

FLIGHT

"Oh gods no..."

The small voice of the ten year old fox girl was one of despair and loss. She fell to her knees, face upturned to the dead carcasses of her two younger brothers, father and mother. All of which were hanging, stripped of their clothes and fur, from the crossbeam of her family's thatched roof. A mournful howl escaped her maw. This was not the first murder in the village, but the small child, now an orphan, could have never prepared herself to come home after a night of play and rule breaking with her closest age mate and find her family like this.

"Sarah! Wha- gods above..."

Kivhel, who was a little more than a year older than Sarah had heard her howl and been the first of many to begin appearing at her doorway, he was also the first to step forward and comfort the crying fox. With one arm draped over her shoulder as if to protect her from the horrors that she had just witnessed, Kivhel began to lead her to his own hut.

Situated in the center of the village on rise constructed of earth and stone was the hut that belonged to the chief, and Kivhel's father. Sarah had never before been inside Kivhel's hut, as she had never before been allowed to enter the hut of the village chieftain. Mortau, chief of the village, was surprised when his youngest son entered the hut accompanied by a sobbing young vixen, and breaking one of the first rules of the village by bringing someone who was not a blood relative into his home.

"Kivhel!" his voice was deep and sharp, but not angry as he called for his sons' attention, as both father and chief he knew that Kivhel would not break this rule if not for a good reason.

"I'm sorry father" Kivhel began "it's...it has happened again..."

"No... Sarah? Is she hurt?"

"Only her family father, she was... out when it happened..."

"Out where? How do you know?" inquired the older male

Scrambling now in an attempt to explain how he knew without getting the two of them into trouble Kivhel said

"I... uh... had to relive myself this morning, and I saw her walking back to her hut."

Mortau raised an eyebrow, neither convinced that his son was lying or telling the truth, however the answer seemed plausible enough.

"Take her to the back room, and stay with her until I send for you." With that the tall fox, with deep crimson and grey fur stood up and walked out the door. Kivhel heard him call the villagers and then heard him begin a speech meant to console the rest of the villagers. Sarah, who had not said a word, was the one in need of console, and he intended to give it to her. Leading her to the back room as

instructed the two kits sat down, Sarah still in the arms of Kivhel had stopped her weeping long enough to look up into the deep brown eyes of her best friend. They full of concern and worry, as well as something else, something that had always been there but had never been said out loud until last night, when he had asked her to sneak out of the village with him. Last night, when they had quietly made their way into the forest and then past the small brook and into the meadow, where they danced on the grass glazed with dew, under an audience of stars. Last night was when he pointed to a single star in the sky, just below the star that never sets, gleaming in the sky, as white as a snowflake he said

"That star there, just below the never-setting one, that star is yours." Sarah looked him; she could not believe it, a star, a star all her own.

"It's beautiful!" She said delighted "what's it called?"

"It has no name, but when I'm chief, I'll make sure the whole village knows that that star is 'Sarah's Star'".

She hugged him, threw her arms around him and hugged him for all she was worth, then sat back and said "but you're never going to be chief, Aladarin will, he's the eldest, the right is his..." seeing the smile drop off his face she added "but for you and me, it's perfect, like a secret code, no one will know what we're talking about."

His smile returned, his white teeth gleaming in the moonlight, barely distinguishable from the white fur around his mouth and down his neck and chest until narrowing into a single white stripe that went straight down behind the rope belt he wore to keep his breaches up. The rest of his underbelly was grey, subtly changing into the same deep crimson of his father. His coat so unlike her own, with a white lower jaw and underbelly, sharply contrasting the 'bleeding dawn', as her father called it, red orange that covered everything except her paws and tip of her tail, which were a grey white. He was so handsome, and kind to her, as she looked into his brown eyes, and he looked into her blue, she did not stop him from kissing her, and as she fell asleep in his arms, looking into the same deep brown eyes she did now, someone was slaughtering her entire family.

Outside the speech Chief Mortau was giving fell upon deaf ears, the outraged cries of villagers fearing for their safety demanded that the culprit be caught. One voice, young and full filled the air

"What of the Sarah girl?!? Who else finds it suspicious that her family dies and she is unharmed?"

It was a voice that commonly spoke out against its father; it was the voice of the future Chief Aladarin, who had the strength to lead, but not the experience.

"Why is she in our house father? Is she alone? Is she guarded? You are a fool for letting her in, she is a demoness, who eats the skin of her friends and family! Or a witch! Who uses skin and flesh for evil spells!"

Murmurs and shouts of agreement could be heard outside; Sarah looked up at Kivhel, and said

"Please don't believe them"

"How could I? You were with me the entire night, and even if everyone else turned against you, I wouldn't"

The couples were silent for a moment and continued listening as Mortau lost support, and Aladarin gained it...

"We must burn the demoness!" Shouted Aladarin

"I'm scared" whispered Sarah

"Don't worry, father will-" Kivhel was cut short by crash, in the main room of the hut the sound of feet fast approaching the back room were heard.

