

Last Of The Bloodline

Aris' Tale

-Chapter One-

He awoke to the sun shining into his face, blinking his bleary eyes open as he turned his head away from the bright light. He rolled over, hauling himself up into a sitting position and rubbing at his eyes groggily. He cast a glance around the room when they'd cleared, taking in the unchanged sight of his home. It was a simple one-roomed hut, nothing grand, but it was what he was given and he was glad enough to have even that.

He reached over from where he sat, taking hold of a jug of water that rested there and pulling it over. He dipped his clawed hands into the water, cupping them before lifting up and splashing the water onto his face. It dripped down his silver fur slowly, falling down to leave little marks on his bedding. He grabbed his one piece of attire from the floor next to him before standing to his feet, wrapping the loincloth-like garment around his waist.

A new day had started and he had his duties to attend, before someone came and fetched him in a less pleasant manner. He stepped over to the door that covered the entrance to his modest hut, pushing it open and crossing out into the morning sun. It was bright out, and it took his eyes a moment to fully adjust to the glare. When they did what greeted his eyes was the familiar part of his village, an assortment of huts and other simple buildings constructed around the area.

They were situated amongst staggered trees and hills, tall green grass growing in the places that weren't trodden consistently. Life was calm and peaceful in the valley where they resided, their little village detached from the rest of the world so that few of its problems ever reached them. Because of that neither did any news or visitors from the surrounding world, leaving them in a small little world of their own.

He stood there a moment, taking a breath of the morning air. The day looked to be a promising one, the skies above clear and blue, and the air warm, but not uncomfortably so. Much like it always was when they weren't in the snow season. His brief moment of peace was disturbed though, a voice calling out to him...

"Aris!" Came his name, making him look down to find the familiar black-furred sight of his friend approaching.

"Good morning, Krel." He replied to him as he walked over.

“Hello.” The male nodded, slapping him on the shoulder lightly, a smile in his brown eyes. “Come on, we can talk later, need to get to the fields before he gets upset and makes us work double.”

“Ah, right.” He agreed with a grunt, falling into step with him as they walked briskly through the village.

He followed Krel as they made their way down the dirt path, heading to the fields he mentioned where they worked. The “he” in question that they didn’t want to upset was the owner of said fields, Gamel, who had a very strict mindset when it came to the dealings of his property. He and Krel had that double work happen to them once or twice, when they’d showed up a bit later than he had liked. The work kept him fed though, so he couldn’t really complain about it...

When they arrived at the fields Gamel gave them the usual tally of tasks for them to complete, before he promptly sent them off with a gruff dismissal. They quickly obeyed and retrieved the needed tools from his shed, if only because they didn’t want to have to sit through one of his speeches or worse, get punished with even more work. As one could guess, their work entailed maintaining the fields that Gamel possessed, a hot and arduous job depending on what he wanted done.

This particular task involved them hoeing those fields, but at least the day’s heat wasn’t unbearable. The work was still tedious and dirty though, mostly spent in silence lest Gamel hear them and get angry for it. They were able to trade some small conversation when he wasn’t in earshot, but like earlier that morning they had to save most of it for later.

The hours drew by, the day aging into the afternoon until their work was finished for today at least. They both gave a relieved stretch of their muscles, heading back to deposit their tools in the shed before checking in with Gamel. He gave a gruff agreement that they could go, handing both of them their meager pay for the work. They both gave their own form of thanks, before departing and heading to the nearby river.

It was a short walk to get there, the river flowing not far from Gamel’s field. They stripped off their simple loincloths when they arrived, wading out to their chests in the water and setting about their own tasks of cleaning the day’s work from their fur. Neither of them had any qualms about being exposed near each other; Krel had grown up with him and may as well have been family.

He dunked his head down into the cold water, staying under for a few moments before he came up and shook the water from his thick hair, stepping slowly through the water back to the bank. Krel did the same, and after they’d tied their garments on they started making their way back to the village to find food, letting the sun dry their fur on the way.

The village center was busy, or as busy as it could be given the population of the place, and they had to wander around a bit before they found a stall to their liking.

Eventually they did, and after handing out their shares of payment to the cook they set their course out of the market in favor of more quiet surroundings. Something caught his eye before they could leave however, making him stop in the middle of the lane to look over at it.

Another Sergal greeted his view, standing near one of the stalls. She couldn't have been much older than he, a bit shorter and slimmer than he was accustomed to seeing, her fur not quite as thick as well. That fur was what had gotten his attention, a soft green that he hadn't seen on any other Sergal before. It was a warm looking color, very unlike the cooler colors he was used to, and one that went well with the mellow sun shining down on them. The unnamed female suddenly turned her head, eyes searching through the crowd until she found him, as if knowing he was watching her.

Her eyes probably struck him more than her fur, a bright orange that stood out amongst the green as she peered at him. His stare on her was quickly cut short though, her orange eyes disappearing from view as his arm was nudged.

