

The Creatures that History Forgot

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Smashwords Edition

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[What Lies Beyond the Shadows](#)

I yawned flexing my long tail then jumped from my thick plush bedding made of fluff encased in fabric. My bare feet landed lightly on the cool floor as I arched my back to the ceiling feeling my vertebra shifting into place. I stood erect though it felt odd and unnatural with my forepaws dangling uselessly at my sides. I swiveled my left ear outward as I released a gust of air through my nostrils, in an amused gesture. I did not need to behave like a princess in the privacy of my own room I thought before I pounced back onto my bed. I landed heavily in the sinking mass but quickly sat upright with my tail wrapped around me as I stared out toward the large glass dome where the heated copper wire glowed as a powerful electric current coursed through it. There was a soft meow as I turned to see a sand colored cat strolling toward me.

“Zabuza,” I exclaimed as the cat leap onto my bed pressing its body against me as I stoked its back. Its throat vibrated with contentment as I looked to the other side of the large room where there were two glass bowls. I looked down at the striped cat that raised its head to stare at me questioningly.

“Zabuza what would you like to eat this morning? Do you want tuna or a pigeon?” I asked noticing the cat stopped at the word pigeon.

“Do you want a flaky bone filled fish,” I began as Zabuza rubbed her face against my arm.

“Or the plump juicy flesh of a bird?” I continued as Zabuza pulled away, looking at me with what I believe to be distaste.

“Fine I guess today you will have the tuna. Tuna must simply be your favorite.” I stated as Zabuza continued purring, tickling my chin with the tip of her tail.

“Come on let’s get some tuna.” I said as Zabuzas leap down gracefully before glancing over her shoulder. I landed beside the cat a few seconds later then led the way to the two glass bowls. I rose onto my hind legs then grasped the bowl and placed it on the floor in front of Zabuzas.

I sat on the floor with my long legs stretched out as I watched Zabuzas eagerly snap up the fish, devouring them, head and all. I waved my tail in a wide arched pleased I was allowed to keep Zabuzas for cats were a sign of royalty since they offered no benefit yet needed to be provided for. I was glad I was the leader’s daughter if it meant being able to keep Zabuzas as a pet.

Zabuzas looked toward the door then meowed loudly in greeting before my mother entered. Her cream colored fur was hidden under her black Death Stalkers uniform leaving only her black tail and feet exposed. Her large black ears were alert as always and her blue eyes were cold like those of any warrior. She stood upright which is a sign of both vulnerability and strength. An inch or so below her elbow she wore a complex black band with a black scorpion forever frozen within a hunk of hard plastic. It was the band the human was wearing when he killed my father on one of the Death Stalkers’ many missions. My mother killed the human single handedly and kept the bracelet in remembrance of my father. There was a good reason why the group was called the Death Stalkers and my mother was their fearless leader.

“Kyzudo I am going with the Death Stalkers to replace the worn parts of the generator, so behave yourself in my absence.” she said as I nodded.

“I guess I will see you later.” I said as she left, obviously in a hurry. I got up then followed her. I raced down the hall but paused when I saw the Death Stalkers gathered around her.

“Kyzudo stand up straight. You are my daughter so behave like it.” Mom said as I unsteadily rose onto my hind legs.

“Are you ready to go your majesty?” asked one of the Death Stalkers bowing low with his ears lowered and his face practically touching the floor.

“Yes lead the way.” Mom answered then followed the dark clothed group using all four of her feet, as lithe and nimble as I ever hoped to be.

I turned away but paused when I saw Maya standing by the doorway. Maya was my mother’s adviser and one of the most intelligent of my kind. She understood everything about our society and even knew a few things about the humans’ vast amount of technology.

“Maya can I ask you something?” I asked as Maya slowly turned my way, her green eyes skillfully concealing her annoyance as her bronze tail froze in an effort to hide her emotions.

“Yes Lady Kyzudo,” she said respectfully being forced to look up since I was still standing upright like my mother instructed.

“You are the wisest and the most intelligent of our kind why is that so?” I asked as she rigidly bowed in gratitude.

"I am honored that you believe this to be true..." Maya began but I cut her off for I was truly curious why some were raised up in our society for possessing certain qualities while others were ignored. Was Maya simply born with superior intellectual abilities while others were not? Was I born a princess because I possess the qualities of a leader, of my mother?

"Yes but why are you so wise?" I continued as Maya looked up at me curiously though kept her head bowed and her tail grounded.

"All have the ability to gather data and form generalizations but in my opinion one who is thought to be intelligent is simply the one who understands when a generalization should be made."

"Um explain."

