

Prompt: Character Journey

Memory: "Loss"

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Oh No!

It was a special day in the family coliseum; many of the young pups had been called to meet their parents on the sands. Tenet and Leviathan were both present, lined up with the others in front of their parents Precept and Zoht.

Tenet was barely present. He had been woken up for this 'extra important family meeting' and his eyes were more sunken than usual. He barely stopped himself from yawning or groaning, but hadn't the consciousness to cease his occasional ear flicks and nose twitches of sheer boredom. He wished to go back to bed, even though the sun was shining high above the Veldt.

Zoht, meanwhile, stood next to his mate with disdain for the unruly litter that stood before them. His fur bristled with annoyance, and the tip of his massive tail twitched back and forth. But, he did not say anything just yet. It was Precept who called for the meeting, after all.

Leviathan stood next to Tenet, his eyes were wide open and he stood alert. He nudged Tenet slightly as to wake him up a little.

Precept glared down at her pups, and she opened her mouth to speak.

"Today, we are going to test your abilities. We will zero in on your weaknesses, and we will stamp them out. Because when you're up against a true fighter, they will spare no expense in your suffering."

Leviathan's nudging did nothing to better Tenet's condition, but when Precept mentioned they had been called for yet another trial by combat, one of his ears perked up. *Great*. This must be purposeful planning to make up for him sleeping till noon. It wasn't *his* fault he was the one forced to stand watch, last night... well, it was. But he wouldn't admit any mistakes made the other day.

Tenet straightened his neck's posture in a feeble attempt to appear awake, lest he get picked on even more. He really didn't need this today.

Once Precept had finished her introduction, Zoht followed.

"We will each select you, one by one, and your prowess will be tested against either myself, or your mother. We will not be holding back like he have in the past, so you best give us your all," he explained gruffly, looking down the line of pups as he spoke. He pointedly noticed Tenet's expression and a few of the others' dispositions as he spoke, and mentally marked them all down. "Who will go first?"

Leviathan gingerly stepped forwards. Clearly nobody else was going to go, so it would be better for him to just get it over with. "I'll go," he said, his voice slightly wavering. "If nobody else is going to, then I'm not waiting around." Leviathan looked back at his 3 other siblings, and gave them a look as if to say 'watch closely.'

Precept stepped forwards in response, waiting for her son to make the first move. Leviathan moved to her side. He'd noticed that Precept's bulk culminated in her massive forepaws, and was not as evenly distributed towards her flank. He struck out with his claws, only for Precept to dodge out of the way. He fell to the ground and was immediately hit by a swipe from one of Precept's paws. As he rose to his feet, he felt something wet underfoot. He was bleeding, probably not deep enough to scar (like his parents would want to leave their young with exploitable and open wounds). He winced slightly, before launching towards her midsection. He intended to bite, but Precept moved enough that only his claws connected. They raked lightly down her side, and Leviathan fell to the ground once more. This time, Precept pinned him down and growled.

"You are leaving yourself open with such heavy strikes out of the gate! Utterly disgraceful! Get up and try again!" she bellowed, removing her weight.

Leviathan pulled himself back up. *"Alright, so make lighter strikes, then,"* he thought. *"Get close enough to safely land a heavier strike."*

This time, Leviathan dropped his head and paced around Precept. He let out a low growl and swiped out at her upper left foreleg. Precept responded by turning around and swiping her claws towards Leviathan, and that's where he made his first heavy strike. He bit down as hard as he could on his mother's foreleg. Precept only grunted before throwing him off.

"You're done for today," she said simply. "Expect to be punished harder for attempts like that."

Tenet took advantage of his parents being distracted by this display; he rubbed his eyes and shook himself all over while Leviathan was 'tested' by the group's mother. By the time Leviathan had been thrown aside and sent back to the line, Tenet was standing as straight as he could despite his drowsiness. He certainly still loathed his turn, though; he was positive this was planned for this time on purpose.

Zoht paid no mind to Tenet's antics even though he caught them in the corner of his eye. He remained focused on Leviathan's performance, taking note of his weaknesses and how both he and his adversary took advantage of them or changed them. He was mildly disappointed with Leviathan's continued failures, but sensed some potential. Given the rest of the lineup, Zoht feared Leviathan may be one of the better fighters that day... he supposed everyone had to start somewhere, but wished his own pups had more mettle to them from the beginning.