"Aris, what are you looking at?" Krel asked, making him jerk his head slightly. He turned his head back quickly, but the female was gone just as fast as he saw her.

"There... was a female over there." He replied vaguely, ears drooping.

"Oh, I'm sure there was." Krel laughed. "But what was so special that you had to stop on the spot?"

"She was different." He told him, turning his head back to face forwards as they started walking again. "She had green fur, and these orange eyes."

"Ah." His friend uttered in recognition. "*That* female."

"You know who she is?" He questioned, ears perking up as he glanced at Krel.

"No." He said, shaking his head. "She just arrived the other day, made herself a little shelter near the river and has been staying there. Comes into the village occasionally, but doesn't really talk to anyone."

"Oh..." Aris muttered, ears drooping again.

"Come on." Krel stated, nudging him on the shoulder. "Let's get to the hill and eat before our food gets cold."

"Yeah, alright." He agreed fatly, still thinking about that female.

They made it to the hill, a place they'd taken to using over the years for their afternoon meals or if they just wanted some quiet. It was a simple rise outside of the village that gave a nice view of the surrounding area, an old tree sitting at its crest. He ate his meal as he sat in the cradle of the tree's large roots, but beyond that he

wasn't very talkative, only giving vague replies to Krel when he tried to spark up conversation. He kept thinking about the female, and he had to wonder why.

"Alright Aris, what's so special about the stranger that you're so obsessed about her?" Krel finally asked; growing annoyed at the silence. "All these years and you've never let a female take over your mind so much."

"I... don't know." He replied, blinking. "She's just... different."

"Aye, well, if you find her so interesting I'd suggest you go and talk to her and sate your curiosity." Krel said to him. "But just be careful, she's not from around here."

With that the dark-furred Sergal climbed to his feet, laying a hand on his shoulder in farewell as he made his way down the hill back to the village, leaving him under the tree with his thoughts as the sun sunk lower.

It was hard to say why he found her so interesting all of a sudden, when he didn't even know her. She was different to what he was used to, and he supposed that just made him curious. Things had been the same day-in and out for all his life in this village, mostly just living on his own save for the foster mother who'd raised him. Maybe it was the fact that she clearly wasn't from around here that caught his interest, a chance to learn something about the places beyond his village. And then, maybe there was something else as well that he couldn't quite recognize...

Aris blinked, waking himself from his thoughts and taking a look at the sky. It was getting late, the sky turning to the oranges and reds of evening. He climbed to his feet, stretching his stiff muscles out from being seated so long before making his own way down the hill. The walk back was much quieter and empty as the day faded towards night, and he made it back to his small home fairly quickly.

Once there he closed the door behind him, putting the simple lock in place before moving over to his bedding. There wasn't any long ceremony to be done, simply setting his loincloth aside before he laid himself out on the padding. It was dark inside his hut, and now that he was laying comfortably on his bedding the toils of the day caught up to him. His mind quickly pulled him towards sleep, and he was in no mood to argue with it as he relaxed.

His last waking thought was of those orange eyes staring back at him, before he slipped into the darkness of sleep...

The next day found him in the same manner, morning sun coaxing him awake. Aris gave a grumble as he pulled himself up, rubbing at his eyes blearily. He had another day of work in the fields ahead of him, climbing to his feet to fetch some of the food

he kept in his hut. His mind fully awoke as he ate, his idle morning thoughts returning where he'd left off the night prior with that female.

He still didn't know why she was interesting, but as he swallowed the last of his food he decided he'd take Krel's advice and just go talk to her. It certainly wouldn't be a bad thing to find out what she was doing here, and if she intended to stay he'd be able to at least find out her name. That would come later though, as right now he had to get to Gamel's fields before it got too late. He made for the door to his home, grabbing his simple clothing on the way and tying it on before he ducked outside.

The sun was warmer on him than yesterday, and he got the feeling that today's work would be a hot one. Krel wasn't there to greet him this time, likely having headed to the fields already, and he set off down the path on his own. There wasn't anything odd in that though; he didn't always stop by his hut every day, just like they didn't always partake in each other's endeavors.

He reached the field shortly, following the familiar path he had been using for years. Gamel wasn't there to give him another list of tasks, as the one from yesterday was one that took steps to complete, a process that would take another day or two. He grabbed his tools again, making for where they'd left off. Krel wasn't in the same spot as him, but as he walked across the soft dirt he could spot his black fur sticking out in the distance.

Aris raised an arm to wave at him, the other male waving back in kind when he noticed it. He got to work after that though, not wanting to appear like he was slacking off and risk Gamel reprimanding him for it. It was laborious work prepping the fields, having to do all of it by hand and with the basic tools they were provided. But they weren't large at least, the area easily able to be done in a few days time with the both of them. And what was it Gamel had said? *"It makes you appreciate the worth of things"*?

He hummed to himself. It was something like that, and he supposed that was a decent enough lesson. Beyond its philosophical meaning, it also had the side effect of keeping his body toned. But, amongst his village at least, that wasn't a unique thing. Despite the fact that Gamel was strict and gruff most of the time, he had watched out for him as he grew up, and of course gave him the work in his fields. Aris couldn't consider him a bad person, certainly, just annoying at times.

