HELD BY A MONSTER

KENZIE KELLY

HELD BY A MONSTER Copyright © 2024 by Kenzie Kelly.

Website & Newsletter: http://www.kenziekelly.com

Twitter: @exlibriskenzie Instagram: @exlibiriskenzie Facebook: kenzie kelly

Discord Readers group: the mythic menagerie

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright holder.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

Cover illustration by Nyx.

Typography and formatting by Kenzie Kelly.

Chapter header illustrations by Kit Fox.

Editing by Dayna Hart.





MY FOOT CAUGHT ON a root and my ankle bent to the left. I went down hard, too fast to bring my hands up and break my fall. The dirt was cool on my cheek and I thought for a minute I might just stay there. I could hear them behind me, stomping through the woods, their dogs barking. I pushed to my knees, ignored the stabs of pain in my hands, and crawled forward. I knew they would catch me, but I couldn't stop fighting.

A sob tore from my throat and I swallowed its friends.

I needed to keep moving. My ankle dragged behind me, the pain of it lost among many others.

They'd said if I reached the wire, I'd be free. I didn't really believe it, but I held on to what little hope there was. The ground gave way beneath me and I fell. I should have screamed

as I rolled down a steep embankment, but my voice refused. I let the darkness take me, my eyes closing as I spun.

Branches tore at my hair and the thin shirt they'd given me. I gathered new scrapes and bruises from rocks and roots. I came to a sudden stop when my stomach hit a tree, my body folding around it. The trunk was warm and soft...

And it moved.

I struggled to open my eyes. I wanted to see what I rested against, but my eyelids were so heavy. I'd stopped running and without the momentum I'd stalled. My muscles no longer wanted to work.

Warm, strong arms slipped under me and lifted. My head lolled, my neck refusing to work. The arm shifted under my shoulders and cradled my head. I couldn't work out what took over for my neck. Too big to be a hand, too wide to be an elbow.

The dogs barked and I whimpered.

A growl unlike any I'd ever heard bloomed at my side.

I should be afraid.

The thought wandered through my brain like a wraith. Fleeting and without substance. It wasn't fear the vibration made me feel—it was safety. Somehow, I knew the growl wasn't meant for me.

I felt air rushing over the bare skin of my legs and arms. I didn't care where the thing took me, as long as it was away from the dogs. Away from the men that stalked me through the trees. Away from the evil that waited for me when I was caught.

The air changed and grew colder. The sweat on my heated skin cooled and I shivered. The arms tightened around me. I still didn't know where we were. My eyes refused to open. From the sound, we were in an enclosed space. Maybe a house?

Outside it was sweltering. Even in the middle of the night, it was hot.

I wished I could shut my brain off. Give myself to the darkness and pass out. I didn't care what happened to me now. It couldn't be worse than what they'd done to me.

We dropped suddenly, my stomach flying into my throat. I squeaked and managed to get an eye open. Dark. Nothing but unrelenting black.

After we landed with barely a jolt, a voice said, "Shh, little one. You're safe now."

A voice so deep I felt it in my bones. Male, but I didn't cringe. I believed him.

He carried me for what seemed like miles, twisting and turning. I'd open my eyes every so often, but unable to see even the smallest detail I gave up. I heard the trickle of water, and swallowed. My throat was so dry it hurt. I wanted to ask him to stop, to let me drink, but I couldn't form the words. I peeled my tongue from the roof of my mouth and opened my lips with a sigh.

"That water isn't good. Just a little further."

Was he reading my mind? Did I care?

I heard the air shift again, soft sounds echoing around a large chamber. I cracked an eye open and blinked against the light. My vision cleared and I stared in shock. Five creatures...beasts...monsters...stared back. They were arranged around a thick, raw edged table covered in papers and open laptops.

They were massive. Easily standing seven feet tall with heads like wolves. Their ears pointed and the crown of their heads sprouted curling horns that swept up and back. Long arms ended in gigantic hands, the fingers tipped with two-inch claws. Wide chests narrowed to waists that split into muscled thighs. They stood on paws with claws longer than the ones on their fing ers.

They were covered in fur everywhere except their bellies. The smooth skin there showed off muscles so defined they put bodybuilders to shame. Their eyes seemed to glow gold, red, or blue. Their fur ranged in color from darkest black to light gray and most had their heads tilted. Strange white markings were on each of their right wrists.

As one, their snouts lifted to look at the one carrying me. The one centered on the far side of the table broke the silence.

"Dr ym?"

Seeing them was confusing. They resembled wild beasts more than anything human, and what little adrenaline I had left should have pumped through my veins, urging me to run. Instead, I felt calmer and safer cradled in the arms of this creature than I had in a long time.

"I found her, She's...mine?"

"Right, I can see that. I'm not asking you to give her up, just on how you came by her. Will she be missed?"

The one carrying me shifted from one foot to the other. "I don't know."

The other sighed and pinched his snout between his eyes. It was such a human thing to do, to pinch the nose in thought.

"Does she speak?"

"She is able, but I believe she has been running for some time. She needs water, food and rest."

One of the others moved then, one with blue eyes, and stalked toward me with the grace of a cat. The arms around me squeezed and they moved back a step. I grunted as the air was crushed out of my lungs and immediately they released.

The blue-eyed one stopped several feet away. "She is injured, Drym. I only seek to render aid."

"Don't touch."

The snarl stunned me. These were obviously his friends or family. Why was he so protective of me? Was I like a treat he didn't want to share? Was he going to eat me?

My heartbeat sped, thumping against my chest. The crack and crunch of bones sounded in my mind and my panic spiraled out of control.

Finally, the darkness closed in and sucked me under.



"YOU SCARED HER, CAVI!" I snarled and snapped my teeth at my brother. If this female weren't in my arms, I would sink my teeth in his belly.