"The foolish gather data without ever drawing a conclusion yet the naïve draw conclusions before enough data is gathered therefore the intelligent understand that all facts cannot be known and that data without meaning is not worth gathering. That is what it means to be intelligent nothing more."

"Um thanks uh could I come with you to the workshop?"

"Of course Lady Kyzudo but I hope for your mother's sake that you do not choose to run off, again."

"I cannot promise you that my interests will not drift or that my body will resist its call."

"Of course, I will gather your guards then we can prepare to leave." Maya said as I nodded "Oh and it would be inappropriate for royalty to be in public without a robe. Her majesty would disapprove if you insisted on leaving without it."

"Fine, I will get dressed." I said flicking my tailed in annoyance before awkwardly walking back to my room with my front paws outstretched in an effort to steady myself.

When I got to my room I went to my closet where a silk black robe hung on a polished golden hook. I unhooked it then slipped it over my head fighting to get my ears through. I pulled my arms through the holes on the side then let the gown fall to my feet. I removed an elegant sash from another hook then tied it about my waist.

I walked over the full length mirror to look at myself. The loose fitting fabric hid all but my bare feet, the tip of my tail, my hands and my head. The only cream colored fur was located around my face. My blue eyes shown like gems in contrast to the black, I looked like an awkward less intimidating version of my mother. I stuck out my tongue in distaste when Zabuza meowed by the door. I looked up to see my four usual guards.

"I am ready so let's go." I said as they nodded then led the way to the door. Maya joined me as the guards surrounded us. I looked around for it felt odd towering over the others dressed in my ridiculous robe. This all felt unnecessary since I am sure many of these cream and black furred guards must be my relatives.

We marched upholding society's silly traditions. The guards formed a perfect square about Maya and me. Their long tails were raised and their ears were pricked. Their vigilant green eyes

scanned the area and all sported the traditional black scarves, which were wrapped around their necks and upper torsos as a sign of their societal role as royal guards.

Beyond our group young children raced each other and wrestled playfully, rolling across the ground. Their eyes confirmed their carefree lifestyles. Their movements seem lively and wonderfully random without worry of the opinion of others, free of tedious planning. They were free to do whatever they wished. I wish I could be like them.

The large light in the center of the huge room came to life putting the smaller surrounding lights to shame. Everyone stopped, including us, to turn toward the central light. Everyone sat with their tails rose proudly as they began to chant the folksong like they have for generations.

We are the rulers of the night
Silent shadows that prowl across the land
Forging an existence just out of sight
Our society is lost from the sun's reaching light
Instinctively feared yet unknown to man
We are the rulers of night
We are survivors preserved by our undying might
We stand having marked our place in the sand
Forging an existence just out of sight
We stand for what is right
Striving to stake our existence even though we have been banned
We are the rulers of night
We form a society that is sewn tight
Mirroring humanity technology whenever we can
Forging an existence just out of sight
We are the patrollers of the stars working for those who have fallen's delight
We are plotting in the darkness waiting to overthrow humanity's ruling hand
We are the rulers of the night
Forging an existence just out of sight

After the chant everyone bowed with their long ears plastered again their heads then continued do whatever they had been doing before, for this was a daily routine that is rarely broken.

"Um come on Lady Kyzudo." said one of the guards as I nodded then followed them across the expansive room to a small side room where Maya students were waiting for her with pieces of technology stolen from the humans above ground. Everyone paused when we entered then dipped their heads and briefly lowered their ears in a causal bow before continuing with their work. I sat down as Maya glanced at me disapprovingly but I chose to ignore her. The guards spread themselves around the room for maximum coverage though many were soon distracted by the new technology that the Death Stalkers brought in for analysis.

“What is their function?” as one of the guards.

“We are not sure but they are pretty high tech. Some of them don’t even have buttons just this pressure sensitive screen.” Maya said holding up one of the devices when the device began to vibrate, causing Maya to drop it onto the table. Everyone gather to watch the device skitter across the flat surface causing the table to buzz.

“Maybe you upset its defense mechanism.” one suggested as I snuck out the room while everyone was distracted. I ran along the wall pausing in the shadows, where I took off my robe then continued on free of the restricting cloth.

I ran pass the large enclosure where plump pigeons, which bred for having useless stubby wings and meaty bodies, waddled about. They gathered together for safety though our main interest was in the eggs, they lay on a daily bases.

I continued on pass the rodents, which stood over four feet high and crowded together, their lack of a tail allowing them to cram in tight. Their large sensitive ears were raised as they listened for the deafening bark of the Rodent Herder, which is a large black dog with long fluffy fringes though it main attribute was its oddly shaped ears. The dog’s ears were small and rounded with only a slight point at the top, being covered in a thick layer of fur to protect its sensitive eardrums.