Such were his wandering thoughts as he worked the field, the sun slowly climbing higher until it made the day just as hot as he predicted. Luckily, Gamel maintained a well on his land, both he and Krel able to fetch buckets of water to drink from as they needed throughout the day. He steadily progressed in his efforts, the freshly turned earth slowly being dried by the midday sun as he worked in lines.

As he finished another pass down the field, he stood upright and took a look at his progress. Pleasantly, he'd nearly finished this step of the work, his mind so occupied that he hadn't paid much attention to the passing time. He turned his head over to Krel's side, finding him to be almost complete with his share as well. With the sun

descending down from its peak and the field before him turned, he decided that it was time to stop for the day, heading back to return his tools.

After that he set his course for the river, the water looking to be a very nice reprieve after being in the hot sun. When he got there he quickly set his loincloth aside, wading into the cool water and giving a sigh as he relaxed in it. Krel eventually arrived as well, turning his blue eyes to watch him as he took to diving under the water. Aris chuckled at his eagerness, the male disappearing under the surface before he came back up a few moments later, completely soaked.

"I see it was just as hot a day for you then?" He called to Krel, floating in the water a short distance away.

"You know it was!" He replied with a snort. "My coat is darker than yours."

He gave a laugh, before dropping down into the water himself, submerging his entire body and holding his breath as long as he could. When his chest started to burn he pushed himself back to the surface, taking a breath of air as he wiped the water from his face. He gave a grin at Krel, the other Sergal pushing his way back to shore shortly after. Aris reluctantly followed suit, realizing that he couldn't stay there forever.

"Feel like getting something to eat and heading to the hill again?" Krel asked as they re-dressed themselves.

He opened his jaws to reply... but for the first time since going to the fields that female came into his thoughts again.

"Actually... Not today." He replied slowly, looking down the river's banks. "Krel? Where was it that female made her shelter?"

"Ah, so you want to go talk to her." Krel stated. "She's down that way." He pointed a clawed hand in the direction, following the same bank as them. "Just be careful Aris."

"I will, thank you." He nodded. "I'll talk to you later, Krel."

He walked off down the riverbank at that, not saying anything else as he set off to find where this female had taken to camping. Past Gamel's fields the river flowed between the hills that dotted the area, following the path of least resistance. Combined with the heavy rains they were prone to get this caused the banks to extend a distance beyond the water, and to cut into the hills it flowed past. Thus, as you started to venture into those hills, the inclines were usually quite steep or undercut by the current, if not simply rock faces all together.

It made following the river quite interesting, and at times left you stuck in a sort of ravine until the ground eventually evened out. He had to wonder why she would want to make her shelter there, but he wasn't even sure exactly *where* she'd made it.

He had to walk for a decent amount of time, soon leaving the level ground in favor of the more hilly variety before he saw any sign of her. When he did he almost missed it, having to stop along the riverbank. The ground here had leveled out a bit, leaving just a small step of dirt and moss where the river had washed it away. Stubborn trees clung to that edge, roots sticking out of the soil in which they'd once grown that was no longer there.

Amidst these trees sat a tent-like structure made out of branches and the large fern leaves from around the area, naturally hidden amongst the moss and shadows. He actually didn't know if it belonged to the stranger or not, but he was sure he'd never noticed such a thing when he'd walked the river previous times.

The click of rocks moving soon answered his question however, turning his head to find the green-furred female standing a distance away on the bank. She was dressed much the same as him, with just a simple loincloth and a belt covering her form. She stared at him with those same orange eyes, but this time he was very aware of the hand by her waist, hovering near a dagger hilt.

"Why are you following me?" She questioned, hearing her voice for the first time. It sounded only slightly different than the female voices he was used to, albeit slightly gruff... Although, that could be attributed to the defensive look she was giving him, and the way her body was tensed.

"I didn't follow you..." He managed finally.

"I saw you staring at me yesterday." She stated. "And now you come to find me. What do you want?"

Her question had a sharp edge to it this time, but he couldn't say it was angry. It was almost as if she was just anxious, and a bit... worried.

"I just wanted to talk to you." He told her honestly, looking across the distance at her with his icy-blue eyes. "You're a new sight around here, and I've rarely ever seen someone from elsewhere visit here. I was just curious..."

Her orange eyes searched his for a moment, before she slowly relaxed and took the hand away from her belt. She didn't say anything, simply walked across the bank to the structure he had been staring at prior and began to rummage through the few things underneath it. Seeing that as a kind of acceptance to his presence, he gingerly stepped closer to her "home".

"So, what is it you want?" She asked a bit more softly this time, glancing up to him.

"Well... what's your name?" He asked, watching her dig around in her pack.

"...Salria." She offered.

"Ah, well that is a nice name." He said, smiling slightly. "Mine is Aris."

