

## Chapter 78

The crowd howled in short, repeated intervals, encouraging the pups as they took their positions several feet away from the designated target boards, Enora's head swung to find her family, lips breaking into a grin before her sights found Greg, and she gave him a wave.

Greg waved back, a proud smile stretched across his face when he murmured, "Shoot them dead, sweetheart."

From his side, Sush questioned, "Isn't it 'knock them dead'?"

Eyes never taken off Enora while she took her position with the other pups, he responded, "No, this isn't about impressing anyone. It's about literally shooting down the competition."

Sush noted the pups aiming for the target board instead of each other - which came as a relief - and said, "I may be new here, but I don't think that's how it's going to go."

"It'd be a lot more interesting if it were. But the bast—" Greg cleared his throat when he remembered Little Blackfur was still with them and continued, "But the one who should be placed at the target board has already been expelled so finding a suitable target would be a problem."

Behind him, Juan offered, "Lucy mentioned Lionel is now in Connard - the kindergarten nea—"

Smack!

Hale delivered a slap to his biceps and hissed, "Don't give him any ideas."

Juan's hand snuck behind her and went to her waist as he pulled her to himself. "It's not as if he wasn't going to find out anyway."

Greg liked Juan that way, not the goody-two-shoes Blackfur was, though still not sadistic enough for his taste. He watched his sweetheart's first arrow fly and the orange tip came between the innermost and second innermost dot as a teacher came to see where the tip landed more on before writing the score on the board. Greg then waited for her to turn and lock eyes with him as she did an excited jump before turning back to the front, which was when Greg turned to Juan just slightly - not wanting to miss a thing on the field - and said, "I appreciate the intel, Alpha. It cuts short the hunting time."

Hale glowered at her husband, and as Juan stroked her side to smother her anger and disapproval, Juan uttered meekly but affectionately, "Baby, he's just saying that. We've known him for years. He's not going to do anything."

Though offended, Greg chose to say nothing, understanding the alpha had a pissed-off luna to calm, something that probably took precedence over the probable murder of a pup he didn't care for, that no one in the family cared for.

Despite the luna's assault, Sush found herself leaning into the warmth of the dynamic not just between the couple, but between the couple with Greg as well - the level of confidence that was there and the degree of trust placed on Greg's restraint.

In the trenches, apart from the mavericks and herself, Greg made himself seem so untouchable. Some hunters even dubbed him as a lone lycan, the only one at the top of his self-created pyramid. But she realized that he had more family that he let on. A real family, not one for publicity. He hadn't shut up about his sweetheart, but Sush wished he hadn't shut up about the rest of the family too, or brought up about them at least.

She overheard bits of the conversations between the more grown-up pups and the adults, stole glimpses at their interaction, attracted by the

vibrancy and warmth radiating from each creature, so different from the way the royal family members carried themselves in interspecies mediations and meetings - always cold and deathly. She counted herself lucky they were less - much less - malicious with her, even before Greg came into the picture.

She watched Greg watch Enora, and fell in love with another part of him that no one beyond his circle would have known existed - his love and attention for a pup that wasn't even his. It was beautiful. Sush turned back to the field just in time to see Enora's next arrow fly and hit the bullseye, and a loud cheer came from everyone in their section - herself included - as the other pups shot to their feet and punched to the sky in celebration.

Greg snuck a hand across the bench to reach for hers when he said, "It's her first perfect shot from that distance."

Enora was so happy that she squealed for a second, then kept the excitement to herself when it was time to fire the next arrow, vaguely remembering her parents' words about being graceful with a triumph and a good sport with a defeat. As the next arrow fell more to the second innermost circle than the innermost, she huffed and concentrated on her final shot, taking her time to get the precision right, blocking out the noise around her.

Her brows arched, her sweaty hair stuck to her forehead, her eyes focused - the same look Greg had as his wallpaper. Lewis got off the bench and moved as near to the edge as possible, with Sush's eyes going between him and Enora, undecided on where to look as the boy took several shots of his cousin, but waiting for the one shot that he felt mattered most.

The other participants had fired their arrows by then. If there were cheers and shouts of encouragement, Enora didn't hear them. When her hands steadied, she let go, holding her breath as the arrow left her grip

and landed - edge-to-edge - on the innermost circle, inciting another loud cheer from behind her. Lewis's fast hands work his way with the camera, making sure he was fast enough in getting pictures of Enora leaping then waving at her favorite uncle, Uncle Greg smiling with nothing short of pride, and the way his family members' faces lit up. Dawdling back to Sush, Lewis showed her the shots.

Over lunch, he climbed into the seat between his mother and Sush, asking the latter which of the almost-same pictures she liked more, and they'd discuss the details of each one before Lewis decided on which to discard.

The sight warmed Annie and Christian. Their son got along well enough with the rest of the family, but he didn't have a creature he particularly cliqued with. Ianne had Reida since the day they could recognize scents. And although Lewis got along with Ken and Enora alright, he never really gravitated to them.

Greg, whenever Enora didn't need his attention, took peeks at Little Blackfur's shots, and he realized - in dismay - that he wanted a few of them, especially of the one with Enora concentrating. He'd tell anyone that it wasn't the same as the one he had on his phone, even though his sweetheart's posture and the competitive glint in her eyes were exactly the same.


Now, the only problem was that he had to ask. A Blackfur.



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