thank Taiya. I thought I'd never get to leave,"

Without anymore exchanging of words, Vern handed me her weapon, just before removing the ammo and powder pouch from her belt. After I tied the strings of the pouch onto my own belt, I thanked her and she turned to walk away.

"Meelo..."

At first, I thought that Vern had forgotten something, but when I turned and saw that she was already about twenty paces away, I realized that it wasn't her who called me.

"Meelo..."

My blood turned to ice and my body was unable to move when my ears finally were able to put a name to the voice that was calling me. *No. It can't be.*

As I slowly turned around and looked to my right, I began wondering if I was just hearing things. But, when my eyes confirmed the tattered and bloody truth standing just to the side of me, I couldn't deny it any longer. My lungs forgot to breathe. It was hard to even mutter the name, but I did it anyways. "Isabel,"

The husky's clothes had been taken from her, or ripped off based on all the bloody claw marks and patches of missing fur around her thighs. Isabel wasn't even wearing a loincloth as she stood there before me in the snow, nearly freezing to death. Her hands were clasped around her chest, either to cover her bare breasts, keep herself warm, or both. Then, I noticed something that made me nearly drop my gun. Where Isabel's eyes had once been, there were now two twisted fleshy mounds of torn flesh that dripped streams of blood down the sides of her cheeks. *They cut her eyes open.*

I almost fell to my knees when she whispered her next few words. "They raped me... Riter promised she wouldn't do it as long as we didn't run, but this morning... Meelo, she made Callix watch. Even when they cut out my eyes,"

I snapped out of my disbelief at the mention rape and removed my tunic from my chest. I then walked over to the poor husky and slid the tunic over her. Thankfully, it was long enough to cover her from her chest to her mid-thighs. Once she was clothed, I took her into my arms and held her as she sniveled. I could smell the lingering reek of sex and cum on her fur.

"How... How did you get here?" I was barely able to ask.

"They..." Isabel sniffed. "They pointed me in the direction of camp and told me to start walking. I used my nose to help me. It's how I knew you were right next to me,"

After a few moments, when Isabel's sobs stop, I turned her and began guiding her back into camp with my arm that wasn't weighed down by my gun.

"Where are they?" I asked, while trying to keep my voice low and soothing.

It took her a moment to sniff and answer me. "At the border...with Callix,"

I nodded and held her closer to me.

Up ahead, I was able to see Vern still walking to her hut. I called out to her, "Vern!"

The corsac fox turned and I knew that she saw me holding Isabel because, the next moment, she came running towards us. When she got close, I noticed that the tiredness in her eyes from earlier was gone entirely.

Vern placed herself on the other side of Isabel and walked with us as she also put a helpful arm around the whimpering husky. "We have to get you to Sera,"

I turned my head to Vern. "You take her to Sera's. Isabel said the Kreq are at the border with Callix. I'll go back to my post and make sure that nobody followed her here,"

Vern opened her mouth to try arguing with me, but then closed it again and silently nodded.

Gently, I let go of Isabel and watched them walk away for a heartbeat. At that point in time, my eyes flicked down and caught the sight of Isabel's tail, or what was left of it. What used to be a full, grey, fluffy tail was now a stump, which sprinkled droplets of blood every time Isabel took a step.

After taking in the dreary sight, I turned and went in the opposite direction. I wasn't going back to guard duty. No, not after seeing what the Kreq did to Isabel. What I was really going to do was find Riter and end everything.

As camp disappeared in the trees of the forest behind me, I pondered all of the suffering that Riter had caused. Sebastian, Dew, Callix, Isabel and every other Kyan had been afflicted by Riter's damn grudge against me. I knew that if I didn't stop her now, more people would suffer, even Seq.

Seq.

I imagined what happened to Isabel and thought of Seq. Never, I vowed to myself, would Seq suffer the way that Isabel did. No Kyan would ever have to suffer again and I would make sure of that. My grasp on my gun tightened and I continued alone through the forest.

Isabel's small dotted blood trail led me exactly to where Riter and the Kreq were. I saw them before they saw me, yet I kept walking before I finally stopped in front of them.

Only fifty steps away, Riter stood next to five Kreq that were all armed with guns. Weko, Hzuk and Kilo were among them. To the side, I saw Callix bound to a tree with that the same material I had used to climb onto the traders' ship. While each Kreq was holding gun, they were not pointing them at me, at least not yet.

Ritter gave a prideful grin and took a step forward from the line of Kreq beside her. "Ah, the murderer joins us at last! I trust that you received our *invitation?*"

I didn't bother trying to argue over Pytle's death. That wasn't important anymore. "I'm here to finish everything, Riter. Nobody else has to die," I raised my right hand and pointed my finger directly at the Kreq leader. "Except you,"

She laughed at my gesture and my words, cackling like some kind of creature you can only meet in the shadows of nightmares. "Oh, I'm sorry! You seem to have forgotten that I'm the one with all the guns,"

Without saying a word, I lowered my hand.

This wasn't the Riter I knew growing up, or even the one who came to the Kyan camp almost two moons ago, that much was for certain. Her voice wasn't a low growl, but instead a high shaky screech. Even her eyes were wild and filled with sick ideas she had in mind for me. Then, I remembered Dooka and how his head opened when I shot him with the small gun. Dooka's death must have done this to her. He was probably the only person she ever loved besides Pytle, which was odd because I found it hard to imagine that she could love anyone. Her mate was all she had left in the world and I took him away from her. Would I become like Riter if Seq was murdered? The idea made me sick.

I was cautious not to mention Dooka's name. "No. I haven't forgotten. That's why I have a proposition for you,"

The snow leopard clasped her hands together and smiled. I was unable to determine if she was genuinely happy or just trying to frighten me. "Oh? A proposition? Tell us what it is, faggot! Oh please, please, please!"

While the hairs on the back of my neck began to prickle, I tried to keep myself relaxed. *She's fucking crazy!* "You, me, one-on-one," I threw my gun far off to the side, as well as my bow and my quiver. "No weapons, just claws and teeth. That's how you Kreq fight, isn't it? Just shooting me wouldn't be a very good revenge, anyways. Why not personally cut me with your own claws?" At that moment, I unsheathed my own claws to show that I was serious.

Riter still grinned when her eyes flicked down to see my claws unsheathe. Her gaze scaled back up my arm and she walked closer to me, just before unsheathing her claws as well. "I'm going to enjoy myself,"

In the middle of walking towards me, Riter suddenly stopped and then shouted back over her shoulder to her fellow Kreq, "If I die, shoot the cocksucker,"