I hurried pass those hard at work commanding the dogs as I dashed into the corn field. Here the brick flooring was replaced with soft dirt where rows upon rows of corn grew. Above a thick copper wire ran along the ceiling glowing with such intensity that to stare at it would mean being briefly blinded followed by the attempt to blink away the afterimages, that last for quite some time. The thick wires were covered with a glass covering to protect the crops from the danger of fire or drying out.

I continued on until the large underground lake was in sight then I sat on the ground as I imagined the world above. My father had been a member of the Death Stalkers so he saw the land above and he told me all about. He said that above ground the sky is without an end and that there are bodies of water at race toward the horizon before falling out of sight. He told me that the corn plants remind him of trees, which he described as great pillars topped with branching expansion tipped with wide leaves that blotted out the sky. He said there was a ball of blinding light that hovers above the world, warming it in its radiance. I can’t imagine such a world but I want to see it one day despite the danger.

I sighed looking out across the still water pleased. My life was so structured that I rarely feel free to simply be, to wish of a future that is truly my own. Here I feel free to do whatever I please. Here I was not royalty, here I was not cast in my mother’s shadow. Here I was whatever I chose to be. Well at least until I am dragged back to my structured life.

I often come here to stare at the lake’s tranquil water for hours at a time. I stroll down the lane of corn imagining great trees in their place until the world my once father described is alive

in my mind's eye. I scooped handfuls of dirt then allowed it to slip through my fingers as time passed without remorse, my mind completely at rest.

I relished in the faint earthy scent of the soil. Each whiff contained a memory. The ground was like an archive of the past experiences. In the soil my father still lived because if I close my eyes I could still see him preserved forever within my memories.

His silver tail would dance among the crops as it swayed as if in remembrance of an enchanting song. A majority of his coat was a dazzling white and was soft to the touch. His eyes were a striking blue that held traces of green which he assured me was the same hue as the ocean.

He told me of the soft plants that blanketed the ground forming a sea of greenery that stretched on for miles, carefully trimmed to a unified height. He told me about large tufts of fine fibers that drifted along the air currents being lighter than the surrounding air. They were fluffy and white like the fiber used to stuff cushions. He also use to go on for hours about the mysterious lights that appear in the sky at nightfall. He said they were called stars and that they make up the fabric of the heavens. He said that the dead are alive among the stars, just beyond the veil of darkness that forms the night sky.

I let the rich soil slip from my hands as I continued to look out across the large pond. I use to splash in its cooling waters with my father countless times in the past. I use to cast my robe aside before diving under its surface. I use to laugh as the water rose with a hard slap of my hand as my father shook himself off before flinging water towards me with his tail. It did not matter if it was a proper activity for one born into the ruling family. It did not matter that I could be doing something more suitable to prepare myself as the future ruler. It did not matter if I presented myself poorly because to my father I was simply me, I was simply Kyzudo.

"Lady Kyzudo you should not run off when there is danger about." said one of the guards as I looked up seeing my guards rushing over to me. I got up turning toward them annoyed for I knew I would be forced to return to the palace.

"I know but you knew where I was so I don't see much harm." I explained when one of the guards stepped forward.

"If you like this place so much why don't you simply let us take you here." the guard continued as the other presented me with the robe I discarded.

"Because that would defeat the purpose of coming," I said annoyed taking the robe.

"Do you need assistance Lady Kyzudo?" asked one of the guards as I struggled to locate the opening of the sleeves.

"I am not be my mother but I am not helpless." I growled as the guard bowed, muttering an apology into the loose soil.

"I am sorry just lead the way home." I said touching the guard on the back with my fingertips.

“There is no need to apologize to the likes of me Lady Kyzudo.” the guard said looking up modestly.

“We can’t march in formation in the corn field, so Lady Kyzudo lead the way and we will follow you at a distance.” a guard said as I nodded.

“Don’t worry I know my way home.” I murmured to myself as the guards surrounded me.

The walk home was carried out in silence. It was such a common sight to those who collected pigeon eggs and commanded the dogs that I only received a slight bow of recognition. The guards were silent for this was more of a routine than an event.

Then suddenly I paused when I saw a Death Stalker, still in his uniform, racing toward me. The guards formed a wall with their bodies to protect me but the Death Stalker slowed calling to the guards. The Death Stalker stopped a few yards away bowing low as two of the guards went to check if he was carrying any weapons. Only after the search was completed and every fold of his uniform was inspected, was he allowed to approach me.

“I am sorry to alarm you Lady Kyzudo but I came to inform you that your mother has been injured.” the Death Stalker said as I lowered my tail in horror.

“I need to check on her!” I exclaimed pulling the robe over my head.

