

Chapter 5

Meelo

Day 5

Grix guided me through the Kyan camp.

Walking behind the gray wolf made me feel like a pup that follows its mother everywhere. Luckily, Grix and I stopped at the fire and discovered that Isabel had joined Sebastian, Callix, Eirok and Aether in roasting rabbits.

"So this is what my tribesmen are doing instead of keeping an eye out for Kreq invaders," Grix said with a grin, as he looked down at the Kyan who surrounded the fire.

"Oh, come on, Grix! We're not being attacked right now!" Sebastian argued, playfully.

Grix chuckled at the dingo's witty answer. "Well, maybe I'll let it slide just this once,"

Grix then placed his hand on my shoulder. "Meelo here still needs to learn how to fire a bow and how to skin animals. Sebastian?"

Sebastian's ears perked up. "Yeah?"

"Since you're the best hunter in the tribe, I'm leaving it up to you to teach Meelo how to shoot,"

The dingo gave a small salute. "You got it boss!" He then jumped to his paws and walked over to me. "Ready to go on an adventure?"

It was hard not to smile at his enthusiasm. "Sure,"

"*Sure?* You don't sound all that excited! Oh, well," Sebastian wrapped his arm around me and we began to walk away from the fire.

"And Sebastian?" Grix yelled.

Sebastian and I turned.

"Go get Syta," Grix ordered. "She'll be in charge of teaching Meelo how to skin prey,"

Sebastian held out a thumbs-up. "You got it!"

We turned around once more and continued walking.

When we arrived at Syta and Eirok's hut, Sebastian knocked on the door and we waited for a response. The door squeaked open a moment later to reveal the female black backed jackal, Syta.

"Can I help you two?" Syta asked with very little patience.

Sebastian replied whimsically, as though he didn't hear the shortness in her voice. "Why yes! You can come with us and get the honor of teaching this young leopard here how to skin prey!"

Syta shrugged. "Why can't you teach him?"

"I would," Sebastian said, playfully. "But a certain wolf insisted that you should be the one to teach him!"

Syta gave a sigh loaded to the brim with stress. "All right,"

She stepped outside and shut her hut's door, just before walking with us into the forest.

"How are things with Seq, Meelo?" Sebastian asked me straight out of nowhere.

I was so taken back by the question that I had almost stopped in my tracks. "How did you know about us?"

Sebastian held his hand on his chest and grinned, proudly. "I just so happened to see the two of you sneak off together the other night at the feast. I'm assuming something happened?"

I was silent.

Sebastian sighed. "I've been nosey haven't I? Meelo, I'm sorry,"

"It's okay," I mumbled.

"Great!" Sebastian cheered. "You don't have to answer the question if it makes you uncomfortable,"

Syta butted into our conversation. "Sebastian, don't be rude!"

However, I found myself defending Sebastian. "No, no, it's okay! I just... The Kreq don't really like gay people. I know it's different here, but I'm still getting used to it. And, if you really want to know..." I rolled my eyes to look away into the woods. "Seq and I went down to the lake and swam around. One thing led to another and we ended up kissing a little bit. Other than that, nothing really happened,"

I felt kind of bad about lying to Sebastian and Syta, mostly because this was the first time that I had actually spent time with them. But, what was I suppose to say, that Seq jerked me off? That would have been much worse than a little white lie.

Sebastian awed. "That's such a nice story!"

Syta snorted and laughed. "You're so gay sometimes, Sebastian,"

I snapped my head over to look at Sebastian, expecting him to be offended. Instead, Sebastian chuckled and put his arms behind his back. "Syta, you're so mean that sometimes I forget you're not pregnant anymore!"

Syta's jaw fell open and released a bewildered laugh.

My ears flattened and I barely mustered up the courage to state my question. "Are you gay, Sebastian?"

The dingo gave me a devilish grin. "You wish," He chuckled for a moment, taking pride in his joke. "I'm straight,"

"I'm straight, too, if anybody's curious," Syta said.

Sebastian gave a flick of his tail. "Not everything's about you, Syta,"

A few heartbeats later, after passing even more trees that all looked identical to me, Syta stopped walking. "So, how are we going to do this?"

Sebastian and I stopped walking as well and Sebastian scratched his ear in thought. "Well, we should probably stop here,"

"Why here?" I asked.

The dingo was the one to answer me. "Well, it's far enough from camp, so you don't have to worry about shooting anybody. And we might find some prey while we're out here,"

Sebastian removed his bow from his back and held it out to me. "Here, use my bow,"

I carefully took the weapon out of Sebastian's hand and held it with the same caution as someone who holds a poisonous snake.

Sebastian continued to explain the situation to me. "Normally, you would shoot with your own bow, but, since Grix asked me without much notice, this will have to do,"

Gently, I plucked the bowstring, which gave a quiet *twank*. Then, I tilted the bow and glanced over the wood portion of the magnificent hunting tool.

"Well, that's enough staring at my lady love. Let's shoot a target," Sebastian said, breaking my concentration.

The dingo dug out an arrow from his quiver and handed it to me.

