

Chapter 23 – “It's A Dog-Eat-Dog World”

"Okaaay ~good boy~ calm now..." Kai tried placatingly as he got to his feet, finding this situation all too familiar to when he was once confronted with a stray dog in a dark shipyard as a mere homeless kid.

But this predator clearly wasn't having it as it suddenly charged. As he suffused his mind with his usual battle calm, Kai, in one smooth motion drew the dagger sheathed at his hip, right before the wolf lunged and tackled him to the ground.

A pained yelp escaped the wolf's throat as its movements suddenly turned frantic, panicking. Kai had used its own momentum to impale itself onto his dagger, embedding the blade into its chest and puncturing its lung.

With a wrench, he twisted the blade and threw the dying wolf off him, letting it choke on its own blood. Although securing the kill had been clean, quick, and efficient, that didn't mean that Kai escaped unscathed, the bleeding wound that crossed his shoulder and collarbone from where it had bitten him quite evident of that.

Although he would've finished off the whimpering wolf instead of letting it die in unnecessary misery, Kai he wasn't out of danger yet. One small mention from his hunting excursion with Elyn and Hedric had stuck with him - the fact that no healthy wolf was ever alone.

The snarls at the entrance of the cavemouth proved just how right those words had been.

Two new wolves had shown up, and Kai could only curse his shitty luck. Although the first wolf had been easily dispatched, that had been because it not only attacked him alone but did also did extremely predictably so.

Fighting off two predators with maws that could maul his flesh and claw that could rake his body, was less... *easy* - and very much so.

Kai didn't have much time to ponder his thoughts though. It was almost as if upon seeing the whimpering mess of their kin dying had thrown them into a rabid frenzy, charging simultaneously with saliva frothing at their mouths and menace in their eyes.

In a grunt of effort, Kai hefted up the now limp wolf, chucking it at one of the two wolves and causing it to collide with the dying one in a tumble. Although this was in no way going to harm the frenzied beast, it would at least slow down one of them.

However, instead of the same predictable lunge that he hoping for, the now leading wolf simply darted around him, snapping at his legs whilst he warded it off with the swings of his short blade.

It was at times like these Kai could see the benefit of having a sword or a weapon with a longer reach, but he didn't really have the time right now to regret not learning how to use them so he just threw those thoughts aside.

Suddenly losing his footing as a loose piece of rock twisted his ankle, Kai let out a hiss of pain as the wolf lunged for the opportunity, biting down on his leg and causing red hot pain to flare out as his skin was torn and the wolf's ragged teeth grated against the bone of his shin.

"AH! FUCK!"

The pain was glaring, briefly cutting through the adrenaline coursing through his veins, and Kai struggled to stay upright as the wolf tugged and twist its maw that was so firmly clutched around the meat and bone of his flesh.

Falling over, Kai managed to score a slash across one of the wolf's eyes and splitting it open. With a pained yelp, it let go and reeled back, but the damage had already been done. His leg was mauled, and he could barely move it as some of his fibers or tendons must've been severed - but at the least, it didn't seem to bleed all that much, his arteries having been missed.

It wasn't over though. The other wolf decided now that it was its turn after having finally recovered from its tumble with the dead wolf that Kai had thrown at it.

Shielding his face and neck barely in time with the arm he held his dagger, the wolf clamped down on it, piercing skin and flesh.

"Get off me you fucking mutt!" Kai screamed in fury, the pain and adrenaline he felt turning into burning hot anger and bloodlust as the hunger deep inside him was riled up through the indignation of being treated like prey.

The wolf was both clawing his chest open, ripping apart the fabric and skin beneath, and mauling the flesh of his forearm with its ghastly fangs.

Letting go of the dagger, he caught it with his other free hand. And in one quick motion, he juted the pointy piece of metal up into the wolf's neck, moving past its grey fur and sinking deep into its flesh.