“What are you doing Lady Kyzudo?” the Death Stalker asked for it was not proper for royalty to be without their robe and seemed like I was going out of my way to break that tradition.

“My mother needs me and I am going to be there for her!” I yelled, casting the robe onto the floor, before leaping past my guards.

“Wait Lady Kyzudo!” the guards yelled as I ran home using all four of my legs to increase my speed. I did not care about upholding tradition when my mother maybe dying. I don’t know how I am going to save her but I am not going to lose another parent, not if I can help it.

A Warrior's Attire

“Lady Kyzudo, come back!” the guards yelled as I sprinted home, my youth and small stature adding to my speed. The Death Stalker was also chasing me but he seemed to be holding back, he seemed to understand my burning desire to get to my injured mother as soon as possible. All who saw us hurried to get out the way watching us pass fearfully though I was beyond caring about how they saw me.

I dashed into the house to see the members of the Death Stalkers gathered around my mother. They parted when they saw me so I rushed over to see my mother, who standing in the center of the group. She bared her fangs with her tail thrashing wildly about behind her. She looked perfectly healthy I thought until, one of her servants touched her hind leg, which had a deep gash.

“Calm down I am alright.” my mother said hobbling forward as I looked away ashamed for I doubted if I could ever be that strong, strong enough to replace her as the leader.

"I need to tend to your wound in order for it to heal, your majesty." the servant said as my mother nodded having understood.

"Fine but then I need to inform the people that the Death Stalkers were able to obtain the supplies for the generator." Mom said as everyone turned to her worried.

"You can" go on that leg." the servant exclaimed having temporarily forgetting her manners.

"I am needed so I must." Mom stated simply ignoring the rashness in which the commit was stated.

"Well I suppose in a few hours..." the servant began but Mom cut her off with a sharp gesture of her tail.

"No I am going as soon as you tend to it." Mom stated boldly renewing everyone sense of worry.

"But you need to rest." the servant insisted.

"My people need information about the generator as soon as possible." My mother stated as if denying that a hindrance existed.

"Maybe one of the Death Stalkers can make the announcement for you." suggested the servant.

"No then they will think I am incapable of delivering the news myself." Mom said whipping her tail back and forth.

"You currently are not capable of such a task your majesty." the servant stated mildly though Mom did not take offense.

"That is where you are wrong I am more than capable of delivering this message for I can't allow for weakness." she stated calmly but the servant would not give up that easily.

"But you can barely walk. If you do not want to appear weak then you may not want to go before them limping on all fours, your majesty." the servant continued dulling her message with her polite words.

"I will walk upright as always." Mom stated boldly.

"But your leg?" the servant questioned.

"It will support me." she stated confidently.

"Just for a tradition but that is stupid. You should not have to put yourself through that much pain for nothing." I exclaimed as everyone turned to me in surprise, for a normal child my age such an outburst would be punishable.

"You don't understand the gravity of the situation." Mom stated unconcerned about the content of my statement.

"If you insist on going you may lean on me." one of the Death Stalkers offered but Mom declined.

"That would be a sign of weakness, of incompetence. I cannot allow it." Mom said harshly as the Death Stalker nodded understandingly.

"I guess there is no swaying your judgment so I shall prepare the bandages." the servant announced then dismissed herself with a bow.

When the servant returned she quickly bound my mother's injured leg. The result was a swollen mass that left Mom's leg stiff and virtually immovable.

"Are you still sure about this?" the servant asked after she was done binding her leg.

"There is only one option so I have no other choice than to choose it." Mom stated grimly as the servant bowed, backing away.

"I will be back with your clothing." the servant whispered then disappeared.

The servant returned shortly with a black outfit that was almost identical to the uniforms the Death Stalker wear except it had red stain sashes tied around the calves, upper arm and midsection. The Death Stalkers' uniforms including sashes in a similar arrangement in black but the red sashes of the leaders clothing were to represent the blood of those who had been killed while benefiting our society. The leader's clothing is never loose so it allows for free movement associated with fighting while offering the regality of fabric.

Next Mother was presented her twin machetes which were classily painted black with the sharpened silver gleaming in the light. And of course she still had that scorpion bracelet, for she was never without it.

"Um I would like to come as well." I stated as my mother nodded.

"Ok but you need to get dressed." she stated as I hurried in search of the guards, who sure enough had my robe.

"Thank you." I said taking the robe from them then slipped it over my head as the guards did their best to hide their emotions.

"I hope you do not take offense but we would like to accompany you." said one of the Death Stalkers as a few others nodded.

"That would be wise. I must admit that I have been weakened so the fact I do not usually travel with guards is irrelevant. Having you with me will increase my strength." Mom said as the Death Stalker, who spoke nodded then organized the others as my usually guards joined in our massive group.