I slowly reached out and took it. My hand grasped the firm wooden shaft and caressed its smoothness. It was constructed of the same wood that made up Sebastian's bow. At one end of the arrow was the nock, which was what held the bowstring. Right above the nock was the fletching and it was made up of brown feathers that once belonged to some bird. The opposite end of the arrow was of a different design. It wore an arrow head made of a black shiny rock carved into a "V" shape. A thin strip of leather fastened the arrowhead in its place.

"Do need help placing the arrow?" Sebastian asked.

"No," I said. "I've seen a couple of people shoot prey that walked into camp,"

I then slid the arrow gradually onto the bowstring. After the arrow was set, I pulled back on both the arrow and the string. The string gave some resistance, but I continued to slowly pull, only now with a little more force.

"Let's start off with something easy. How about you hit that tree?" Sebastian said, before bumping his head in the direction of a tall redwood that was fifteen paces away.

I held the bow in front of my chest and took aim. I fired, but was only met with disappointment when the arrow merely scraped the side of the tree. After lowering Sebastian's bow, I examined my failed shot.

Sebastian shrugged. "Nobody ever hits a target on their first try,"

A tiny bit of my embarrassment melted away at his reassuring words.

"Meelo," Sebastian said.

I turned to face the dingo. "Yeah?"

"Go get the arrow,"

"Oh, right!" I said and followed my arrow's path.

When I found it, the arrow was sticking out of the ground near a bush that's leaves were drenched in a coating of snow. I bent over to pull the arrow from its snowy resting place and began walking back to Sebastian.

After getting back into my shooting position next to Sebastian, I took aim once more and fired. However, the result was the same.

When I fetched the arrow again and took aim for what was now the third time, Sebastian began to instruct me. "Here,"

He pressed his chest against my back and held my hands with his own, allowing me to feel his heartbeat and every breath that he drew through my back. "Now keep your arms still. You can breath, just do it slowly,"

I obeyed and slowed my breath, all while keeping my arms still. For a few more moments longer, Sebastian gave me some more guidelines on aiming and on my stance.

"Ok, now try," Sebastian said, as he let go of me and took a few steps back.

After making sure that I was following all of Sebastian's advice, I released the bowstring and shot the arrow once again. The arrow found its target and burrowed its head into the trunk of the tree. I couldn't help but grin with pride as I walked forward and removed the arrow from the bark.

"All right," Sebastian complimented me as I stood next to him again. "Time to hit something a little harder," He then pondered what my next target could be.

"Oh!" Sebastian yelped. He then whispered, "Perfect timing," The dingo then melodramatically pointed towards whatever caught his interest.

I followed Sebastian's finger and discovered a rabbit sniffing the ground, just passed the tree that I had used for target practice. Its rear was towards us and its nose hadn't caught our scent yet.

I sighed in despair, thinking that I would surely miss such a small target.

I drew the bow and readied the shot. My eyes closely examined the distance between the rabbit and myself. The rabbit began to gnaw on something it miraculously found in the snow to eat.

I licked my chops and my tail twitched. *Three...Two...One.* I released the bowstring and the arrow zoomed towards its unsuspecting victim.

The arrow pierced the rabbit's fur, driving its sharp head into the organs inside. The rabbit gave a shrill screech and began flopping around uncontrollably on what was now red snow, almost as though it were possessed by some incredibly painful illness. A few moments later, it fell on its side, kicked one last time and quietly died.

Sebastian gave a howl of praise and patted me on both of my shoulders. "All right, Meelo!"

The dingo then marched over and examined the dead bunny. After a quick inspection, he placed one of his hands on the rabbit and put the other on the arrow. In one fluid motion, he ripped the arrow out of the rabbit, spraying blood onto the snow behind him. The dingo then dipped the arrow in the snow at his paws and got off as much of the blood as he could. Afterwards, he brushed off the snow and returned the arrow to his quiver. "Okay, Syta. It's your turn to play teacher,"

"Yay," Syta groaned and strutted forward after drawing her knife. She walked with me over to the dead rabbit and squatted over my kill. The jackal then handed her knife over to me. Slowly, I took the blade and held it tightly in my hand.

"Start cutting rings around the rabbit's legs, but make them underneath the joints," Syta advised me.

Cautiously, I made an incision in each leg and cut circles around them as I was told.

"Good," the jackal complimented me. "You're not cutting too deep. Now, start slicing up to the backside of the rabbit from each ring,"

Syta continued to walk me through the entire process until I had finished. I surprisingly turned out to be better at skinning prey rather than shooting them.

When I finished, Syta turned to Sebastian with a condescending smirk. "I guess I just have knack for teaching, unlike some people,"

Sebastian retorted with a quick defense. "Hey, he can shoot can't he?"

Syta took back her knife and spoke to me. "Take the pelt. I'll take the innards,"

I took the pelt in one hand as I was told and, once Syta cleaned her knife in the snow and picked up the rabbit meat, we began our journey home.

"Normally, we wouldn't skin the animal until we back but to camp," Syta said. "But it's quiet out here and we wouldn't want you to get distracted, since it was your first time,"

"Actually," Sebastian began to say, "when Callix and I found you, I shot a deer. Callix and I had to carry you back with us, but we weren't sure what to do with the deer. I was carrying you and Callix couldn't carry both the pelt and the meat. So, he ended up carrying the pelt,"

I grinned at the story.