

Allies

By

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The smell of animal hide was challenged by the scent of burning candles lining the walls of a beautifully broken room. It looked as though it hadn't seen electricity for generations. I couldn't say I was being held prisoner in a room like this, but I was not allowed to leave either.

The sun hung low in the afternoon sky and drenched the flourishing world in its orange glow. I stood on the balcony gazing upon a city in ruins as nature took back what it rightfully owned. I wasn't sure why this island was so different from where I was from: there was no technology here. I had been told by the locals that the main lands were covered in radiation, but that's impossible. I had to keep hope that I would get my people home.

Muffled voices sounded through the door. "We need them? Or you need her?" The voice sounded like Zarah, Stormy's battle leader. Zarah hated that we had history. "Enough!" Stormy's voice echoed outside the door. Silence fell over the room.

The aged, cracked glass door creaked as it opened.

"How do you like the room?" Stormy said. Finely crafted leathers hung from her body with elegance.

I turned and glared at her with the fire of a thousand burning houses reflecting in my eyes.

Stormy's eyes showed no sign of fear, only regret.

She looked so different without her armor: as beautiful as Aphrodite herself. The black war paint she wore complimented the long blonde hair that fell gracefully past her shoulders. Get it together, Alex. She betrayed you.

"How could you," I said. This was the first time I saw her since that day. It was all rushing back to me.

Proudly, she said "That's war, Alex." She slowly walked towards me until she stood a few feet from my spot on the balcony.

“That’s dishonor.” Our gazes remained locked on each other.

She sighed. “Do you not stand before me now?”

Clearly, she thought I was overreacting. Did she truly not understand what she had done?

“That absolves you of nothing!” I said.

I lost it. In a moment, my logical mind faded away and pure emotion took over. I charged her in a fit of unexplainable rage.

She swiftly flipped out of my path. I was foolish enough to think I could best the strongest and swiftest fighter in this world, but I didn’t care.

“Alex, I know you are angry. Let’s talk about this.” She froze in a defensive stance.

I lost my balance and fell to the ground: how graceful of me. I hit the ground with my fist and turned to her. The rage in my eyes turned to tears of pain. I laid on the ground, a broken shell of my former self. “Why have you brought me here?” I said.

She relaxed and closed the gap between us. “Alex, I care for you deeply. Even though I seem to have unusual ways of showing it.”

“Then release me,” I said.

She stared at me in deafening silence. The sun sank lower behind the mountain. She offered her hand to help me up.

I didn’t need her anymore. I wanted nothing more from her. I pushed her hand away and stood on my own. “What is it that I can do for you, Commander?”

She winced when I addressed her as the leader of a tribe instead of on the personal level she was used to. “You’ve been summoning me for days. Surely there must be a reason,” I said.

She stepped back, unrevealing. “Alex, I came to warn you. Some warriors in my rule have separated from the tribe,” she said.

“You sent warriors out to capture me in the middle of my hunt for that?” I said. Who did she think she was?

Golden rays of sun illuminated the room decorated in furs. She moved to the couch, a hint of sincerity in her voice. “We need materials and you hold the territory of the wreckage.”

I turned away. “That sounds like a whole lot of not my problem.”

“Alex, we can help you...” she said.

“No. Why should I trust you again?” I said.

She let out an exhausted sigh. “You need me.”

“I stopped needing you a long time ago.” Why should I have cared what she needed? She made it abundantly clear that she didn’t care about the needs of me or my people.

“You’re right. You have grown a lot since the day your ship dropped from the sky,” she said.

I arrived on this land thanks to a storm that I still didn’t fully understand. Coming from a world of advanced technology to a place that has never seen any of it. It’s feels as though I traveled through time. Wait, did she just say I was right?

“You were just a weak girl when we raided your ship. Now, you stand before me a great warrior, and a great leader,” she said.

A warrior who was responsible for the well-being of many. “I didn’t ask for this.”

“Alex, we don’t choose greatness. Greatness chooses us,” she said. “And as a great leader you must recognize that the metal from your ship means new weapons for my warriors, and protection for yours,” she said.

“Protection?” I was intrigued. Admittedly, it would have been nice to not have to fight so hard to live another day. Suddenly, my legs were taking me back in her direction. It’s like they

had a mind of their own. How did one person make resisting so hard? “How do I know you won’t just take our home, and leave us to die?”

In that moment, she seemed to realize just how much pain she had caused me. She took my hand. “I’m truly sorry. You were a stranger to this world, and our ways can be less than desirable at times.”

I looked away as I fought back a wave of tears.

She pulled my face back to her and we locked eyes. “I will protect your people. You have my word,” she said.

No, I had to be strong. Our lives depended on it. “My people need me,” I said.

Stormy nodded. “You are not my prisoner, Alex. You are free to go.”