"Lead the way when ready" my mother commanded as the group slowly proceed.

Despite the strength of our group many could not help noticing that their leader walked with a slight limp so anytime someone stared longer than usually or forgot to bow at the sight of us my mother would growl until they planted their faces into the ground with a stream of apologies. As we approached the center of the crowd that was gathering about the huge lit dome we passed a great line of people lying flat on the ground in respect though when we reached the place where we usually speak, whispering began to build. Mom walked in front of the guards, slashing her blade expertly before her causing the keel metal to whistle as it rent the still air and with that everyone fell silent.

“It is no secret that I have been injured but my strength has not diminished. I am still your leader and I promise to all of you that I will not allow myself to fail.” Mom said as the crowd produced high pitched yips of joy.

“I came here to inform you that the Death Stalkers have succeed and got the parts needed for the generator so you can all be at ease.” my mother continued as a new wave of yipping began.

“Um I don’t mean to be rude but what happened?” asked someone near the front, who made himself known by briefly raising to his feet to enable us to locate him.

“If you do not mind your majesty I would like to explain.” said a member of the Death Stalkers, modestly.

“By all means Dabu.” my mother said as he nodded then stepped forward.

“We managed to steal the parts alright but a blinding light came on, as if it could sense our movements. This alerted the guards who were armed and fired at us but we managed to take refuge in an area enclosed by a wire fence. We did not know at the time but there was a dog. Our leader fought off the dog with her bare hands and she was faring rather well but there was another dog, we all failed to notice. The other the dog took her by surprise and sank its jagged teeth into her hind leg. Luckily we found a crowbar and killed the dog. I just wanted you to know our leader was not injured due to cowardice or lack of ability. I believe that she is more than capable to continue leading us.” Dabu said as the yipping grew quickly into a mind numbing racket.

“I know our leader is strong but we can’t ignore the fact that she is weaker due to this incident. She is limping already can we really expect her to be able to continue leading the Death Stalkers in this condition.” someone stated rising up and only seemed to fall due to lack of balance rather than politeness.

Mom snarled then threw one of her machetes toward the one who had spoken. The crowd scattered as the blade implanted itself into the crumbling mortar so its wooden handle stuck straight up.

“Is that a challenge?” my mother demanded.

“Of course not your majesty, I was simply stating a fact. This tragic incident has weakened you. As you so elegantly announced your injury is not a secret.” she explained coolly but she did not bow as expected or even lower her ears or tail out of respect.

I am not weak!” my mother yelled as the one who spoke awkwardly walked over to my mother’s blade, standing upright like one of the royal family. She used the blade to prop herself up as her dark brown tail aided her balance.

“I am simply reminding you that being the leader is no position for the weak, your majesty. I am only concerned that you may currently lack the ability to complete your duties for they require one who is in peak condition, your majesty.” She continued as she pulled the blade

from the ground with a mighty heave, a feat of great strength that everyone present observed. Many of those assembled began muttering to themselves when my mother spoke.

"I am more than capable of completing my duties for my devotion to the people is greater than..." Mother began when she stumbled forward, wincing as a wave of pain caught her off guard.

"What if you can't? What are we expected to do in the event of your failure? She questioned as everyone looked to my mother for answers, but she didn't provide them with one.

"I will deal with that situation when I must." my mother answered as her challenger continued to advance dragging the blade behind her as everyone watched her stunned into a state of inactivity. Even the guards were conflicted as she neared. They did not force her to drop the blade they simply watched her as she neared their leader. There was something haunting about her vivid blue eyes, something unsettling about the intention they concealed within their depths.

She raised the blade then pointed it at my mother's chest as the guards stared at her unresponsively as if they temporarily forgotten their sworn duty to protect the royal family at the cost of their lives. A few of them bared their teeth with displeasure but they were otherwise frozen just like everyone else, waiting for the challenger's next move. Dabu stepped forward as his anger slipped through his clinched teeth with a hiss.

"Oops that is not the proper way to return one's blade. I would hate for it to cut you." She stated as she flipped the blade over in her hands then presented the handle to my mother. My mother snatched it from her hands before turning away.

"Of course not your majesty" she said coolly but she did not bow as expected or even lower her ears or tail out of respect.

"I have had enough of this, lead the way home." Mom said as the guards nodded then complied.

After we got home and all of the guards left to patrol the area and the Death Stalkers to get some rest after completing their mission, we were left alone. My mother stripped off her robe as the servants prepared a tub to clean her wound. My mother's ears drooped with exhaustion as she let herself fall onto all fours. She took a few steps forward wincing, her movement stiff and painful. She was no longer an unfeeling warrior but simply a creature in a great deal of pain for she had stripped away her ferocity and brevity leaving nothing more than my mother in need to help I could not provide. She was a warrior yet being a warrior simply meant donning a certain temperament in the presence of the public only to reveal flesh and bone in the privacy of one's own house. Being a warrior is a temporary mindset that conceals the mortal fearful beings we all are. It is separate entity from who we are yet defines how others see us, like the royal robes I was forced to wear.