Salria paused as he said that, eyes shifting to look at him curiously. "A... good name..." She uttered.

The female eventually pulled her hands from the pack, settling down onto a small blanket as she set a bundle in her lap. After she unwrapped it, she took what looked like smoked meat of some kind out and began to take slow bites from it.

"So, what is it that brought you here?" He questioned. "...If I may ask."

"You may as well sit down." Salria stated, gesturing to the ground across from her. Aris did as suggested, taking a seat and folding his legs to the side. "I came here, because no one bothers me."

If that was directed at him, he wasn't sure. "Ah, well, it is a good place to be left alone." He agreed. "Where is it you came from?"

"Far to the south and west." She replied, looking up at him as she ate. "How much do you know of the world beyond this place?"

"Very little." He said, tail twitching. "We don't get visitors here, and no one really talks about it if they know anything..."

"A little world in itself then." Salria mused to herself quietly.

"Something like that, I suppose." He mumbled.

"And you were raised here?" She questioned, taking to asking just as much about him.

"Yes, as far back as I can remember." He responded, scratching at one of his ears. "I've never left... never found a reason to, I guess."

She didn't say anything further, and the air took on an awkward silence.

"Why do you camp so far from the village?" He asked.

"Because I wished to get away from all the people." She stated. "That is why I came to this corner of the world."

"Ah..." He aired. "I'm sorry if I'm bothering you then."

"It... is alright." She sighed. "I just grew tired of the people and their quarrels."

Aris glanced away from her at that, looking up at the darkening sky.

"You chose an out of the way spot to camp." He mused. "I should probably head back before it gets too dark."

"Yes, you should." Salria stated, though whether it was in agreement or command he wasn't certain.

"Maybe I can come talk with you another time?" He asked meekly, ear twitching.

"Perhaps, Aris." She replied finally.

He took that as his queue to depart, climbing to his feet. He stared down at her for a moment, her orange eyes watching him until he took his gaze off her and turned away. He hopped down the small ledge back to the riverbank, starting to retrace his steps down the mossy rocks and dirt. Though they hadn't spoken about much, he still found it oddly nice to talk to her. It was interesting to talk with someone he knew nothing about, who wasn't from his village.

He looked forwards to talking with her again, though he wasn't sure when that would be. Salria hadn't denied him when he'd asked to talk with her more, but he could tell she wasn't completely comfortable around him. Though, he suspected that was because of her wish to get away from people, and not that she necessarily disliked him. He'd just have to wait and see he supposed.

Aris made it back to his village by the time dusk was falling, night starting to drape the world in darkness. There wasn't anyone on the paths as he went to his hut, most of them having gone to sleep in preparation for the next day. As he ducked through the door of his home, he felt a bit bad for not having talked to Krel since that afternoon. But, he figured the other male wouldn't mind; he'd talked with him for many years before now after all.

He crawled onto his bedding, laying his head down on the improvised pillow and shutting his eyes. There was yet another day of work ahead of him, and it was time he got to sleep...

Aris spent the next days finishing his work for Gamel, working the fields until they were ready for the old Sergal to plant his seeds. He liked to do this part himself, to make sure everything was planted properly, and to take part in the work he was no longer able to do by himself. There was a time when Gamel tended his fields alone, until he'd taken on the help of he and Krel. Even then he'd still spent some time working alongside them, though in the last few years he wasn't able to spend as much time laboring. Gamel had been seeing to those fields for just as long as Aris had been there, a good eighteen years or so, and then some before that.

When all the planting was done, the old male had called both of them to have a word with him. At first the two of them were nervous, exchanging glances at the thought they'd somehow done something wrong and were about to be punished for it. As Gamel gave them a stare with his old yet still sharp eyes though, he proved that fear wrong.

"Take a day or two to rest up." He said to them both gruffly. "I can handle the next steps myself until you return."

He and Krel shared a surprised glance this time, hardly expecting Gamel to let them off like that.

"Thank you." They both said in near unison.

"You did good work." Gamel stated, waving his hand; even that much was high praise from him. "Now go on, get out of here."

Not wanting to make him rethink his offer, they quickly turned and made off towards the river for their customary swim. As he walked the short distance there, Aris wondered to himself what exactly he'd do with the time to himself. He didn't have to think for too long though, Salria popping into his mind. He hadn't gone to see her since that first time, and now that he had time off he desperately wanted to. Maybe a bit too desperately, but she was a new idea that his mind clung to.

But right now, he definitely wanted to swim first, and to that end he ran into the water until it was deep enough for him to take a running dive under the surface. He swam down to the bed of the river, feeling the current try to carry him as he pushed against it. Eventually he had to come up however, swimming back to the surface for air. He blinked his bleary eyes, spotting Krel idly floating in the water nearby, looking off towards the shore at something.

"Aris, I think a friend of yours is here." He called, brown eyes glancing over at him.