###

The air was sweet and felt cool across my face. I moved through the dark cover of the forest as silently as a panther on the hunt. Some people dream of a life like this: back to nature. I bet they don’t realize how much they would miss coffee. Especially in the winter. The winters in this land were brutal. Last year we fought twelve inches of snow.

A war cry sounded in the distance as I approached our camp. A light flickered through the trees. I froze and took a deep breath. What now? I dug my bare feet into the soft dirt and sprinted towards our campsite.

I slowed to a stop as I reached an opening in the trees. My eyes fell on a horrific sight. The home we had built around the crashed cruise ship lay in ruins. The shelters had been knocked to the ground and trampled. Arrows stuck out of bodies on the ground. Many of my people were injured and the rest were tied up.

My two right hands, Ace and Kodah, were gagged and bound to a nearby tree. They struggled with the ropes that tied their hands. Ace let out a muffled scream through the thick vine that gagged her mouth. “Mhmhmmhm.”

I ran over to my two leaders and pulled out the knife I kept concealed in my breasts. I cut the vines from Kodah first.

“Oh my god, Alex! You’re alive!” Kodah embraced me in a hug.

Ace struggled impatiently with her binds. She shot me a look. “Mhmhmmhm.”

I squeezed out of Kodah’s grasp and cut her binds. “What happened here?” I asked.

Ace’s eyes darted from tree to tree. “Stormy’s army. Our guards fell asleep and they came from all directions with arrows and spears. Half of our camp is still out on the hunt. They overran us.”

“They said they would return to finish what they started tomorrow night.” Kodah stomped his foot. “Bunch of bitches.”

I couldn’t believe my ears. Could she really be capable of this after her act earlier that day? She seemed so sincere. “Are you sure it was Stormy’s army?” Ace isn’t the kind of person to make assumptions, but I had to be sure.

Ace nodded. “Yes. I recognized some of her highest-ranking warriors.”

“She said that some of her warriors defected...” I said.

Ace snapped at me. “Are you seriously still defending her? She has killed over thirty of us since we landed in this hell hole two years ago.”

The muscles in my chest tightened and I struggled for a full breath. This is a type of pain you wouldn’t be able to imagine unless you have felt it first-hand. “Your right. She has proven time and time again that she can’t be trusted. We will do what we must.”

“But, Alex, you love her. I don’t think you’ll be able to…” Kodah started.

“I said, we will do what must be done.” My voice was shaky, I was barely holding it together.

Athena ran at me full speed out from the ship. “Oh my God, I was so scared! I thought I would never see you again.” She greeted me enthusiastically and embraced me in an uncomfortable hug.

I forced a smile and squirmed out of her grasp. “All that matters now is that I’m home, I’m safe, and I will protect our people,” I said, “At any cost.”

“Ok, let’s not get crazy now. You’re not a superhero,” Kodah said. He playfully punched my arm.

Ace looked to the bodies covering the ground. “Athena, how did you escape without a scratch?”

“I was asleep below deck. What happened?” Athena said. She looked around at the war zone that remained. “Holy shit.”

“Don’t worry about it. There are more pressing matters at hand,” Ace said.

I looked at my people scattered on the ground and covered in wounds. My face grew hot. “Let’s get them inside and tend to their wounds. Someone will pay for this.”

###

The morning sun peaked over the trees and casted its orange glow over the broken wreckage we have come to know as our home. I stood in the sunlight and stretched in preparation for the day ahead.

I scanned the wreckage to see Ace sitting with her back against a tree. Her eyes locked on the horizon. Her fist gripped so tightly around her sword that her knuckles were white as snow.

“You okay?” I called out to her.

Ace nodded emotionless. “Just another day in paradise.”

Kodah emerged from the ship behind me. “Rise and shine, bitches! Somehow, we made it through another night.”

Ace turned to Kodah, “You made it because I watched the woods while your lazy ass slept through your shift.”

“Sorry, I forgot my alarm clock back in my room in Los Angeles.” He shot Ace a sarcastic smile.

“Alright you two. Can we play nice today?” I pleaded.

He threw his head back. “I can’t take this anymore. I miss my simple life of getting people coffee and booking flights. All this survival crap is for the birds, literally.”

I couldn’t help but giggle at him. His over-dramatic nature was one of the pillars of his personality. It could be trying at times, but we loved him for it. “You always know how to lighten a mood,” I said.

He looked at me and scowled. “Whatever you say, Wonder Woman.”

I put a hand on his shoulder. “I know this sucks, but I need you behind me. We must protect our home.”

Kodah growled. “I know. I’m just cranky. What more do you expect from a gay man trapped amongst a bunch of gay women?” He threw up his hands.