“Your majesty the tub has been filled. We are now ready to begin cleaning your wound.” the servant called.

“I am coming.” Mom said as I watched her drag herself toward the sound of the servant voice.

I followed hoping that by removing the dried blood that clung to my mother matted fur that I would realize that everything was going to be alright. I peeked around the corner as the servant pressed the steaming cloth to my mother’s leg as she pulled back her ears hissing through her teeth. The wound was deep and a large tuft of thick fur was missing. It was no longer bleeding yet it was swollen and it seemed off colored.

“I think it infected.” said the servant fearfully.

“Then disinfect it,” my mother growled as the servant pulled back her large ears, closing her eyes in despair.

“I don’t have the means to disinfect it. I don’t know what to do.” the servant stated as I turned away afraid of what to think. My ears dropped on their own accord as a mournful cry erupted from my jaws.

There was a chance I would lose my mother, there was a chance that she would die. I got up then ran to my room in an effort to escape from my mother, who would only ask me to state my fear aloud. All four of my feet moved in sync in an effortless manner as I darted into my room. Zabuza veered out of my way as I leap onto my bed. I pressed my face into the soft material that muffled my cry.

I could not lose my mother when I had already lost my father. She was the only parent I had left. I may not be too close to her because of the nature of her work but I knew she cared. She may seem cold and see me as her successor but I knew she also saw me as her daughter. If she died there would be no one left, who is close enough to see me as anything other as the leader’s daughter. She was my mother and I could not bear lose her, to be left all alone.

[Emerging from the Shadow of a Great Leader](#)

A night has passed and my mom has come down with a fever. She has become too weak even to pretend to be in good health. The Death Stalkers have come though I fear the only purpose of their visit is to simply pay their last respects to their dying leader. All of the servants are tending to her and the guards are whispering their fears in the halls. I fear my mom’s health is declining and it is showing no signs of recovery. I fear soon I may truly be alone.

Zabuza meowed as one of my mother’s servants entered. She told me that my mother wanted to speak with me and I feared she wished to cite her will. I climbed from my bed as the servant bowed before exiting. Zabuza meowed sympathetically as I pat her on the head then walked slowly down the hall, afraid of what I might find.

I edged down the hall passing a group of Death Stalkers on my way. They were whispering near the corner. They had their backs to me as if they did not want to be seen. A high ranking female, named Merula seemed to be doing most of the speaking.

"I hate to state my fears aloud but what will become of the people if the leader dies? We need a leader at all times but I am not sure if a commoner can best a trained warrior. Syrugia is right about thinking about the future of our people but I think that the next leader needs to be one of us." Merula suggested as her peers nodded solemnly in agreement.

"Kyzudo is next in line for the throne but she is merely a child. I fear you may be right Merula. We may have to abandon tradition." one of the Death Stalkers reluctantly agreed when Dabu stepped forward.

"No Sanoka will pull through this. We must follow tradition for the sake of the people." Dabu informed the others, not accepting the possibility of her mother's death.

"Hopefully you are right," a Death Stalker agreed as I continued down the hall to my mother's room.

I entered as the servant, standing over her, bowed then left us alone. I edged around the large bed peering at the mound of covers piled on top of my mother's still body.

"Mom," I called when Mother's hand firmly grasped my upper arm.

"I need for you to promise to me that you will take my place if I am unable to lead the people, if I die." she told me as I pulled my arm free from her grasp.

"You are not going to die." I told her angrily though I could feel hot tears gathering in my eyes.

"I don't know about that but I am going to die one day and when that day comes I need to know that you will take my place as leader." she explained as I backed away, hoping to hide within the shadows stashed secretly away in the corners.

"But I can't, I am not like you." I told her when her eyes found me amongst the gloom.

"I know you can do it and you are the only one who should." she assured me as I stepped forward knowing that I could not hide from her gaze.

"What about your brother?" I asked her as she scoffed at the idea as if it were ludicrous.

"He is a male. I am sure they will not take him seriously." She reminded me when I thought of myself in comparison.

"He is a member of the Death Stalkers," I reminded her as she nodded impatiently.

"I know that he is capable of taking on the responsibilities as leader but the public needs to accept him and after having a matriarchy for so many generations the change would be radical and would spark a civil war I am sure." She explained as I continued to think of someone else, anyone else that could perform the duties expected of the leader.

