

Mother-Daughter Hunt

By C. Jade Wyton

Taz'zar has recently become the mother of her partner's adult children and, wanting to pay special attention to the lonely Ki'mor, she invites her new daughter to come hunting with her. It is clear that Ki'mor wants Taz'zar's approval and Taz'zar is more than happy to give it.

Contains descriptions of animal death and mentions of ableism.

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The sun beat down hot and relentless against the empty riverbed. The cracked, dry clay that once kept the water from soaking deep into the thirsty dirt crumbled underfoot; crunching like pebbles as it broke into a fine powder and dusted the bare talons of the harpy pair that followed its trail.

*It was haunting, Taz'zar thought. Like the footprint of something so big it could not be comprehended by eyes as small as her own; a mark that left a deep, foreboding feeling of power much greater than mortals could ever wield.*

*'There was water here, once,' Ki'mor stated.*

*'I know, my zelkin,' Taz'zar said, softly.*

*Zelkin.*

It was that word again, coming out of her mouth without her meaning to say it.

*Zelkin.*

*Daughter.*

That word still felt so foreign on her tongue. Taz'zar had only joined her partner's family six months ago and though his adult children were now also her own, it was still something she was getting used to saying aloud.

*'It's dried up now,' Ki'mor continued.*

*'These things happen,' Taz'zar sighed. 'We can try digging, but I don't hold much hope that we would find anything.'*

*'No point,' Ki'mor mumbled, scratching at the dirt in that strange way Taz'zar had been warned she might do. 'It would be stagnant.'*

She had something wrong in her brain, people said. She was *hakalika*, they whispered.... Harmless, now. But not always. In her childhood she had been erratic, and in her adolescence she had been violent. And though she was calm now other harpies —both inside and outside their family— still avoided her for it.

*'If it's dirty it can be cleaned; if it's stagnant it cannot.'*

*'Correct, my zelkin.'*

That was why Taz'zar had asked her to come out hunting. It wasn't healthy for Ki'mor to be on her own as much as she was. The only person who ever seemed to make time for her was her father, and that just wasn't enough. Not really.

Not for a harpy.

*'We might find toads if we dig,' Ki'mor suggested. Then, her brow furrowed and she shook her head at herself. 'Na, idiot. Toads can be toxic. What a stupid*

suggestion!

‘It’s not a stupid suggestion,’ Taz’zar comforted. ‘Some toads *can* be eaten. And in a dire situation it is important to know where toads can be found. It is simply currently not worth the risk to find them. Not at this moment. Not while we are not starving.’

Ki’mor’s shoulders relaxed at the gentle words, and Taz’zar realised that she had been tense. She hadn’t noticed it during their short walk; not until now, as her tail drooped to brush the ground and the feathers along her wings shrunk together and lay flat.

Had Ki’mor been anxious this entire time?

*Why?*

Taz’zar looked at her daughter, scanning the woman’s tired-looking eyes for the answer.

*Approval.*

She wanted Taz’zar’s approval.

‘It’s important to know all of our options,’ Taz’zar tried. ‘I’m proud of you for thinking of it.’

Ki’mor smiled; just as Taz’zar had hoped she would. And then she motioned to a nearby rock. ‘Halmoi?’

‘You think there’s a halmoi inside that rock?’ Taz’zar asked, cocking her head slightly. ‘Why?’

‘There are drag marks,’ Ki’mor said, stepping over and running her talon in the air parallel to a short line that had been scraped into the dirt. ‘Like the rock has been dragged.... Hm. Might have been moved by something else. Might not be a halmoi...’ her brow furrowed again. ‘Stupid suggestion. I’m probably wrong—’

‘—It’s not a stupid suggestion,’ Taz’zar cut in before her daughter could fall to berating herself again. ‘It’s worth looking. Nothing bad could come from making sure— If you are right and there is a halmoi, we will have dinner. If you’re wrong and it’s an empty rock, we will simply continue hunting. There is no risk, only chances of reward.’

‘*Mm,*’ Ki’mor gave a low hum of acknowledgement —or was it happiness?— as Taz’zar moved to her side and stood close. And, slowly, the woman lent into her mother’s side.

Neither made a move to crack the stone as they stood together. Instead they simply looked down at it, enjoying each other’s quiet company. Neither was quite ready to end their hunt and return home, not yet, but that was something that could not be said aloud.

‘*It’s nice to have a kekik, again,*’ Ki’mor finally said, her voice quiet as a whisper. ‘*I haven’t had a kekik since Yalfit chased them all away.*’

Taz’zar wasn’t sure what to say to that. So she remained quiet; simply lifting an arm to put it around Ki’mor’s shoulders.

