

Chapter 11

Meelo

Day 6

Why did you bring me out here?

A knock came at Seq's door.

"Meelo?" a voice followed.

I sat up in Seq's bed, just before glancing to the side to see Seq peacefully dreaming next to me.

Another knock came.

I couldn't resist letting out a groan. Why did I have to get up? I would have much preferred to stay in bed all day with my nice warm fox.

"Meelo, I know you can hear me. I already went over to your hut and you weren't there," the voice spoke once more.

My shoulders sunk as I sighed.

I got out of bed and walked over to the twisted heap of my clothes. *Wow, we really didn't take things slow last night.* I grinned at the memory, as I gingerly slid on my loincloth.

I had put on my trousers and was putting on my second moccasin when the voice came again. "If you're getting busy, I can come back later,"

"I'm almost ready, unless you don't mind me answering the door naked," I joked, as if I had the audacity to do such a thing.

It was then that I heard a chuckle come through the wood of the door. "Take your time,"

I slid my tunic on over my chest, drawing my arms and head through the openings, just before strapping on my quiver and bow. *Wait.* I scanned the floor and found what I was looking for. I had almost forgotten my knife. After tying knife's sheath to my belt, I trotted over to the door. As I opened it, I came face to face with Sebastian.

"Hey," I greeted him.

Sebastian smirked. "So... Feeling sore?"

My face grew warm.

"Oh, I'm just messing with you!" Sebastian assured me, after an uncomfortable moment of silence. "Anyhow, I was wondering if you wanted to go on a hunting patrol," Sebastian then nodded his head towards something behind me. "You can come, if you want,"

My ears flattened, as I turned to see Seq, who lay on his side in bed with his bare chest exposed and stared at us.

"Should I come like this, or would you at least prefer me to wear trousers?" Seq asked.

Sebastian shrugged. "Whatever's more comfortable,"

Seq yawned before continuing. "Well, I can't. Grix is starting to do border patrols because of last night and I just so happen to be on the first one today," Wow. Somehow I had completely forgotten that Grix asked Seq to be on a patrol the night before.

"What a shame," Sebastian said.

Seq stuck out a finger and beckoned me over to him.

I stood there for a moment, frozen inside the doorway with my head uncomfortably turned over my shoulder. When I realized that Seq wouldn't take no for an answer, I turned my body around and walked across the hut towards the bed. Once I finally stood over Seq, my shadow fell across the bed.

"Lean down," Seq said, lowering his hand down onto the bed.

My tail crawled between my legs, but I squatted down nonetheless, knowing that I had no choice but to obey. Then with my face was only a finger length away from Seq's, the fox leaned forward and lightly kissed me on the mouth. There wasn't any tongue, which I'm sure was due to Sebastian presence. Although, I'm sure Seq would have done more than just slip me some tongue if Sebastian wasn't there.

Seq pulled back, only to give me a lively stare. "Have a great day,"

I gulped and managed to use what little air was inside my chest to speak. "You, too,"

"Aw," Sebastian admired from the doorway.

"Good luck," Seq added, with the tiniest hint of sarcasm.

I walked out of Seq's hut and closed the door behind me. "Ready?"

Sebastian squinted one eye. "Almost. Since Seq can't join us, we should probably ask Callix,"

The two of us began walking to Callix's hut.

"What if he says no?" I wondered out loud.

Sebastian only shrugged. "Then we'll go by ourselves, I guess,"

I remained silent.

When we arrived at Callix's hut, we found the coyote gazing outside of his window.

"Hey, Callix!" Sebastian greeted his friend.

"Hey, Sebastian," Callix said. "Hey, Meelo. What are you guys up to?"

Sebastian pretended to act serious. "Well, we are going on a hunting patrol. You can join us if you want. Unless you have something better to do,"

Callix acted like he was thinking for a moment, as if he did have something more interesting to do that morning. "Well, I can see that you so desperately need my incredible talent. So, I'll tag along,"

Sebastian gave a painfully overdramatic bow.

It only took a few heartbeats after Callix drew back from his window to come out of his door and join our patrol. We then made our way out of camp and into the woodland.

What are you doing?

I shuddered. Afterword's, I looked around and noticed that neither Callix nor Sebastian had seen it. Even if they did, they probably would have assumed I was cold.

"So, Meelo, how did Sebastian get you to join him on this fine morning?" Callix asked me, breaking my inner distress.