"What about any one of our relatives?" I questioned.

"Their bloodline is too diluted for the unanimous acceptance needed. No it needs to be you." my mother confirmed as I backed away again.

"What if I fail?" I asked her but she did not give me a straight forward answer.

“You are the only legitimate leader. If the people are allowed to choose their own leader then they will become split which will spark a civil war. We heavily rely on each other to survive so such a division could harm our dwindling population.” Mom continued to explain.

“So if I fail our entire species could be in jeopardy?” I exclaimed fearfully.

“I am sorry but I need for you to try to lead them.” she instructed me as I allowed her to grasp onto my hand. She squeezed it weakly as I forced myself to look up into her eyes.

“I guess I don’t have a choice, do I?” I asked for confirmation as she smiled weakly.

“You need to be strong for the sake of your people so don’t show any sign of weakness or they won’t see you as their leader.” Mom continued to explain.

“Yeah that is all I need to do.” I agreed though my head still seemed to be spinning.

“I will be here as long as I can so ask me whatever you like.” She told me as I nodded before pulling myself free from her slacken grasp.

“Ok I would like to think about all of this alone.” I said then left the room, my mind clouded with the idea of taking my mother’s place. I wandered into the royal hall, stopping before the throne. My mother’s twin blades were rested on the seat along with her of robe which had been neatly folded. This was the hall of my ancestors, which held the history of my people.

This hall was built to honor my ancestor, the one whose bloodline the royal family all share. She was the one who suggested that instead of hiding from the humans that we should live within their shadow, in hopes of learning their secrets. If my people did not listen to her the humans would have found us in time and wiped out our species like they have with others of their kind using weapons of amazing power. My ancestor was the one who believed the humans were only more technologically advanced because they rise up those with innovative ideas instead of adhering to tradition. She was the wisest of us all and I have no hope of ever coming close to matching her greatness. I was not like her and I was nothing like my mother. I was just a child so how could I lead the people?

I looked up at the crossed blades thinking of my mother’s strength. My mother was strong for the good of our people though that does not mean she had extraordinary powers. She was just like the rest of us. She was not a great leader because of her bloodline or her genes but because she had to be, like I have to be to prevent a civil war from forming amongst the people. I may be young and naïve but I have to try and hopefully then I will gain the same strength as my mother.

I picked up my mother’s robe then slipped it over my head. I squeezed my limbs through the narrow openings then I picked up her twin blades holding them firmly in my forepaws with my head raised proudly. I may not be my mother but I would not fail her or my people I thought as I raised one of the blades in victory.

“Your Majesty I was not informed of your recovery.” someone said as I turned to see Dabu, my mother’s brother, standing at the entrance of the hall.

“Kyzudo?” Dabu stammered looking carefully at loose fitting cloth that hung off my small childish frame and the two blades I held awkwardly in each hand.

“What are you doing?” he inquired as I looked away embarrassed.

“Um well I spoke with my mother and she told me that she wants me to take her place.” I muttered as Dabu turned away fearfully, refusing to believe me.

“Wait! Come back here!” I yelled dropping the blades to run after him. “Stop!” I yelled when I saw him a few yards ahead of me as others poured into the hall to see me in my mother’s uniform.

“I promise that she told me to take her place. I would never choose this for myself.” I yelled as Dabu stopped to face me.

“You are not her and you will never be. You could never lead these people.” he yelled as I lowered my ears and tail, looking less like a leader every second. Dabu rushed away to speak with my mother as I returned to the hall to escape everyone’s judging eyes. I took off mother’s outfit, folding it and laying back onto the seat of the throne. Then I picked up the blades and laid them on top. He was right I was not my mother and I could not lead my people.

Dabu returned but I did not even look at him. He walked down the hall then turned to face me. “I spoke with your mother and she confirmed that she wants you to take her place as leader and she wants me to train you.” Dabu said as I turned toward him then nodded before reaching for my mother’s royal clothing.

“Um you need to earn the right to wear this and I believe the blades maybe a bit too dangerous for you.” Dabu said as I glanced at him utterly confused.

“So what am I supposed to do?”

“I have the perfect task that will enhance your fighting abilities. I will meet you in your room.” Dabu said as I nodded then left the hall. When I got to my room I waited on my bed as Zabuza sat beside me purring all the while. After a few minutes passed, Dabu entered with a large chunk of wood. He set it up on a platform of cinderblocks, which two guards helped him carry then turned to me to explain.

“A Death Stalker needs to be able to fight and there is little time so I believe that I must skip the easier tasks.” Dabu began as I looked at the thick plank of wood mystified

“So what am I supposed to do?” I asked confused.

