

It was a simple affair. Best two out of three would have the bragging rights for the next year and while that was not much of a prize, considering there would be no other compensation for effort put forth, but that was all Clover needed to get into the zone. He was notoriously competitive. A mean streak left over from a time that didn't matter anymore and hadn't for a long time. After all, he had been a sibling in his previous life and sibling rivalries could be life or death situations depending on the context.

"We need to pick teams," Opal said. "That's how this sort of thing works. We pick teams, we get thirty minutes to set up a fortress and make our ammo, and then we fight! Last one standing wins."

Paprika huffed, unamused that he had been dragged into this, but once he saw Pepper slide off a pile of old crates in preparation, his tune changed immediately.

"I pick Pepper," Paprika said. "She is on my team."

Opal winced. "I mean. I was going to just have us pick straws but if Pepper is okay with it, then I guess that works too."

"It makes no difference to me." Pepper made her way over to one side of the prepared snowball fighting grounds. It has been set up for them in the Hidden Garden and was cleared of all the unsavory debris left over from the last fight.

Opal shrugged and turned to Clover. "Guess we're paired up then. But just between you and me, I'm more of a lover than a fighter."

Clover clenched a fist, the rush of competition flowing through his mist-filled body, the urge to just start fighting washing over him. This was a surefire win and both he and Paprika knew it. "I'll handle it."

"Uhm, this is not like doing stuff for the house, dude. It's a snowball fight. I don't think it works like that?"

"I said I'll handle it."

Opal winced again as Clover took to setting up their snowballs with a frightening efficiency, a manic gleam in his eyes. He wasn't going to interfere with whatever was going on there but he felt a little bit of guilt as he was certain that the other team had no idea what was coming for them.

"We are going to die!" Paprika exclaimed, putting forth more effort than he had ever done in his new life into making the snow fortress.

"It's a snowball fight," Pepper responded with mild disinterest as she made snowballs. "Snow has not killed anyone."

This was patently untrue since avalanches did exist but this was a snowball fight and not an avalanche.

"You don't understand. Clover is a monster when it comes to competitive stuff like this. He's going to kill one of us and it's just a matter of who is the last one standing."

"We'll be fine."

"You say that now but he has to be the first target. Get rid of him by any means necessary or we will not survive."

Pepper looked up at Paprika, who had built quite the barrier for them to hide behind. "Any means necessary? That will be excessive. It is not life or death."

"Humiliation is quite the death sentence if you know how to weaponize it."

"If it comes to that, then so be it." Pepper continued to make snowballs of various size. Some of them had chunks of ice or rocks in them. Some had bursts of wind. Some were just packed snow. "These ones will be for Clover." She pointed to the dangerous pile. "And these will be for Opal. I do not want him to be hurt too badly. Just cold."

Paprika inspected the snowball piles. "These are indistinguishable from each other."

"Then I hope your instincts are honed."

Paprika did not respond but he had the suspicion that this snowball fight tournament would be down to Clover and Pepper. There was a terrible look in her eye. One of extreme violence and apathy. She would be the final decider of victory for their team.

Clover, obviously was the decider for the other team and he and Opal were just going to be caught up in the crosshairs. This was going to be a miserable experience, but it was just a matter of getting it over with as soon as possible.

Opal and Clover had no game plan, as Opal was making a pathetic looking snowfort and Clover knew that of all the participants, he was the lead among them. This would come down to him and likely Pepper, as Paprika knew when to be difficult and when not to be. This was one of those times not to be. When the whistle had blown, Clover leapt out of cover, snowballs in hand, racing for the other team.

Paprika threw as many snowballs as he could manage before he was showered in snowballs that also varied between balls with rocks, ice, and plain snow. It was a massacre. He never stood a chance and once Clover was upon him with the fire of war in his heart, Paprika gave his best effort, but ultimately could not bear Clover in a fierce competition. It was like staring into the mouth of the devil himself. Like brushing up against the madness of the sea God.

Pepper on the other hand was throwing the softer snowballs at Opal as he tried and failed to hit any target with anything.

"Hey no fair! You have the height advantage!"

Pepper did not have much of an advantage, but she did cease her fire for the time being.

"You missed every single shot you made."

"And?"

Pepper patted Opal on the leg as high up as she could reach. "Are you sad that we are not on a team together?"

Opal made his lower lip tremble in false sadness. "We would have been a great team I think. I make a pretty snow castle and you..."

"Obliterate the competition?"

"Well I was going to say make a pretty snow castle too but I guess if you want to obliterate the competition, you can do that too." Opal flinched in an equally false fear. "Are you going to obliterate me?"

Pepper gathered up some snow and pressed it onto Opal. "If we are on opposite teams I have to. But if you just fall down and pretend to tap out, I don't think your partner will notice. He's attacking my partner right now."

"PEPPER! PEPPER HELP!"

"That is probably Paprika."

What followed was the most harrowing series of cries and screams followed by total silence. Opal fell down into the snow, pretending to be dead.

"Oh no, you defeated me!"

Pepper gathered up more snow and dropped it on Opal as he made a snow angel in glee.

Clover would be upon her soon. And Paprika did say defeat him by any means necessary.