Aris turned his head towards shore, curious as to what Krel meant. He saw what, or rather who it was, but he had to blink his eyes a few times first before he believed it. The green form of Salria sat on the grassy bank, orange eyes peering out at them, or more precisely him, as they swam. He briefly wondered what she was doing there, finding it odd that she would come find him, but pushed that thought aside for now.

He waded back to the shallow water, wrapping his tail around his front before doing so, aware that certain parts would be obvious with his fur wetted down as it was. He stepped onto the soft dirt of the bank, grabbing his loincloth from where it lay before walking towards her. Salria watched him the entire time as he approached, regarding him with a neutral gaze.

"What are you doing here?" He asked, stopping a few strides away as he tied his garment back on.

"I was curious as to what you did." She stated simply.

"I work the fields..." He began, but at the knowing look in her eyes it was clear she'd already found that out. "Have you been watching me all day?"

"Yes." She replied with a nod. "A little longer, actually."

"Why?" He questioned with a frown.

"I wished to know who you were and what your intent was." She told him, quirking her head.

"And have you learned them?" He asked.

"Perhaps." She said, giving the first smile he'd seen her give, albeit a small one.

Krel picked that moment to come onto the bank with them, stopping next to him as he tied his own piece of clothing on. Salria turned her orange gaze to regard him questioningly, clearly wondering who he was.

"This is Krel." He offered, gesturing a hand towards him and then to Salria. "And this is..."

"Salria." She answered for herself.

"Well... hello then." Krel said, looking over at him. "Aris, I'm going to head back to the village, I'll be at my hut if you need me."

"Alright." He responded, watching Krel walk over the grassy ground in the direction of their village. Salria watched him go as well, turning her gaze back to him when he was a distance away.

"He does not trust me it seems." She mused.

"He's just... weary around strangers." He replied with a shrug. "Like I said, we don't get many outsiders here."

"Well, it is smart of him to not trust those he does not know." She hummed.

"I suppose." He uttered. "If you just wanted to learn what I did, why show yourself?"

"You are not slow, at least." Salria stated with a quiet chuckle. "I wished to see if you wanted to talk more, as you mentioned a few days ago. I trust you do?"

"Ah, well yes, I would like to talk more." He agreed, noticing now that they were under the full shine of the sun. It wasn't a hot day, but warm enough to slowly make it uncomfortable. "But, would you care to go somewhere a little more shady first?"

"Possibly." The female prompted. "Do you already know a spot?"

"Actually, yes." He nodded. "There's a place me and Krel go, it's close and it has good shade, as well as a nice view."

"Very well." She agreed, climbing to her feet. "Lead the way then, Aris."

With her consent he did just that, starting off in the familiar direction that he'd followed countless times before. Salria stayed quiet then entire time, simply observing the surroundings as they walked. He noted that she kept her belt and

dagger on, and he knew she wasn't entirely at ease here. He didn't see any reason for her to be, his entire time growing up in the area an overall peaceful one. Though, he supposed that tied in with her statement of not trusting those you didn't know.

A statement that could hold true for her as well, but he didn't feel as though she was a danger to him. If anything he felt she just wished to be somewhere quiet, where no one would care to bother her. And if that was true, he imagined she would like the place he was taking her too...

They arrived there a short time later, climbing the slight incline through the trees as they made their way to the top. When they got to the summit as it were, they had to walk a stretch of level ground before they made it to the tree looming in front of them. It clung near the edge of an almost shear drop, the sudden decline allowing you to stare out over a piece of the valley they resided in.

He took Salria to the edge, standing under the shade of the large tree as she peered out at the view. She remained silent as she looked, her tail occasionally twitching being the only movement she made.

"It is... nice." She said after a time.

"Yes." He nodded, thick silver hair rustling. "It's always quiet up here."

Aris took a seat on the ground beneath the tree, propping his back against its trunk and resting his arms on his knees. Salria mirrored him, though she kept a decent gap between them both.

"What else do you wish to talk about?" She questioned him.

"Well..." He mumbled thoughtfully. "Why did you come so far from your home? Do you not have family there?"

"I..." She started, before closing her jaws and staring flatly out over the valley. "I have no family."

"Oh, I'm sorry." He offered, seeing pain in her eyes to back up her words.

Salria merely grunted. "And what of you, do you have family here?"

"Well, Krel is like a brother." He said. "And Gamel has always sort of looked out for me... He's the one who those fields belong to."

"But no blood family?" She questioned past his vague responses.

"No." He muttered. "My parents..." His ear twitched. "Died when I was still young. I was raised by a foster mother here until I was old enough to take care of myself."

"Were they the ones that named you so?" She asked.

He quirked his head at that question. "I imagine so, why?"

"Just curious." She mumbled.

"May I ask what happened to your family?" He queried slowly.

"They were killed." Salria declared bluntly.

"By who?" He questioned with a wince.

"You truly know nothing of the world outside this place, do you?" She said, glancing over at him. Her tone wasn't snide, just blunt.