He only responded visibly with a slow head shake, and the uttered words "You should know better."

Leviathan pulled himself to his feet and bowed his head deeply. "I'm greatly sorry, it won't happen again!" He said hastily, limping back to the lineup. He shot a look at Tenet. "You better have woken up by now, they... they really aren't playing around." he whispered to his sibling.

Precept returned to Zoht's side, before locking her gaze on Tenet and Leviathan, and letting out a low growl.

"I'll be fine," Tenet whisper-muttered in response. His eyes said otherwise, but it's Tenet: he would never admit weakness no matter how obvious it was. Not that it mattered, because his parents could very clearly see it.

Zoht turned to the line, and agreed with the growl of his mate. He looked Tenet in the eyes, and sternly stated, "If you're so sure of that, then you're up next. Come forward; you'll be against me."

Tenet unwillingly obliged, stepping up to his father. Zoht was built more even than Precept, but his forward strength was still not something to be trifled with. Especially not with Tenet's spindly neck, which did not yet allow him to tower over everyone else. Instead, it made a glaring weakness on top of his fatigue.

Zoht lowered himself to the ground, waiting for Tenet to make the first move as was custom. Tenet took note of Zoht's massive tail, which he would have to avoid, and figured Zoht's front half would be the easiest to target. Tenet paced around his father for a few moments, before lunging with claws outstretched. Zoht moved out of the way, but Tenet caught himself on his feet instead of falling and turned around fast enough to just barely counter Zoht's charge. The two's horns connected, due to Tenet's neck meeting him at the eyes, and the two horn wrestled for a few moments.

Unfortunately for Tenet, he could not match Zoht's strength, both due to the difference in size and fatigue, and his head was tossed aside, allowing Zoht to rip

open a shallow cut in his shoulder. Tenet grit his teeth at the pain but moved past it, swiping at his father's face with a massive paw. Zoht moved out of the way and returned the favor, only for Tenet to move his head to the side. Tenet was tiring quickly, and he raised to his hind legs to deal a returning blow.

Zoht rammed right into his son's stomach, knocking Tenet to his back, and quickly stood atop him. With one paw on Tenet's chest, and one on his neck, he had the smaller kirunhound hopelessly pinned.

"You should know better than to try something like that, especially after Leviathan's display. You ought to use that twig neck of yours properly if you don't want it snapped," Zoht grumbled, still on top of Tenet.

Tenet only groaned softly in reply. His energy for the day was already exhausted, and he knew any fight against being pinned like this would be fruitless.

Precept was to handle the next two. She dispatched the first of their siblings with ease, as Monolith made the crucial mistake of charging headfirst at Precept.

Precept let out a snort of amusement, before charging headfirst at her pup, and knocking them onto their side with a sickening crack.

"If you were even the least bit competent, then you wouldn't have broken any ribs today!" she growled. "Utterly PITIFUL. At least Leviathan and Tenet put even the most MINISCULE effort into their sorry attempts."

Leviathan pricked his ears up. Being used as a 'better example' definitely meant you weren't the worst. Of course, not that it mattered much. Zoht and Precept were rarely, if ever, *proud* of them.

"LEVIATHAN! Drag your sorry excuse of a sibling out of the way, NOW!" Precept roared. Leviathan quickly scrambled to support his sibling as he walked them back to the lineup. To say that everyone was afraid of Zoht and Precept was an understatement. From their first play-fights, the Kirunhound pair observed their

young with malice, clearly disappointed that the most recent litter weren't warriors out of the womb. It was almost... instinctual. To be afraid of them. Any resistance would be... would be an awful outcome, to say the least.

"I've had it!" blurted out their final sibling, their sister, Charter. Leviathan shook himself from his thoughts to observe the commotion happening. Charter had a bleeding gash running up to her shoulder, from her attempt to rake her horn across Precept's shoulder. "All this... training! This isn't what a childhood should be like!" she stamped one of her hooves. "This is ABUSE! That's what this is! And I'm done with it! I hate you both!"