“You are to break this plank of wood with your bare hands. Tell me when you have completed the task so we can move on.” Dabu said as I nodded leaping from my bed as Zabuza followed me curiously.

“Good luck Lady Kyzudo,” Dabu said as I nodded then smacked the wood with my bare hand.

‘Ouch,’ I exclaimed holding my hand in pain. There was no way I could crack such a thick plank of wood but I had to try for the sake of my people.

I hit the wooden plank as hard as I could for at least an hour but paused when someone entered. I was hoping it was Dabu to tell me a hint but it was one of my mother's servants, who informed me that my mother wanted to speak with me. I backed away from the raised plank. My hand was sore and I could feel it throbbing. I needed to take a break and my mother may have something important to tell me.

I followed the servant to my mother's room. A few of the guards were mumbling that they were told that the leader was recovering so I was hopeful when I entered as the servant held open the door.

"Mom," I called hopefully as I made my way to her bedside.

"Yes," she answered sounding weaker than ever.

"You wanted to speak with me?" I asked as Mom blinked slowly then took off her bracelet and handed it to me.

"I want you to keep that." Mom said as I took it with my forepaws shaking with disbelief. Mom would only give me her bracelet if she feared that she was on the brink of death.

"No I can't," I said refusing to believe that my mother was going to die as I handed the bracelet back to her but she showed no sign of taking it back.

"I want you to have it," she whispered as I pulled my large ears back filled with grief and sorrow.

"You are going to get better, everyone knows it." I said desperately but my mother did not seem convinced.

"I am not so sure, the servants say my health is still declining and they have no means to stop it." Mom said as an involuntary cry escaped from me.

"No, that can't be true,"

"It is, the others may want to believe that I will get better, that things will simple return to normal but I am not so sure so I need to know that you will do all that you can to prove to them that you have inherited my strength. I need for you to continue training with Dabu for he is an expert fighter and he is family so he is very loyal to me and our family." Mom said as I nodded.

"I will do my best." I said as Mom lovingly touched my hand.

"I know you will." She said as I bowed respectfully then returned to my room to continue training.

I kept at it for hours into I was sure the bones in my hand must be broken though the chunk of wood was without even a hint of giving away any time soon. I growled pushing the plank from its platform frustrated. I was starting to believe this was an impossible task but I could not fail yet my strength was fading as time slipped away. I needed a brake so I could return refreshed. I needed to think of the trick before my knuckles are destroyed.

I ran out of the room thinking of the corn field and the sense of peace I associated with it. I would go there to renew my spirits. I paused by the door wondering if I should bring my guards

but I was sure they would not allow me the sense of freedom I sought, besides my mother rarely relies on guards when she is out.

I ran swiftly keeping to the shadows for I was not dressed like royalty and I did not want to affect the way others view me now I was determined to take my mother's place as leader. I ran past the pen where the pigeons were kept and the fenced in area where the rodents roamed under the dogs unwavering surveillance. I was almost to the corn field but I paused when I saw a group had gathered just a few yards away.

"Syrugia, you would make a fine leader after Sanoka passes." said one as I growled remembering that my mother warned of challengers that would split my people into hostile groups. As my mother's successor it was my job to stop this before it got out of hand.

"Hey my mother is not going to die so show some respect." I demanded as the group turned to face me.

"Are you Kyzudo, Sanoka's daughter?" asked the one called Syrugia.

"Yeah and my mother is not going to die. She will pull through I just know it." I said hoping from the depths of my heart that this was true.

"Maybe but her injury has weakened her." Syrugia stated as I raised my tail high baring my teeth aggressively.

"She is still stronger than any of you." I yelled as Syrugia stepped toward me with her tail raised in a challenging manner.

"She can't lead us so a new leader must be chosen." Syrugia stated as I whipped my tail in the air growling.

"And you think you have what it takes to be the leader?" I demanded as Syrugia stepped closer making the size difference more apparent. She was a fully grown adult and I was just a child.

"Well yeah, there is no one else to take her place." she stated as I gathered as much courage as I could.

"Maybe there is." I stated boldly though Syrugia only became farther in enrage.

"Who, you whelp? Do you think you have what it takes to lead these people?" she demanded as the ridge of dark fur rose on my back.

"I am the next in line so it seems logical that I should lead." I stated as Syrugia pressed her ears forward as she snarled.

"You are nothing more than a child, why should anyone listen to you?" Syrugia demanded as I rose onto my hind legs a sign of royalty that I hoped she would respect.

"Because I am royalty and my mother's blood runs through my veins," I said when Syrugia spotted my mother's bracelet around my arm.

"You have Sanoka's bracelet so it has been finalized. She wants you to lead us in her absence." Syrugia said as I looked down at her with my ears raised proudly.

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