

CHAPTER 07: NEEDLES SUCK OR FIELD MEDICINE AT ITS FINEST

Their conversation would have continued, if not for the continued loss of blood from his left calf. Between he, Rush, and their combined wounds, the bed looked as if there had been a triple homicide involving multiple stab wounds perpetrated by an angry lawnmower. They'd both lost a fair amount of blood and it wasn't going to get any better by them just talking.

The elder knew Erik's health was declining the moment he placed his hand on Erik's cheek. The elder bade him to lay down on his back and elevated his feet with the back of the leather chair Jenkins was using earlier. The gunshot that Erik sustained wasn't terribly deep, but it did remove a large portion of flesh and a maybe even a bit of muscle. The elder radioed to his men, "I could use a hand here boys, would you kindly?" The reply came from Jenkins in short order; "Aye sir!"

Jenkins and Franklin sprinted back to the deluxe apartment the three men were in. "What's wrong sir," Jenkins queried. "Need a hand removing some debris from Erik's leg here. Franklin how're you doing?" Franklin shrugged and said, "I've had worse, sir. It's just a flesh wound." Elder Redding nodded and replied, "a scratch is just as bad as a stabbing out here, you know that. Off with the rest of your gear. I'll get you after we finish up these two idiots." Franklin nodded and went back to the living room to doff his gear, as instructed. The elder looked at Jenkins and said, "see if you can't find something clean to tourniquet this wound with. I think I saw some sheets in the bathroom over there." Jenkins tread off through the small living room to find clean wrappings just as Rush started to come around—or so the elder thought.

The elder paused his examination of Erik and placed a hand on Rush's lower leg. "Hey son, are you okay?" His response was an eerily low and gravely growl. He quickly withdrew his hand and stared at the beast in worry. Rush began to twitch, as if he were fighting something in a nightmare. The elder tried to reach out to him again, "hey, big guy. You okay?" Rush growled again but instead of fidgeting, he snapped upright wide-eyed in bed and released a piercing howl that sounded as if his very soul was breaking. He was weeping profusely. Unabashed, he howled again, consumed with the agony of losing his family.

He quietened down a bit after he realized that he was causing panic in the humans surrounding him. He looked at the elder, tears shining in his yellow eyes, staining his muzzle, and sobbed a choked reply, "apologies. Day of loss." The elder's face

softened from his alarm as he moved from helping Jenkins—who was deftly picking debris of a 10mm bullet out of Erik's wound—to Rush's left side, nearest the edge of the bed. He smiled gently and patted the weeping giant's back. "I'm terribly sorry for your loss, young man." Redding leaned in and whispered to Rush, "I was hoping to meet you under better circumstances, you see. Your grandfather had told me of you, I wanted to have a nice reunion for you and Erik." He leaned out and continued, "But I guess Murphy's Law is still in effect ..."

Rush snuffed as choked on his sorrow and asked the elder, "Who is Murphy?" Elder Redding chuckled, "no one in particular, it's just a saying we have down here for when things go from bad to worse." Rush nodded and looked over at Erik, "Murphy's Law, huh?" The elder nodded, "yeah, the both of you decided to get shot up. Was it fun?" Rush shook his head. "No, just hurt." The elder patted Rush on the shoulder one good time and walked over to where Franklin was. He'd taken residence on the old white couch. The elder shook his head as he made his way through the living room to him, "Your turn. Let me see that wound of yours." Franklin nodded and turned his torso to put the elder directly in front of his left arm. He'd taken a bullet through his armor, but it wasn't too deep. "Well, for once Frankie, you're right, it's not that bad," the doctor exclaimed. "Hold tight while I get some forceps and a shot of something to numb it before I go digging 'round in your arm."

The elder looked over at Jenkins who finishing up the last sutures on Erik's calf. "Almost done here, sir." Elder Redding looked at the soldier's handiwork and said, "remind me to have Major Artie give you a commendation, those are some of the best sutures I've seen come out of our brigade." Jenkins nodded at the praise with a small smile, "Uh, sir, I started to take a look at the big guy here, but he wasn't having any." He finished by stabbing a needle in the air in Rush's direction who bared his teeth and let loose a low growl at Jenkins. As he recoiled from Rush's warning, Jenkins dug in his bag and handed the elder a syringe.

The elder smiled as he accepted the medication from Jenkins. "Young man, you don't like needles, do you," he asked as he waved a syringe full of ketamine in Rush's direction. Rush nodded abashedly. "Nothing good comes of them," he added. The elder nodded again, "Well, this is just a local anesthesia that will numb the wound; keeps my patients calm while I finish up their needlework. As a matter of fact, I used some on you earlier after Erik brought you in." Rush unconsciously rubbed his left shoulder then winced with pain and regret. "You should probably leave that alone 'til I'm done, son," the elder cautioned softly. Rush nodded then sat motionless and

stared at a pale Erik with worry while he waited for the elder to finish his work on Franklin.

The elder and Jenkins both walked back to Franklin. Jenkins continued on into the kitchenette to wash up as the elder sat next to Franklin on the couch and began to look at his lacerations. Frank was right, the wound wasn't bad at all, it was mostly the superficial epidermis that was damaged; a bit of shrapnel here and there was lodged into his skin. The elder gently pried the debris with a pair of forceps, piece by piece.

As he did so, he began to chat with Franklin. "So...what do you think about that giant wolf-thing in there? You think he's safe?" Franklin tried to shrug, but instead got yelled at for moving. "I don't know sir, it seems smart enough." He glanced through the doorway at Rush, he was gently scratching Erik's head. "Well, he certainly seems concerned for Erik's safety. I guess he's okay. Why, elder?" Franklin winced as the elder was struggling with a particularly gnarled piece of shrapnel. "Just curious, soldier. I haven't decided what to do with him yet ..." Franklin sat in silence as Jenkins took up residency on the couch next to him. "Scary, that thing is. You hear how it growled at me earlier? I'm pretty damn sure I saw some teeth that could rip a man apart, no problem."

The elder nodded at their worried banter and commented, "*it* does have a name. His name is Rush, and I think I've just decided that he's coming home with us." The elder paused, added three more sutures to Franklin's arm and then said, "You're done. Jenkins wrap this up, would you kindly? When you're done, the both of you should welcome our new initiate to his new, uh, clan."