"No..." He replied, blinking. "I don't think anyone here cares to bother themselves about what's out there. I've always been curious, but... I just never found a reason to leave this place in favor of something I didn't know."

Salria gave a snort at that. "Out there, Aris," She waved a hand at the horizon, "Things are not as peaceful as they are here. At least, not anymore."

"Not anymore?" He repeated. "What happened to make it change?"

"The 'Emperor' happened." She said with a scoff. "Much of the land out there is ruled by him now."

"Ah..." He mumbled, brows furrowing. "And is this what you sought to get away from by coming here?"

"Yes, it is." The female agreed.

"Well... I hope your stay here is a peaceful one then, Salria." He declared, turning his head to her. "And if I can help make it so, I'd be happy to do so."

Salria turned her orange gaze to him, a small smile visible on her features. "Be careful not to make promises that aren't yours to keep, Aris."

"I mean that though." He said pointedly.

"I know you do..." She said quietly, taking her gaze from his. "I should go now."

She climbed to her feet, and he jumped to his as well before she could walk off.

"Wait." He stated, making her pause. "Would you like to meet with me again? Tomorrow maybe? I have a few days free from working the fields..."

"Perhaps..." She said, the same as last time. "Goodbye for now, Aris."

With that she resumed her walking, descending the incline through the trees until her green fur eventually blended in with the foliage. He swallowed and licked his lips after she'd disappeared, turning back to face the scenery. A breeze blew its way past, ruffling his hair and making him stare at the horizon. The skies in the distance were a mix of colors, ones that he recognized meant a storm was likely brewing somewhere out there.

He doubted it would reach them that night, but in the next few days probably. It would be a good thing though, as they hadn't had much rain recently. At least as long as it wasn't a heavy storm it would be good, anyway.

Aris turned about and made his own way down the hill, heading home to get some rest for the next few days he would have to himself. He felt... happy after talking with Salria and learning more about not only her, but a little of the world beyond as well. The fact that she'd allowed him to talk with her more was a large part of that happiness, glad that she hadn't rejected him that way.

What she'd said about the world outside troubled him a bit, yes, but he hardly knew enough to be sure of what to think. He was sure of what he'd said to her though, that he hoped her stay was peaceful. Maybe it was strange for him to care that much when he hadn't even talked with her for very long, but he did.

When he ducked inside his hut he wasted little time laying down on what served as his bed, ready for a content sleep. He had the next few days to look forward to, and with them he hoped another meeting with Salria...

When he woke it was no longer dark inside his hut, light coming in through one of the small windows. He blinked his eyes as he opened them, staring up at the ceiling for a moment. In that moment he bolted upright, ready to throw on his clothes as he realized he'd be late to get to work at the fields. As he reached for his clothing though, he slowly remembered that Gamel had given him the next couple of days off.

Aris lowered his arm with a smile, stopping his frantic rush to get ready to instead just relax as he sat on the bedding. There wasn't any need for him to rush around today, letting himself gradually awaken before he got to his feet. He walked over to one of the windows, peering out of it at the sky. There were a lot of clouds beginning to roll across the blue plane, no doubt caused by the storm he had seen brewing yesterday. It seemed his days off would turn into wet ones.

He turned away from the window, moving back to his bed to grab his loincloth. It wasn't wet yet though, and he made for the door to spend some time outside before it became so. He could smell the hints of the storm as he stepped outside, walking down the dirt paths towards the small market. He passed a few other familiar faces that were his neighbors, giving them nods in greeting as they went about their own business.

When he reached the market he made his way to one of the village cooks he liked, exchanging a few familiar words with the male. He eventually bought some of the spiced meat that appealed to his taste, trading a few coins that served as currency

for the wrapped meat. With his food in hand, he departed the stall and went to a quieter part of the market, where a few primitive benches had been fashioned under the cover of the trees. He placed the package in his lap, setting into the still hot meat merrily as he sat.

"Enjoying your day off, Aris?" A voice asked questioningly, making him glance up to find his old friend approaching.

"Hello, Krel." He greeted after swallowing down a mouthful of food. "And yes, I am."

The other Sergal took a seat on the same bench as him, setting his own food down as he started to eat as well.

"How has yours been?" He asked.

"Alright." Krel replied through a bite. "A bit strange to not have anything to do."

"Yes, it is." He chuckled. "But why don't you go hunting? I know that's something you like to do."

"I would, but..." He cast a glance up at the sky. "I'd rather not get stuck in the middle of that storm."

"Ah, I see..." He uttered. "Do you think it will be a bad one?"

"I was up on the hill earlier." Krel hummed. "It didn't look like it would be a light one, that's for sure. A lot of rain coming if I had to guess."

Aris frowned, ears drooping as he thought about that. It was around the time of year when they would get rains, that was why Gamel wanted to get his particular crop planted. It also meant that the nearby river would possibly rise, and that was what had him a bit worried.

"Why the concerned face, Aris?" His friend asked, finishing off his food. "You know we always get these storms."

"Yeah, I know." He replied, glancing up at the sky. "Do you think the river will flood again?"