But instead of the wolf letting go, this just caused its frenzy to deepen into desperation. Unlike most other predators who would let go of if their prey fought back and managed to fatally harm them, this wolf simply went into a do-or-die madness and escalated its thrashing of him - much to Kai's increasing chagrin and anger.

Even worse, the other wolf whose eye had just been rendered blind, joined in again, latching on to his thigh, biting deep into his sensitive muscles. Kai screamed in pain, the feeling of having his flesh being forcefully torn apart and ravaged; mind-rending.

Luckily, the wolf atop him finally began losing strength, its life coming to its end as blood gushed out of the wound and splattered across his face and the smile that began stretching across it.

The taste of blood was metallic but caused a sense of finality and power - to taste the life essence of your foe. Kai's eyes turned into pinpricks, a surge of strength returning to his aching and exhausted muscles.

Gripping firmly around the dagger lodged in the wolf's neck, Kai ripped it out, only to plunge it directly back in with a sickening squelch. The wolf wailed, but still didn't let go, almost resigning to its fate but having decided to take him down with it. At least so that the remains of its pack could eat.

Kai didn't stop there though. Screaming incoherently into the face of the panicked wolf, Kai stabbed its neck, over and over again, blood going everywhere as the meat was turned into a tapestry of gore.

When its moth finally went limp around his arm and its body collapsed atop him, it was unceremoniously shoved off, giving a clear view to the only other still living wolf gnawing at his leg.

Kai tried to sit up to slash at the wolf, but his body was almost out of energy, so his swipe only slashed air. Laying there as he felt his leg being torn apart by ragged teeth, Kai felt the world swivel as pain and exhaustion clouded his addled mind.

But as the wolf noticed him going still, it stopped its thrashing, backing up to get a good look at its prey and what both its kin had died to bring down.

It nuzzled his leg to see if there was any response, but it just limply rolled with the wolf's muzzle nudging of the still bleeding piece of meat.

Sniffing up along Kai's body, the half-blind wolf didn't see the certain cues of his tensing hand, gripping tight around the haft of the dagger at his side. Because of its now restricted vision, it also didn't have time to react when the blade all of a sudden slammed into the side of its muzzle, severing the tendons of its jaw.

A pained yelp escaped the wolf as it swiped out defensively, scoring a raking hit across Kai's face. A claw ran down from his upper cheek, all the way down to his chin, slicing his upper and lower lip in two with the gum of teeth clearly on display in a grizzly sight of mutilation.

But Kai didn't stop. The beast inside was lending him strength, and even though his body was running on fumes and had severe blood loss, the hunger did not allow him to give up here, and neither did he.

Feeling a hunger to kill unlike ever before, Kai forcefully grabbed the wolf's now loose and dangling jaw, yanking it towards him. A sickening ripping sound sounded out as he tore more of the jaw's flesh loose and popped loose a bone.

Heaving the whimpering wolf into a tussle, finding both his good and mauled arm clutched tightly around both parts of the wolf's muzzle with his hands, Kai began slowly exerting his dwindling strength.

The wolf tried desperately to pull back, flailing around in Kai's grapple and scratching him, but he didn't let up. There was nothing that could stop Kai now, pain was already long gone in his semi-conscious state of battle lust.

"DIE!" He screamed, summoning the last vestiges of strength from the power within his ravaged body.

With the strain, the sound of bone dislodging and flesh being ripped sounded out to in the cave, the wolf falling limply to the cold rock ground as its head had almost been split in half from its muzzle.

It was utterly silent in the cave, the only sound being the thudding of his slowly beating heart in Kai's ear like a dying cadence. As he swayed, he too fell to the ground, practically atop the wolf who was dying in its last death-throes.

Blood caked his face, both his own and not, so ghastly that consciousness shouldn't have been possible at this state. But he just stared into the rock ceiling of the cave, his labored breathing the only indication that he truly was still alive.

But even so, with all the pain, agony, and blood loss, Kai didn't even feel the fear of his death, he merely... smiled.

Because he...

Had **won**.