

*I remember the day well; a terrifying, yet exciting occurrence that rarely happens. But here...here I don't know what to think, other than wondering why we both threw ourselves in this hell-hole for the fun of it.* The green, saber-toothed panda struggled to pay attention to the radar on his laptop while making sure the frequency on the scanner was in-tune with any and all of Iowa's storm spotting networks. The bumpy ride along county road E16 through the powerful wind and rain didn't make things easier to keep a steady hand on the dial and his laptop in place on its makeshift stand.

Thankful that he could still see out of his left eye, Niko glanced over to check on his mate. The blue bolf was focused, calm, yet his knuckles showed otherwise as they bulged from the tight grip Ryan had on the steering wheel, practically making the red and blue stripes on his paws stand out even more against his white fur. As they both ignored the garbled warnings to take shelter and stay away from certain areas near Prairieburg, Ryan glanced at the GPS on the dashboard of their armored SUV.

"Ok babe! I'm gonna need to make a hard left soon here!"

Niko glanced at the speedometer, the needle hovering between 85 and 90 miles per hour. "Hun! We're gonna get pulled over!"

*Tornadoes spotted in areas of Linn, Benton, Johnson, and Iowa counties. Watch for wind damage to power lines.*

Among the blowing rain and small balls of hail battering their vehicle, Ryan could just see the sign for their next turn. "Alright babe! Hang on!"

The panda had no time to react when his mate made the turn, his body shifted to the right as he gripped the door handle. The laptop was just about to fall over when he caught it with his other paw, readjusting it after they straightened out onto the next road: county X20. He panicked as his good eye went wide, checking over the device for damage. He breathed, relieved when he found it was still intact.

"Hun, you're insane."

"You know you love me," he cooed, "Besides, I'm so excited to see these this intense of a storm live!"

"Me too, but these chases can get danger--babe look out!" Niko gripped the bolf's arm fur tight as well as some skin.

A large sheet of metal flew towards them. Ryan swerved to the right just in time so they wouldn't get hit, but ended up driving further off the road into the dip of the gravel shoulder.

"Shit! Shit! Shit!" Ryan spun the wheel to the left once this happened and slammed on the gas. They sped up and out of the ditch and back onto the road. The wind, rain, and hail battered the SUV harder as they traveled North on X20 towards Prairieburg.

*Severe hail and high winds spotted in Prairieburg, Castle Grove, Coggon, and surrounding areas.*

*This is a tornado warning. Please seek shelter in a designated area immediately.*

Niko could feel his large body swerve with the vehicle. He hung on to the door handle and the laptop for dear life while they nearly crashed into a ditch.

"Man! How did I not *see* that?!"

"And yet *I'm* the one with a bum eye," he scoffed, "Next time, I'm driving."

"Fine. Fine."

He looked at the radar. Dark red swirls rotated and crawled away from where they were headed on the screen. And yet, they must be close to them, based on their location on the map. He looked out the windshield. Then back at the screen. And then back out the windshield.

"Keep going down this road a few miles past Prairieburg. Got some crazy shit going on in that area according to the radar."

"You got it!" Ryan got the speed back between 85 and 90, even as they speed straight through the small town and past the traffic light, which blinked red on all four sides and bouncing on its wires from the storm as if it was about to snap at any moment. The bolf had to press hard on the gas to keep his speed as the powerful wind and rain attacked the windshield.

And then, straight ahead of them and creeping to the right, was a large, dark grey and black cloud that seemed to span for miles over the countryside. Two funnel clouds touched down nearby, tearing up anything that was in their path.

"We going in?"

"We going in."

Ryan sped towards the storm cloud, the rumble of the engine was barely audible over the increasing intensity of the storm. Niko closed the laptop and set it by his feet, one paw on the door handle, the other on the wolf's arm.

The wind hit harder. The rain poured heavier. Several bolts of lightning struck amongst the mesh of clouds overhead. The hail fell harder and harder, growing larger and larger the further Ryan drove towards the storm cloud. The sounds of rain and hail punishing the metal armor of the SUV grew louder and louder as small cracks in the windows began to form.

Niko could feel his heart racing, his breathing getting heavier. He could tell his mate felt the same way as he gripped his arm. But experiencing passing through a bear's cage was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for them. They were not passing this up, even if they may get injured or killed.

He's made it 27 years so far, and he could make 27 more. The cancer may have taken his right eye, but he refused to let it take his life.

And yet, if this becomes their last date together, the green panda would rather leave this world with his blue wolf in a hellish storm than lying in a hospital bed because of an incurable disease.

The thought lingered in his mind as Ryan drove them closer and closer to the bear's cage. And that made him happy.