"Most likely, if the rains are as heavy as I think they'll be." Krel said surely. "Why? What's wrong?"

"Well... Salria made her camp near the river bank." He reminded him.

"Ah, that's what has you worried." The male muttered. "I'm sure she'll be fine, Aris."

His friend may have been sure, but he wasn't. Salria was new here, and she didn't know the tendencies of the weather and land. Especially the rivers, which would quickly run their banks during a storm.

"What is it about her that she's always on your mind anyway?" Krel asked, looking over at him as he hunched forwards and rested his arms on his knees.

"She's just... interesting to talk to." He said, tail twitching.

"There's got to be more than that." He replied with a snort. "I'm sure there's people here that would be interesting to talk to as well, but you never do. Do you like her or something?"

"Well, maybe..." Aris blinked, looking down. "I just like talking and meeting with her."

"So Aris finally found a female he likes." Krel stated with a chuckle, to which he shot a glare over at him. "Does she like you? Do you even know if she intends to stay here or not? I don't see her around the village very much at all."

"I've been talking with her, and I'm pretty sure she intends to stay." He replied. "She told me she wanted to be somewhere quiet, where no one would come and bother her."

"I think she hasn't quite found the right place then if you've been nagging her." Krel said with a smirk.

"She doesn't mind talking with me." He shot back, glaring at him again.

"Yes yes, it was just a joke." Krel said, raising his hands. "It's not really my business anyway, but if you like her why don't you get her to come to the village more?"

"I don't think she likes being around a lot of people." He shrugged. "I've been trying not to bother her too much, and let her talk when she wants to."

"Well, if you're so concerned you should just go tell her about the storm and see if she'll come back here until it passes." Krel pointed out.

"Maybe..." He agreed.

Krel climbed to his feet, looking down at him. "Alright, I need to go do some things now myself." He declared, patting him on the shoulder. "Just do what feels right Aris, that's all that matters."

At that the male turned and started walking off to attend those things of his, leaving him sitting on the bench by himself once more. A light wind passed through the trees as he sat, rustling the leaves above and tossing his hair about. He cast a final glance up at the sky, now completely shrouded by ominous looking clouds. Right then he made a decision, climbing to his feet and beginning a trek out of the village. It would take him a while to reach the river and make his way down it; he just hoped to get there before the storm got into its stride.

Aris navigated his way down the dirt trails that would eventually guide him to the river, the light growing gray in the brief calm. He made it to the most accessible point of the riverbank before Salria's camp, his hope seeming to hold up. It didn't last much longer though, the first droplets falling against his fur as he walked over the rocks. A low rumble of thunder urged him into a slow jog, keeping mindful not to sprain ankle on the uneven rocks, or worse yet break one.

It was at this gait that he finally came to the recognizable spot where Salria had camped, the rain starting to fall steadily. He took a jogging jump up the ledge of dirt and roots, spotting the female sheltered under her makeshift awning. Her orange eyes watched him with a frown when he leapt up onto the ledge in front of her; stopping under the modest cover the trees gave him.

"Is something wrong, Aris?" She questioned, eyeing him peculiarly.

"Well, in a way yes." He replied, looking down at her as she sat with legs curled. "There's a bad storm coming, and I wanted to check in on you."

"I... see." She said slowly, still eyeing him. "I'm quite alright here, thank you."

"No, there's more to it." He said with a shake of his head. "We get these storms every year around this time, and they'll usually last for days. The rivers always flood their banks, including this one, and quickly."

"Alright." Salria responded. "I appreciate the warning, but did you come all the way here just to tell me that?"

"No." He agreed. "I wanted to ask if you'd like to come back to the village with me, at least until the storm is over. I'm, ah... worried the river may wash out your camp."

The green-furred female quirked her head at him, giving a frown at his offer. As if to back him up, the rain started to pour heavier, washing down in sheets that drenched the ground and turned the river surface into innumerable splashes and ripples. Salria's features softened a bit, perhaps seeing that he was just concerned for her.

"Alright Aris, I will come with you." She said, grabbing a pack that seemed to hold all her belongings and climbing to her feet.

"Thank you." He smiled; feeling relieved over that. "Come on, I'll lead you back."

He turned, Salria behind him as he hopped down the ledge of dirt back to the bank. As he felt the heavy rain pelt against him and soak into his fur, he regretted not bringing any kind of weather wear. Both he and Salria would be soaked by the time they got back, but it was only water at least, and they could get dry at his hut he supposed...

They half jogged, half ran back the way he'd came, trying to stay under the tree cover when they could. The rain kept on in its torrent, the wind soon picking up with it to make the trees sway and the falling water whip back and forth at them. It was refreshing in a way once you gave in to being soaked by the rain, but with the wind howling and the thunder beginning to roar he didn't want to be out in the open if he could help it.