After being silent for a moment or two while I searched for a decent response, Sebastian answered for me. "He's just upset that he couldn't stay in bed with Seq this morning,"

Callix's eyes widened. "Do you know about Rye and Seq?"

"Oh, Taiya, here we go," Sebastian said and let out a sigh, which looked like smoke in the sunlight of that frosty morning.

I swallowed and tried to moisten my dry tongue. "Um, I know they used to date,"

Callix gasped and probed further. "So you don't know why they broke up?"

Sebastian rolled his eyes and remained silent.

"So apparently while they were dating, Rye-"

Sebastian broke his silence and spoke in a harsh tone. "I don't think that's something Meelo should hear from you, Callix,"

Callix's ear flattened as he focused his attention on Sebastian. "Why not? He deserves to know!"

Sebastian glared back at Callix, not in the mood to be argued with. "That might be true, but if anybody's gonna tell him, it should be Seq,"

Callix gave up without any further argument. "Fine,"

We walked for a while longer.

"We might as well split up and see if we can catch more prey," Sebastian suggested, as we came to abrupt stop.

The coyote shrugged. "Sounds good to me. Meelo, what do you think?"

I paused for a little bit. "I still don't have a lot of experience,"

Sebastian could obviously see my embarrassment in admitting my terrible hunting skills and tried to comfort me. "Would you like one of us to stay and help you?"

I nodded.

"All right. I'll do it," Callix volunteered. "We could use it to get to know each other better,"

Sebastian nodded. "I'll see you two later,"

With that, the dingo ventured deeper into the forest.

I couldn't help but ask the question that had been bugging me since Callix mentioned Rye. "Do you think...Seq changed after he and Rye broke up?"

"Umm," Callix replied with uncertainty.

"Not that I want you to tell me what happened. I just... He's always pushing me out of my comfort zone and I can't help but wonder if it's cause of what happened with Rye,"

Callix thought for a moment. "No. Seq probably just wants to make sure you feel welcome here. I hear that the Kreq are pretty harsh,"

I nodded. While I willingly admit that I misjudged Callix when we first met outside Sera's hut, I still wasn't ready to talk about my family issues with him.

Callix saw the look in my eyes as I remembered life with the Kreq. "I can't imagine," There was a moment of silence and then Callix continued. "You seem like a great guy. And I can honestly say you're better than Rye,"

A tiny grin crawled across my mouth. "Thanks,"

"No problem. Speaking of Rye, I'm surprised he hasn't lost his balls to frostbite," The coyote chuckled at his own thought.

An ominous roar tore through the air behind us.

Callix and I turned and were met with a snarling wild bear, standing on its hind legs with fur blacker than ash.

An extended arm shot towards us quicker than lightening and struck Callix down with its powerful claws. Callix crumbled to the ground next to me on the snow as though he were a leaf. The bear then landed on all fours and hovered over motionless coyote.

Without even thinking, I drew my knife with my right hand and aimed for the side of the bear's neck, only to miss and hit its shoulder. Warm blood began to ooze over my hand as I twisted the blade further into the beast, making my nose burn with its pungent smell.

The bear let out a snarl and knocked me over onto my back with its powerful skull. As my back collided against the snowy ground, I could hear ringing and taste blood.

Put the knife down.

The attacking bear stood back up with my knife still lodged inside its shoulder, pouring streams of red down its side. The creature lumbered over and prepared to carve me into tiny shreds.

I shook my head and forced myself to my to stand up at the sight of the attacking bear coming closer. I then turned and ran, only to dig my claws into the first tree I reached and begin climbing. *At least he's coming after me instead of Callix.*

After climbing for a few moments, I stopped and crouched on a branch while keeping a hand on the tree's center. I stared down the trunk of the tree and saw the bear standing only an arm's length away from the tree's base. In an effort to keep the bear's attention off of Callix, I hissed at it.

"My bow is broken Meelo!" Callix cried.

I looked up from the bear and saw the coyote standing up now. Callix held the side of his head as blood trickled through his weak fingers. The bear must have hit Callix really hard because I could see the coyote struggling to keep his balance.

His words, I realized, were true, as my eyes found Callix's bow snapped in half on the ground. *Damn.* He must have crushed it when he fell back onto the snow.

"I'll run and get Sebastian. I'll be as fast as I can," Callix said, before turning and stumbling into the woods in search of Sebastian.