"Drym!"

Kragen's sharp voice turned my head to him.

"We are not the enemy. We will not hurt your female. It's clear she needs care. Let us help you."

My arms pulsed. They were right, of course. I needed to let them help, but some instinct wanted to keep them away. I shook my head, my tail thrashing behind me. My words came out as a whine. "I know she needs help. I just can't. I can't put her down." I dropped my head in shame. This female needed help and I was keeping her from it.

We had always worked together, the six of us. We were made at the same time and grew at the same rate. We learned quickly that each of us had a skill that complemented the others. As a team, we were unstoppable.

Kragen nodded in understanding. "Okay, we'll work with that, but Cavi needs to get close to look her over."

I growled louder; the sound bouncing off the walls of the cave.

Kragen's patience snapped. "Her blood coats the air, Dr ym!"

My growl stuttered into a whine.

Kragen's eyes flicked over my shoulder and he dipped his muzzle. I felt the sting of a needle and sighed in relief. A sedative wouldn't affect me long—no medicine did—but it would calm me enough to let Cavi see to her.

Cavi was in front of me in a blink and gently took her from my arms. My limbs were heavy but I tracked his tiniest movement. He laid her on the table, scanned her quickly, and then barked orders.

"Quin, grab a suture kit. Some of these cuts are deep. Thurl, start cleaning her feet."

Kragen stayed next to me. Lending me support, but also there in case I needed to be restrained. Cavi started at her head and cleaned her wounds as he came to them.

"Scratches, mostly."

"She was running through the woods, panicked," I told them what little I knew. "There were men and dogs after her."

A collective growl filled the air as we all reacted to her being hunted. None of us liked to see harm come to a female.

They had put females in with us, of course, even before we reached maturity. They wanted to see if we would breed them or kill them. We refused to do either.

Roul went a little mad from the tests. The females he was given were always terrified, no matter what he did to calm them.

He was the largest of us, and his red eyes revealed his purpose. Aggression. Force. He and Thurl were true weapons. The tip of the sword. Kragen and I were the wielders. Bred for intelligence and strategy, we planned. We saw all avenues and possibilities before we landed on the best way to accomplish a mission.

Cavi and Quin were our healers. Cavi was better in emergencies, field triage. Quin kept us healthy and saw to any long-term care that was needed.

That wasn't to say we weren't all deadly. We were. They tested us for that, too. Forced us to fight for our lives, or that of our brothers.

Quin had cleaned her left arm and given her a local anesthetic so he could sew a deep gash in her bicep.

I wanted to rip his head off.

"I don't understand, Kragen. Why do I feel like this? This never happened with the other females." I wrapped my hand over my eyes to block the sight of her in pain, but not looking was worse.

"I don't know, Drym. When she's stable, we'll have Quin draw blood. Maybe it will provide answers."

"We should have left one of the scientists alive." Red edged my vision and I took a deep breath. I couldn't lose control. Not while she was near.

Roul had moved to my other side, just in case. "We did," he snapped.

Yes, but none of us knew what happened to her after we escaped. It caused Roul pain to even mention her. I wouldn't have normally been so careless. "Why do you think they were hunting her?"

Kragen shook his head. "I don't know."

"Roul," I flicked an ear at him but couldn't look away from the female. "Can you track them? Find out what they were doing?"

He spun and I heard his claws scrape the rock beneath our feet as he took off.

Kragen called after him, "Do not engage!"

All we received in response was a grunt.

Cavi had finished cleaning her face, neck, upper chest, and right arm. He moved to the torn hem of the shirt she wore and lifted it. I took a step forward. Kragen threw his arm in front of me.

"I think we should let Drym check her torso in private. He can clean her, and if there are any wounds that need care beyond what he can provide, he will let us know." Kragen grabbed my snout. "Right?"

"Yes. Yes, that would be better." Tension eased from me as Cavi dropped her shirt and began to clean her legs. I didn't like them touching her at all, but my control was getting better.

Her eyes flew open and her head whipped around. She thrashed and the others held her limbs. My vision was well into the red and I ripped through Kragen's hold and moved to her, batting Quin aside.

Her eyes hit mine and I crouched next to her. "Shh, little one. You are safe."

"Are you real?"

I didn't want her to fear me. I didn't want her to scream and throw herself into the corner and make herself as small as possible.

But I couldn't lie to her. "Yes, we are real."

Her chest rose as she inhaled, her eyes closing on an exhale. "Thank god."

We all looked at each other in shock. That was not a reaction we'd ever gotten before. She relaxed, so Quin and Thurl released her and resumed cleaning her legs.

"Can you tell us what happened?" Kragen slipped a bottle of water into my hand.

I twisted the cap and offered it to her. She struggled to sit up, so I put my hand between her shoulder blades and supported her. I wanted to shout for joy when she leaned into my touch. She drained the entire bottle.

"Thank you." She took a deep breath. "I was kidnapped after work, taken to a house and kept in a basement with other women. The men hunted us."

"Why?" I couldn't keep the anger from my voice. I saw it reflected in her eyes.

"Sport. Boredom. Because they could. Who knows why twisted rich men do anything?"

HELD BY A MONSTER

She looked at each of us before her eyes landed back on me. "You guys really are enormous, hunh?"

I chuckled. "Yes. I am Drym."

"Hi, Drym. I'm Kendal."

I went around the same way she had studied each of us. "This is Kragen, Cavi, Thurl and Quin. Our brother Roul is investigating the men who chased you."

"Good." Her features hardened. "I hope he kills every one of them."

READ THE FULL BOOK

Held by a Monster is now available on <u>Amazon</u> and in <u>Kindle Unlimited!</u>



kindleunlimited

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright holder.