Soon they made it back to the village, walking quickly over the muddied ground to his hut. He opened the door for her and showed her in, allowing them both to duck into the dry confines of his home. When he closed it all that remained of the storm was the rain pelting the roof above, and the water dripping off of their soaked forms. Now that he'd brought Salria to his modest home, it left her standing awkwardly in place as she looked around.

"You can set your pack down if you want." He said to her, trying to make her feel a bit more comfortable.

She took it from her shoulders after a moment, carefully setting it down by the door.

"This is where you live then?" Sarlia mused.

"Yes." He replied with a nod, opening up a small chest of drawers to find something they could dry off with. "It's not very big, but it's a roof and it keeps me warm and dry."

"It is... cozy, I suppose." She mumbled.

He eventually found something that would serve the purpose, standing from his crouch and bringing the towel-ish cloth over to her. She took it gingerly when he handed it to her, sniffing at it before using it to wipe her head of the water that clung there. He looked over her green fur again like he had in the market, still finding the shade... appealing. She still only wore a loincloth much like his, leaving the rest of her shorter fur exposed.

Sarlia finished drying the fur on her head, taking the cloth away to look at him curiously with her orange eyes as she found him staring at her. He blinked, taking his eyes away as he realized he was simply standing there, his own towel just hanging from his hands. She quirked her head at him as he set about drying himself, watching him oddly. When they were finished he took the damp cloths and set them aside, leaving both of them slightly dryer than they were before.

He cast a look out the window as the wind and rain howled, trying to gauge the time. It was a pointless task though, the heavy rains and dark clouds reducing the light to a listless gray. He knew it had been somewhere around midday perhaps when he set off to get Salria, so it must have been somewhere close to evening. Still, that didn't mean much if they were huddled inside while the storm raged.

"Would you like to sit down?" He said to Salria with a gesture to some of the mats on the floor, noticing how she still stood in place.

"Very well..." She replied, moving to slowly sit down and curl her legs.

Aris took his own seat across from her. "This storm will probably last another few days or so." He told her. "But your welcome to stay here until it passes."

"Thank you..." She said slowly, draping her tail across her lap.

"If you don't want to head out into the storm I keep some food here as well, if you're hungry." He continued. "Are you?"

"Ah, no, not right now." Salria declined. "I have my own food with me anyway, there is no need for me to use up your stores."

"I don't mind." He said with a shrug. "Maybe once this storm clears I can show you around the village, and you can try some of the food."

"Perhaps." The female said flatly.

He kept his maw shut after that, seeing that he was simply rambling. The rain continued to pelt against the roof, occasional flashes of lightning illuminating everything for a split second only to be followed by the rumble of thunder.

"So this Krel, he is your friend?" Sarlia eventually asked, breaking the relative silence.

"Yes." He nodded in agreement. "I've known him for most of my life; grew up with him."

"Do you trust him?" She asked, watching him curiously.

"Of course." He said with a frown. "Why would you ask that?"

"I simply wished to know." She stated. "I must ask you not speak of my name to any others however."

"Alright..." He replied, finding that request... strange.

"I trust you, Aris, and I will trust your judgment of Krel." She added, tail twitching in her lap. "But I would prefer that my name and where I came from not spread to too many ears."

"I understand. I'll not speak of it to anyone if I can help it." He promised.

"Thank you." She said, a bit of relief in her voice. "If it is alright with you, I would like to get some rest now."

"Oh, of course." He uttered. "You can use my bedding over there, if you want."

"That isn't necessary." She declined with a small smile, reaching over to her pack. "I have my own with me."

"Ah, okay." He mumbled as she took a roll of padding from her pack and laid it out in an open space; away from his own bedding he noticed, though that didn't bother him. Salria rested herself down, curling her legs up and resting her head on her arms.

"Can I ask something?" He spoke up before she could close her eyes.

"You may." She consented, peering up at him.

"Do you intend to stay here? In this valley, I mean." He questioned timidly.

"I do not have any plans to leave just yet." She replied vaguely. "Why?"

"I just, ah... don't want to see you go." He mumbled, averting his gaze.

If he'd still been looking he would have seen the amused smile cross her orange eyes. "Goodnight, Aris."

At that she closed her eyes, leaving him in silence once more as she drifted off to sleep. He fidgeted a bit as he sat, glancing across the small space to look at her, form gently rising and falling as she breathed. Aris didn't know why he'd asked that, but he'd just wanted to know if she was going to stay. Maybe he did like her in the way Krel had joked with him about after all.

He thought about that as he stayed awake, listening to the storm outside. Perhaps it was foolish of him to think that when he knew so little about her, and when she very well didn't think the same of him. Still, she'd allowed him to talk with her and trusted him enough to come to his home, even if it was under a circumstance. She was difficult to read, but he was fairly sure she didn't dislike him; she'd said she trusted him, surely.

He took his gaze away, looking up through the window at the darkened world outside, the clear rain washing down and whipping against the primitive glass. Regardless of what he may have felt, he would keep it to himself for now and allow her to keep her own space. He would be happy with the chance to simply talk with her for now, and maybe in time call her a friend...