With Callix finally out of my sight, I returned my attention to the problem at hand. The black bear was sniffing the base of the tree, as though it was about to eat some suspicious looking food.

I hissed at the bear in challenge, which was accepted with a roar, right before it dug its claws into the tree.

"Come on!" I growled. "I hope the tree can hold your fat ass!"

The bear didn't understand my words, but it clearly knew the attitude behind them. It snarled and began to climb. As the wild creature began ascending, I could see my knife slightly wobble in its still-bleeding shoulder. The blade was dug deep inside the bear and continued to drain it of blood.

I continued to climb once the bear began to get close to the branch that I had been sitting on. This time, I climbed until there were no higher branches that would support my weight. After balancing myself, I returned my attention to the

bear and discovered that the animal had only just reached the branch that I had sat on when Callix left. *Come on, Callix.*

I noticed a gradually slowing of the bear's climbing. *It's lost a lot of blood.* However, despite the bear's slowing pace, the fiery hatred in its eyes had not quenched.

I had considered jumping. It wasn't the tallest tree in the woods, but the bear could probably have sliced me on the way down. Also, even though I wasn't really high, there was always the chance that I could break a leg. If that happened, the bear would surely catch me.

The bear was now closer than ever.

Suddenly, an arrow drilled into the bear's back, causing the bear to give a weak growl and fall from the tree.

THUNK!

The bear lay still for a moment, but then arose on all fours and faced the new nuisance that dared to challenge it.

I saw Sebastian holding his bow with one hand and drawing a second arrow with his other. Behind him stood Callix, who was still holding the side of his head while trying to catch his breath.

The bear let out another terrifying roar and began to hobble toward Sebastian and Callix.

Callix drew his knife, even though he probably knew it wouldn't be very helpful.

Sebastian shot his second arrow, which stuck into the bear's leg. The bear paused for a moment and continued to walk forward.

Quickly, I climbed down the tree, using its branches. I landed in the snow at the base of the tree and gazed at the bear's back. Surprisingly, the bear hadn't noticed me yet. I could still see my knife sticking out of the bear's shoulder, drawing even more fresh blood that infected the morning air with a sour smell.

I had to move fast.

After inhaling a deep, cold burning breath, I sprinted forward. With one fluid motion, I ripped the knife from the bear's still-bleeding shoulder with my left hand, drawing more blood and ripping flesh as I did so. The bear defiantly knew I was there now, but I was quick.

Before the bear had a chance to react, I jumped up onto its back. Then, I wrapped my right arm around its neck and began to stab it with my knife. I dug the blade in and out of the back of the bear's neck a few times before the bear began to try and strike me. Luckily, I was in a position in which the bear's claws couldn't reach. After a few stabs that drew quite a bit of blood, I was able to see the fleshy red inside of the bear's neck, which had been hidden by its thick black coat. I was even able to make out red stained part of the spine that ran up the neck into the bear's head.

As the bear fell forward onto its chest, I continued to drive my knife in and out of its neck, causing blood to gush out onto my tunic.

After the bear hadn't moved for a few moments, I stopped. I pulled my knife out of bear's neck for the last time, resulting in a splash of blood splattering against

my nose. My sense of smell was then completely drowned out by the putrid scent of the blood that stained my face.

Once I stood up, I gazed at the body of the bear that had so desperately tried to kill me. The lifeless corpse was lying before my paws, now in snow stained with its own red blood. I examined my knife, just before wiping off the remaining blood on my already stained tunic, and sheathed it.

Finally, I looked up at Sebastian and Callix. It wasn't until that moment that I saw both of my fellow tribe mates silently standing before me with their jaws open in disbelief.

"Are you-" Sebastian then swallowed and continued speaking. "Are you hurt, Meelo?"

I shook my head.

"How's your head doing, Callix?" Sebastian asked, turning his neck to look at the coyote.

Callix rolled his eyes, while still holding the side of his bloody skull. "It looks worse than it is," The coyote then turned his eyes on me. "I was wrong about you when you first came here. Now, I can see you're totally a Kyan,"

A slight sting of embarrassment came from my chest. "I only did what you guys would have done," I said. I had to admit, it felt good to be admired for once.

Sebastian giggled.

My ears twitched. "What?"

Sebastian grinned at the dead bear next to my moccasins. "Oh," he said. "I think we just found you a new bed,"

Don't do it.