I spotted an arrow in the ground next to Ace’s foot. I pulled it from the ground and inspected it. It held the marks of Stormy’s clan. “I can’t believe she would do this to me.”

“Really?” Ace said. “After everything she put us through?”

“You lesbians really are blinded when it comes to love,” Kodah said.

Ace turned to Kodah and threw a piece of fruit at him. It slammed him in the leg. “Can you at least act like we were brutally attacked last night?”

“Still not a morning person?” He rubbed his leg and sat on the ground next to Alex and Ace. “So, Alex, where were you the past few days? We missed you during the slaughter and all.”

I looked off into the forest. “Stormy’s men found me when I was on a hunt. She ordered them to capture me. I was a prisoner in her village for three days.”

“Well, we have a lot of work to do. They mentioned coming back tonight. We have to fight.” Ace sharpened her sword stoically.

“I’ll sound the bell,” I said.

“Oh, no! Let me do it! Please, please, please. Any excuse to be loud and proud.” Kodah jumped up and down. He ran to a bell that sat near the door of the ship.

The survivors emerged from the ship and gathered in a circle.

Ace and I took our place on an elevated platform. “I know that none of us expected our lives to turn out like this,” I said. Athena jumped up beside me like it was her rightful place. The crowd mumbled as I spoke.

Ace continued, “I don’t know if anyone will ever find us here and maybe it is time to accept that. It’s been two years. This is our home.”

They all looked at us in fear of how the night would end. If only I could’ve eased their minds. “We must protect this place. The outsiders can’t be trusted. I know we have worked with them in the past, but now they want what is ours,” I said.

“We will not tolerate people who think they can come in and take whatever they want,”

Ace screamed.

The crowd cheered. Athena screamed, “Let’s build a wall.”

“This is not 2017 and America under Trump boo-boo.” Kodah snapped his fingers.

The crowd laughed nervously. Athena sunk back.

“I need a team to go set traps for food.” Four people raised their hands.

Kodah put his fingers in the mud and smeared them across his face. “Okay, I’m ready!

I’ll lead the hunting team,” Kodah said.

I nodded. “I need a team in charge of rations. Make sure we have enough to be in top shape for when they come.”

Athena raised her hand. “I’ll lead it.”

“Ace had an arsenal of weapons stowed in this ship when she boarded. A huge black chest is in here somewhere full of swords and daggers. I need you to search the ship until you find it. Split up. I need five people standing watch,” I said.

“Let’s go set the snares,” Kodah said.

The crowd separated. I sat down on the edge of the platform, alone. If it came down to it, how would I find the strength to kill the woman I love? That took a kind of strength not many could say they possess.

###

The sun hung low in the afternoon sky. Ace stood by my side at the top of the ship overlooking the forest. This was the highest vantage point. Everyone prepared for the battle that loomed overhead.

Ace and I may have had our problems when we arrived in this foreign land, but she was my rock. I knew that no matter what, Ace would always have my back. I have never trusted anyone as much as I trusted her. Not even the woman I loved, that should tell me something. I have had some trouble opening up to people ever since my sister died in the storm.

“So, how are things with Athena going?” Ace said.

“You mean that thing where she thinks we’re in a relationship?” I rolled my eyes. “I kind of feel sorry for her.”

“Something is very off with that girl,” she said. She tilted her head and squinted off into the distance.

“Alex,” Athena screamed from down below.

“Ace and I ran over to a tree next to the railing. We jumped into it and climbed down to Athena. My heart was pounding. Whatever had her screaming like that couldn’t be good. Ace’s feet slapped the ground and she steadied her balance. My feet hit the ground and I fell on my face.

Ace turned back to me and shook her head with a smirk. Ace looked to Athena and drew her weapon. “What is it?”

I lifted myself to my feet hoping nobody else saw.

Athena struggled to catch her breath. “People are getting sick. I think the water supply is poisoned.”

Ace and I stood, frozen. What could we do without water. “How many are ill?” I asked.

“Seven,” Athena said.

Kodah stepped into the clearing with his hunting party. Ace approached them. The expression on her face was clear. More bad news. She walked over to a small tree and chopping it to pieces with her sword.

I made my way to the hunting party. They were clearly discouraged. “What now?” I asked. Ace continued to shred the poor little tree who was completely undeserving of such a fate.

“Someone cut all the snares. We have no food,” he said. The hunting party walked into the ship.

I stood in silence as Ace chopped at the ground where the little tree once stood. “We have no food, and apparently no water. How can we fight if we are weak?”

Ace sat on a stump. “She might be ruthless, but she is smart. It’s kind of impressive, actually. We could learn a lot from her.”

“No! We will never fall so low.” I sat on the log next to Ace, not even sure if I believed my own statement. How far would I go to save my honor?