Precept's eyes flared. "You ungrateful WHELP!" she screamed. Within an instant, Precept was on top of her daughter. "You think we don't CARE? Do you think this is all because we DESPISE YOU?? If we truly hated you, we'd have left you for the mindless animals to feast upon!" She raised one paw up high, over her daughter, and clawed across her midsection. "If you are too blind to see that, then I suppose we SHOULD have left you for dead!" She raised her paw again, this time slamming it down on Charter's hind legs, resulting in a resounding crack, and pained screams from Charter. Precept continued attacking her incapacitated daughter, until the struggling legs and tail visible behind Precept's bulk went limp. When Precept stepped away, seeing her daughter's limp body, a brief flash of regret was visible on her face, before turning to rage, as she looked to the rest of the litter. "Let this be a lesson! If you are not strong, you end up like THAT." she said, flicking her tail towards the fresh corpse. Her posture seemed to be less confident, but none of the pups would notice.

Leviathan could only stare at his sister's bruised corpse. He did not say anything. He did not make any sounds. He just stood. And stared.

Tenet had been released before *Monolith's* attempt was made, so he sat in the line with the others. Or he did, until *Monolith* was rendered immobile and Charter dared to step up against the litter's parents.

Tenet's ears pinned against his head and his eyes widened slightly at the display Precept made with Charter. He had not seen such levels of violence yet- not towards other kirunhound, and especially not towards his own flesh and blood. He dared not move, he dared not speak, he just stared at the lifeless body that Precept stood beside. This was the day Tenet learned that *no one* could be trusted. Not even his own mother could be trusted anymore. He always knew his parents were brutal, but this... this was unheard of. Unspeakable. *Unforgettable.*

Zoht was unable to see what his mate was doing before it was too late. Unlike the pups, he noticed Precept's posture change, and realized her regret, but he said nothing. His expression remained stoic, even though it hurt him, too, that Charter had passed. He slowly walked over to Precept and leaned to her ear to whisper, so the pups would not hear his remark.

"You know we could have sent her to the Den of Decay, right?"

Precept huffed. "I was not thinking in the moment. That would have been favorable."

Leviathan looked towards his siblings. Monolith was steel-faced and unmoving, and Tenet's gaze was locked onto the body of his sister.

"Only a few more years of this," Leviathan whispered to his siblings. "Only a few more years, and we're done."

Tenet peeled his eyes away from the sorry sight to look at Leviathan. "Y-yeah, if we *survive*," he retorted quietly. "Those two are waiting for a chance to snap my neck. They've breathed down it my whole life."

Zoht sighed at Precept's reply, and turned to his pups. "We are done here for now, you are all dismissed. Go back inside."

Leviathan nodded. "I've never seen them look at any of us with any pride. We're definitely expendable, and this just confirms it." He said, turning to help Monolith inside.

Precept turned back to all of them, to say one final thing: "You'd all best hope you don't die as easily as she did." Before turning back to her mate.

Tenet turned around to return inside without looking back, but he silently agreed with Leviathan's comment. They clearly *were* expendable- and with how many older siblings they had, it was no surprise. But Tenet had always thought that the family could be trusted. Even if his parents treated the pups like this, he thought that they could be trusted. They gave birth to him and the others, after all... but no. Precept and Zoht are just as bad as everything they claim is dangerous outside. They're ruthless, violent, and cruel; Tenet betted that even the Den of Decay's hyenas weren't as cruel to their own kin, and those *things* were the most awful creatures in the veldt.

As Tenet walked, one of his newest tenets filled his mind. It was required to have a strict list of rules to follow for each self, in addition to the parents, and Tenet now had a slightly more complete list.

*"Trust nobody. Keep friends close, enemies close, strangers close. Always be on guard."*

Zoht, meanwhile, glanced at Charter's body, and then returned his gaze to Precept. "We should probably set up the burial pit for this," he said, feeling he did not need to gesture to the corpse to accentuate his point. It was clear enough. "Help me carry the body over there; we can have the pups gather firewood later."

Precept nodded, pushing her head underneath the corpse so it would rest on her back. "She just needed to follow orders. That's the reason she's dead." Precept told herself, clearly trying to cope.

Zoht gave a worried sigh, then helped Precept remove the corpse from the family's arena in silence. It was going to be a long day.

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