

Chapter 18

I was still and uncomfortable as the men departed and the queen guided me to a small patio set on the porch.

"I can handle myself, Noah," Keiko dismissed when Ajax's right hand man loomed by. He didn't move from his post.

I almost snapped at him, wanting to know why he didn't step in when two men were almost tearing at each other's throat. Then, when Keiko smoothed her plaid shirt like it was a fine blouse, I remembered that I was in the presence of a woman who could control almost every aspect of my life.

"That must've been very hard for you to witness. I'm very sorry for Ajax's actions. Ever since he met Hades, he's been fascinated by him. We had never heard of anyone like him. He's resistant to royal command, you know. Once we figured it out it became a game for Ajax. Could Hades resist silver? Did he pose some kind of super human strength? And most importantly for Ajax, is he physically stronger than the king?"

"So this was just some stupid pissing contest?" I demanded, feeling my teeth clench. I had gone through all of that just because King Ajax wanted to prove something to himself.

"Always has been between those two. I personally think that Hades could kill Ajax without much effort. That's why Hades always resists shaming, because he knows how powerful he is. Then you came along and you're quite the little spot of weakness for him. One of Ajax's best qualities as king is being able to find where it hurts and push until someone breaks. If you hadn't been there Hades would've crumbled." She blinked her almond eyes, seeming to catch herself. "Sorry, I'm rambling. With having a young child I haven't talked to another adult in a long time. Would you like something to drink?"

"Water please."

Keiko waved her hand, sending Noah away though this was the second time she had dismissed him.

"This must be a lot for you to handle," Keiko mused, cocking her head.

"I'm doing what I can," I replied tightly. "Is that why you let Hades do whatever he wants? Because you can't control him with royal tone? Is it because he's your stepbrother?" The fact that Keiko had any siblings at all was news to me, but I refused to let it show.

A dark eyebrow slid upwards in confusion, but otherwise the queen stayed rather impassive. "Hades is not someone that we want to control, necessarily."

And, queen or not, I lost it. "That's absurd! Do you not see what he's doing to your people?" I demanded. What kind of queen would just let her people get slaughtered like this? Didn't she know how much people were suffering? I couldn't be the only person who had lost a loved one and packs had lost alphas, leaders, their way of life.

"Charlotte, I'm in charge of my entire communities well being. Of course I know what Hades has been doing," she said. There was a steely edge to her voice, reminding me that, though her mate had crossed a line, they were still to be respected.

I didn't care.

"He murdered Caleb. My pack is left with an old alpha and no one is fit to take it over. My father is going to have to run the pack while the alpha mourns and I'm going to have to learn how to be without my best friend for the rest of my life." My voice wavered at the end and I had to blink away tears while Noah set down two glasses. Water for me and iced tea for her.

"How long have you been with Hades?" she asked.

"Just a couple of days."

She nodded to herself as if that helped her understand my situation. "As royals we can't control Hades. The moon goddess hasn't allowed anyone to have more power than him and for good reason. The only available option we have for dealing with him would be to kill him."

I took a healthy swig of water, hoping it wouldn't come back up when I spoke again. "Why didn't you just kill him then?" My heart stung at the words.

Keiko almost seemed impressed that such words could come out of my mouth about my mate without having a severe physical reaction. Clearly, she didn't understand how much I hated this man.

"Hades has been an incredible asset to us. I'm sorry that he has such a bad public image, but I find him almost as important as Ajax and me. Getting rid of him in any fashion would be ridiculous."

"You can't be serious," I sputtered, not believing my ears.

"I'm not one to harbour secrets. I know how damning that can be to any relationship. However, with Hades, I can't interfere. These are conversations that you and your mate need to have. Much of the information I give could be too emotional for either of you. And Ajax has done enough damage for one afternoon."

"He's a killer!"

"He's your mate," she retorted. "I'm sure that if you asked him anything he would be more than delighted to tell you the truth. You just need to be willing to listen."

"But-"

"I'm not interrupting anything, am I?" Hades murmured from behind me, his voice low and gravelly.

"Not at all," Keiko murmured with a bright smile.

Then I was left to listen while she and Hades talked about trivial things like relatives and current events. I couldn't help but glare at her while I sipped my water. She had power to control the situation, to prevent my best friend from getting murdered, yet she had done nothing. And now she was joking with him like he was a saint.

When we were left stayed silent, keeping my head leaned against the window.

If the queen herself would do nothing to control the beast then what could I do?

~~~Question of the Day~~~

What is your favorite dog breed? Or, if you're into cats, what's your favorite cat breed?

I know for myself that I would always adopt a dog before I ever bought one that was bred. There are so many lovely dogs that deserve good homes already out there. However, I love Dalmatians with all my heart. I think it stems from my childhood obsession with 101 Dalmatians, but I just love them so much!

And, as far as cats go (get ready to cringe) I love naked Sphinx cats. I hate animal hair and didn't grow up with animals. I didn't like them at first but they started to grow on me, like these little adorable goblins that lay on furnace vents and wear sweaters.