

Chapter 10:
Glif 6th, Grada
Year 10,053 AE
(Just Outside The Nigelle Farm; Okatako)

Ka'harja and Distro hurried towards the caravan. Their pace was slow, as both were exhausted and sore, but Ka'harja thought they'd made good time. He could see people in the distance gathered in front of the caravan. There were a lot of people; almost five times more than had been at the caravan before.... *Two troops.*

Ka'harja swallowed as he and his mother crept closer. They used the uneven ground to their advantage and slipped from ditch to ditch, careful not to be seen as they got close enough to hear the argument.

'We only want the runaways!' hissed a foxen woman. She lashed her golden tail angrily and stepped towards Sken and Dena, who stood bravely before the Har'pies. 'Give them to us, and we'll leave peacefully.'

'Peacefully?' Sken scoffed. 'What, before or after you *murder* them?'

The foxen hissed like a cat and Ka'harja thought if he could see her face she would have been baring her teeth. 'What do you care about a couple of nurlak breeders? They're worthless scabs! That one—' she motioned to Dena. 'She's too old to bear children! All she does is waste food! And that one—' she pointed to Stars, who cowered at the back of the caravaners, hugged defensively by Annanyn. 'Is as dumb as dirt and twice as useless! Bearing children is all she'll ever be good for!'

'Unlike you, we tend to define someone's worth by who they are and what they choose to do,' Sken's own hiss was twice as loud as the Har'py's, and spittle sprayed from her gills as she screeched unhappily. 'Not by what we can get out of them!'

A second Har'py stepped forward; a nurlak. Ka'harja saw Dena stumble back and realised that this must have been Lah'kort.

'They're not your kind!' he growled. 'Tarr farfah tirr!'

'Anyone with a smile and a wanderlust is our kind!' Sken spat back. 'And we will protect them; no matter what!'

Lah'kort scowled, as if Sken's words had been offensive, while the caravan sent up a cheer of agreement.

'They are *mine!*' Lah'kort screeched, stepping past the first Har'py and coming nose-to-nose with Sken, who didn't even flinch. 'They are *my* blood! *My* property! My kekik and our zelkin; and my new berr!'

Dena inhaled deeply, setting her trembling jaw, and growled at Lah'kort, 'You think so, but the child is farfeh yalfit! A dassen yalfit! It denies you!'

Lah'kort lifted a hand to his mother, threatening to strike her. 'Neg'an would never betray me and do what I have forbidden!'

'I have!' Stars cried over the crowd. Annanyn hugged her tighter, flaring her gills at the Har'py as Stars continued. 'I have made love with Fabecut! And I love our berr! Tarr is not yours! Farfah berr is made from *kosson!*'

Face twisted with rage, Lah'kort forgot his mother and lunged in Stars' direction;

he threw Sken aside and charged at the caravan guards, who cut him off. He looked about them furiously and stepped back before he took a deep breath and grinned. 'That's alright, Neg'an. I forgive you. Come back now, and I'll let the child live.... If it's a zelkin. I could do with another daughter.'

Ka'harja felt his stomach churn and he gagged. He couldn't believe what he'd just heard; he'd only half-believed Stars when she'd talked about Lah'kort but... seeing him in person....

'I'll punch your dick in so hard you'll become your own daughter!' Sken grabbed Lah'kort from behind and threw him back towards his troop. 'Then you can go *fuck yourself!*

'YOU FISH-FACED KAKA'LI!' Lah'kort scrambled to his feet and lunged at Sken. His hand almost met Sken's cheek. But at the last moment Dena slammed into him and he stumbled back. He struggled against his mother as she grappled at his face with all of her arms, desperate to get a hold on anything she could.

His hair, his ears, his skin; she dug her nails deep into every part she could reach and cut short his angry cry by sinking her teeth into his throat.

Blood gurgled out of his mouth and into his lungs as he tried to scream. He pushed against Dena, desperately trying to get her off as she wrapped her legs tight around his lower shoulders and dragged her sharp nails down his cheeks.

She brought him closer, and then.... She unhooked her legs and kicked away from him with a horrible spray of blood.

A rush of air escaped Lah'kort and he hit the ground with a thud; his throat half-hanging from his neck, oozing onto the damp grass as he convulsed and grabbed at nothing.

Everyone watched in silence as he gave one last horrible choking gasp and fell still.

And then Dena turned her predatory stare to the foxen woman, who stumbled back three steps and shouted with fear and surprise.

'How did— How did you learn to— You're kizza kiita!'

'I was only three when my yalfit stole me and my kekik and brought us to the Heck'ne,' Dena spat her son's blood on the ground and rose to her feet. She held the Har'py's gaze while she did, and Ka'harja was glad her dislike of him was as small as it was; he was sure if she gave *him* that look he'd drop dead just from the force of it. 'It's been fifty-two eclipses... do you think I've survived this long by being *weak?*'

The Har'py troops stepped forward, preparing for a fight, and Ka'harja felt panic rise in his chest; there were so many Har'pies! The caravan was outnumbered five-to-one. He couldn't bear the thought of watching them die and without thinking he rushed out from his hiding place.

'Hey! Har'pies! Or should I say, uh.... *Oh I didn't think this through!*

The woman who had been heckling Dena turned abruptly, shouting in surprise, and stopped when she saw Ka'harja. They stared at each other for a brief moment; a dawning recognition washing over them both as they stared.

Ka'harja realised that it was Kay'oten at the same time she realised who he was. She rushed forward, so angry Ka'harja thought she might burst into flames as she came at him.

He didn't even realise he was screaming until Distro slammed into Kay'oten and sent her tumbling across the ground.

'Touch my son,' Distro growled in a tone that made Ka'harja shiver from his ears to his tail. 'And I will rip your face off and shove it so far down your throat that you'll have to give birth to get it out again!'

Kay'oten didn't move from her spot on the ground as Distro continued to threaten her. She stared at the woman's oozing wound with wide eyes, as if she couldn't believe Distro was still standing with such an injury.

Almost half a minute passed after Distro stopped shouting before Kay'oten was able to compose herself. She scrambled to her feet and faced Ka'harja's mother with a sour face. 'He's not *your* son! I don't remember you being there when he was born! I'm pretty sure it was just me and Pert'ana there when I shat the little hal'kaka out!'

'So *you're* Kay'oten?' a wave of realisation washed over Distro's face. She stared for a moment before letting out an unearthly shriek of rage and lunging forward. She punched Kay'oten in the nose and spat on her as she hit the ground. '*You're* the bitch who hurt my boy!'

'Don't you *dare* hit me!' Kay'oten staggered to her feet, ignoring the trail of blood that rolled down her lip. 'Do you have *any* idea who I am? I'm Kay'oten! Strongest warrior of—'

'You're a stupid bitch with an ugly face, that's what you are!' Distro interrupted. 'I'm going to rip out your fucking teeth and stab you in the eyes with them!'

'What kind of threat is that?' exclaimed Kay'oten. 'What is *wrong* with you?'

'Mum, stop!' Ka'harja grabbed his mother's arm and tried to pull her away from Kay'oten, but she tugged out of his grip and stepped closer to the Har'py.

'You think you have more right to my son than I do?' Distro growled. 'I know how you Har'pies do things! I challenge you to Gra'gahoo da!'

'A fight to the death? Alright; that's fine with me. Winner gets the runaways,' Kay'oten wiped her bloody lip, and her eyes darted from Distro to Ka'harja. '*All* of them.'

Chapter End.

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