#

The sun fell so quickly that it seemed to be running from the terror we were about to ensue. The only light left was from the full moon. We waited in our hiding spots with weapons in hand. We were tired, hungry, and dehydrated. At least we found the weapon arsenal. We were as ready as we could be.

I heard the chilling sound of war drums in the distance. This was it, war. We survived two years in this unforgiving land. It didn’t make sense for it to end like this.

Boom, boom, boom. The drums grew closer. I looked over to Ace. She was perched high in a tree. Her bow was aimed steady. Kodah hid behind a nearby tree. I barely recognized him. For the first time ever, he looked like he belonged in this world.

The drums stopped. Silence. The calm before the storm.

I took a deep breath and squeezed the swords I held in each of my hands. I closed my eyes and listened. The only sound was the breeze in the trees. A coyote howled.

Swoosh, an arrow sped by my head. I opened my eyes and raised my sword. A wave of arrows flew from the trees.

“Take cover,” Ace said. Everyone ducked behind their posts.

A rain of arrows flew upon us for thirty seconds. Then, the war cries came and about fifty warriors ran out of the trees. Some of them had spears, and others held swords. I recognized Zarah, Stormy’s highest ranking officer. This *was* Stormy’s doing.

I ran out from my post with my swords drawn and charged the warriors. My people emerged behind me. Swords and spears flew everywhere. I targeted Zarah. She had Kodah backed into a corner.

I swung my swords at her like rapid-fire from an automatic weapon. Thankfully, Ace taught me how to use these things. Zarah was strong. She dodged my every move. Fighting her was like trying to hit a ghost. She pinned me against the ground.

“I never liked you, Alex. You were a distraction to the commander,” Zarah said.

A strange orange glow illuminated her face. I looked over to see the ship going up in flames. A scout ran out of the doorway, clearly the arsonist. “Nooo!”

Ace turned to see the ship engulfed in flames. She froze in terror and a warrior hit her from behind, knocking her unconscious.

Outmanned and outgunned, we were dropping like flies. So, this is where it ends.

A familiar war cry rang in the distance. I knew that sound anywhere. Stormy flew from the trees as if she were carried by angels. Or more accurately, demons.

My people were falling, and Stormy was here to end me. How could I ever trust anyone again after this?

Stormy locked her eyes on me. Zarah's blade still to my neck. She charged in my direction on her ghostly white horse. I closed my eyes, awaiting my fate.

About thirty seconds later I opened my eyes to find Zarah lying on the ground. Stormy stood above me with her hand out to help me up. I was so confused. The flames flickered off her intoxicating face.

"I'm sorry about this. Zarah felt I was being unfair to our people when I refused to take your ship by force," she said.

I grabbed her hand and we ducked behind a tree. "This isn't your doing?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I love you, Alex. I tried to warn you."

"There's too many of them. We don't stand a chance." I looked around as more of my people fell to the ground. I felt helpless. I dropped my head in defeat.

"Alex, pull yourself together. Your people need you" She placed her hands on my face and I fell under her spell. An arrow hit the tree between us and I snapped back.

"The rest of my army is behind me. They will be here soon. My horse is the fastest in the village. We need to buy them some time," she said.

"I have an idea." I sprinted to the giant beast and flew onto his back. He took off. We rode in circles around the camp, catching the attention of the rogue warriors. They turned their weapons to me and I dug my heels into the horse's haunches.

My people began to lift themselves from the ground while the warriors were distracted.

Over a hundred warriors emerged from the trees. Some lifted up the injured and rode them to safety. The others turned to fight. I saw Kodah laying on the ground. I rushed the horse

to him. He rubbed his head. I pulled him up onto Stormy's steed and carried him to the safety of the woods. I returned to Stormy's side. She knocked the last rogue warrior to the ground.

"How could I ever repay you. I'm sorry I doubted your honor," I said.

The moonlight certainly did her some justice.

"I'm sorry about your home," she said. "Come home with me and let me protect you."

I turned to my home that was burning in the night. I couldn't say no to such an attractive offer now.

An orange glow flickered in the trees. A woman on horseback approached us with two guards at her back.

"Athena?" I said. I didn't understand what was happening.

"You assume I am naïve. I hear the way her name falls from your tongue. I knew I wasn't the only one," Athena said. The rogue warriors hobbled in her direction.

This girl was seriously delusional.

"You weren't even in the race, Athena," Ace said.

"This is not over, Alex." Athena sounded her horn and the new tribe took off into the night.

Ace walked over to me and put her hand on my shoulder. "I'm sorry."

I laughed. "For what? We all knew she wasn't right. Besides, it was out of my control. We will be okay."

I shared a look with Ace and turned to Stormy and extended my hand. "We will join you."

Ace nodded, and Stormy embraced my arm in bonding deal. We were no longer alone here. This world is now our home.