She knew Ki’mor’s family history: when the girl had shown signs that something was wrong with her there had been talk of what to do, and few had been kind suggestions. And so her father had driven away all of his spouses; furious at the things they’d wanted to subject his daughter to. And he had raised her and her siblings as their only parent.

Taz'zar was the first partner he'd dared to have after that. And that was why it was so important that she didn't take Ki'mor for granted....

'Come, we shouldn't be so kaka when there's family to feed,' Taz'zar said as she nipped Ki'mor's ear lovingly. 'We should check this rock for halmoi. Will you crack it for me? My talons aren't what they used to be.'

'Yi, Kekik,' Ki'mor mumbled, breaking from her mother's embrace to stand straight again.

'Thank you, my zelkin,' Taz'zar said, pulling the stone close for Ki'mor to take. 'Have you cracked a halmoi before?'

'Yi, Kekik,' Ki'mor repeated with a curt nod. 'Yalfit made sure all of us learnt how when we were young.'

'A good skill,' Taz'zar said with an agreeable click of her tongue. 'I didn't learn until I was a little older than you.'

'Hm!' Ki'mor gave a hum of acknowledgement, but didn't otherwise respond as she became preoccupied with examining the stone. She turned it with her talon, flipping it over and searching for its weak-point.

'I see a hole!' Taz'zar said, encouragingly.

'Halmoi hole?' Ki'mor asked. 'It's big.'

'I think it might be one!' Taz'zar grinned. 'Big hole means a big halmoi, yi?'

'Na,' Ki'mor frowned. 'All halmoi fit through the same holes, no matter their size. And they prefer small holes. A big hole is a bad sign.'

'Ah?'

'Mm.... It's not a natural hole,' Ki'mor said; her eyes not moving from the rock as she continued to look it over. '*Definitely* not a natural hole. Could be a crab. Not as tasty as a halmoi but Yalfit likes crab. It's probably not an imp; an imp would have been spooked out by now and gone running.'

Taz'zar pet her daughter's head, ruffling her hair. 'Smart girl.'

Ki'mor finally looked away from the rock, beaming at her mother with a smile that melted the older harpy's heart. Then she went back to the rock; tracing her talon along its centre before gripping it carefully.

A deep breath, a tight squeeze, and the rock *CRACK!*ed along the line Ki'mor had drawn.

And as soon as the rock cracked, a tentacle poked out.

'*Halmoi!*' Ki'mor exclaimed, dropping the rock and kicking off its top to reveal the mollusc inside.

She made a grab for the creature but it shifted away; dodging her foot and skittering with surprising speed across the dry riverbed.

But it was a pointless attempt at escape. Taz'zar had been ready for it, and with a mighty *squelch* she'd squashed its brain to pulp between her toes and the hard clay ground.

She looked up at Ki'mor who stood, staring, in surprise.

*Surprise and....*

Taz'zar realised that Ki'mor was embarrassed. She'd almost let high-value prey escape when it had been right there in her talons; something that would humiliate any wastelander.

'And that's why we hunt in pairs,' Taz'zar said, trying to lace her tone with a mix of affection and humour.

And Ki'mor laughed, her embarrassment immediately fading as Taz'zar held up the halmoi for her to take.

Though she didn't take it. She was too distracted by the rock she had broken.

'Look!' she exclaimed, picking up one of the two stone halves and holding it close. 'It's full of crystals!'

'A geode?' Taz'zar asked, stepping to her daughter's side to examine the rock.

'It's so beautiful...' Ki'mor mumbled, running her fingers along the pale white crystals. 'They're not glowing, so it's not soulstone.... It's safe to touch, right?'

'Yi, it's safe,' Taz'zar comforted. 'It looks like quartz.'

'Quartz?'

'Yi,' Taz'zar nodded. 'Outsiders often use it as jewellery. It's not worth much, even outside of Heck'ne, but people will still trade for it. Especially along the Oktoka border.'

'Oh... I've never been to the Oktoka border,' Ki'mor mumbled. 'What's it like?'

'Hot,' Taz'zar responded. 'Hotter than here. Their land starts where the desert does.'

'Desert?' Ki'mor blinked. 'Like... sand instead of dirt?'

'Yi,' Taz'zar confirmed. 'Sand that's so hot it's like walking on a freshly-smothered fire-pit.'

'*Gighi*,' Ki'mor breathed her awe.

'Mm,' Taz'zar hummed her agreement, and the pair trailed off into silence.

Then, after a long moment, Ki'mor held up her geode and asked, 'Can I keep this?'

'Of course you can,' Taz'zar chuckled, resting her hand on Ki'mor's shoulder. 'You found it. It's yours.... Make sure not to leave the other half behind. Your yalfit would love it, I'm sure.'

'Yi, Kekik!'

—END—

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