"Where is she father? Tell me now! The demoness must burn!" the shouts of Aladarin rung through the house.

"Quickly!-" Kivhel said "-out the back!"

He moved a large clay jar out of the way revealing a small hole in the wall

"Go! I'll hold him off!"

Sarah stood up and scurried to the hole, grabbing Kivhels hand she looked again into his deep brown eyes

"What you said last night... did you mean it?" she asked in a whisper

"Every word." he replied "Now go"

Sarah climbed in the hole and was able to pull herself through it using her arms; she heard the scraping of clay on dirt as Kivhel moved the jar back into place. The wall was thick and though Sarah was stretched out she still had a foot to crawl before she would be able to make a mad dash to the forest. Scotching herself forward she froze when she heard Aladarins voice.

"Where is she brother?" he commanded anger obvious in his voice.

"Who?" Kivhel asked

"You know exactly who! The which! The Demoness! Don't play games with me!"

Kivhel was quiet for a moment, then said "I will not say"

"You stupid kit!" Aladarin shouted

Sarah heard a quiet thud followed by a sharp yelp of pain then another thud.

"Tell me! Tell me where she is or by the gods I swear I'll-"

"You'll what?" interjected the quiet voice of Kivhel "you're not chief!" his voice grew stronger "You can't do anything!"

Aladarin let out a soft growl, and then Sarah heard another light thud, followed by a grunt of pain from Kivhel. Terrified Sarah thought "*I wonder what's going on*" she heard the sound of a clay lid being lifted off its pot "*oh no! Next he'll surly move the pot!*" she started to inch herself forward at a desperate pace, only a foot more, nine inches, six, three more inches... Sarah was almost free; she could smell the fresh air outside the musty crawlspace. She was almost free! She could hear the birds, she could see the path between the huts, it was a straight shot into the woods. She was so close to freedom when she felt the hand of Aladarin grab her left ankle, and begin pulling her back.

"No" she shouted desperately trying to kick the hand off. As she was pulled out of the hole her leather skirt was slowly lifted up, the small pebbles on the ground were scraping her unprotected thighs and sides now as she was violently yanked out of her passage way to freedom. When she was pulled entirely out of the hole her skirt had been pulled entirely up, leaving her bear-rumped and exposed. For a moment she sat there, dazed before she tried to hide her nakedness with one paw, only to have it shoved away and pulled behind her back. She was bent over with Aladarin holding in place with one paw while the other touched between her legs. What she felt was both pleasurable and wrong. She squirmed and tried to get free, shouting "No" and "Stop!" only to have a portion of her skirt torn and crammed into her mouth. She desperately looked around for Kivhel only to see him unconscious in the corner; a large bruise had formed on his cheek and the side of his head. Tears streaming down her face Sarah accepted she could do nothing as Aladarin did as he pleased with the spot between her legs. Silently sobbing as she heard the breathing of the older fox above her steadily increase she began to prepare herself mentally and physically, for what she did not know but she was certain that it would hurt.

"That's enough Aladarin!"

Sarah fell to her knees and rolled over to see Mortau standing in the doorway, leaning heavily against the frame, holding his hand against his head as blood, crimson as his coat, poured from beneath his fingers. Next to him was Shiall, the village's medicine man and elder. His silvery coat gleamed in the dim light of the back room as he made his way over to Sarah. Everyone in the hut was silent, except for Kivhel, who whistled through his nose as he breathed. Hands, slightly shaky from age reached forward and removed the shred of leather from her maw. Shiall looked grave as he peered into Sarah's eyes. He reached into the leather pouch at his waste and pulled out a grey green powder that he rubbed on Sarah's forehead. Then he pulled a small pinch off and tasted it. Then another pinch was thrown into the air.

"I'm sorry child." The silver fox said

Looking graver than Sarah had thought possible Shiall turned to Mortau,

"Your eldest is correct... the child is indeed a witch"

A look of sadness appeared on Mortaus face almost as quickly as one of triumph panted its way on Aladarins.

"So be it" said Mortau he walked forward, avoiding eye contact with Sarah Mortau walked forward and, used his free hand, roughly grabbed and lifted her into a standing position by her upper arm, he then proceeded to lead her out of the hut and onto the area in front of the hut where the villagers all still stood, waiting for this moment, to see the witch brought before them. Ignoring her pleas to be let go, and insistent proclamations that she was not a witch, or a demoness, Mortau called for the cage used to hold deer before they were killed for the Autumn Feast. When five or six villagers left to go bring the cage Sarah gave up. She went as limp as her ragdoll, hanging her head, softly sobbing. Occasionally phrases like "not a witch" or "let me go" were made out by the chief, who heard them but pretended not to, as a he let a single tear fall from his eyes. As soon as the cage was in brought forth and lashed together Sarah was thrown in, and the chief returned into his home, leaving Aladarin to finish the preparations. Sarah lay as she had fallen; ignoring the foul things people she had once considered friends said to her. As she watched the men of the village go out and bring back the trunk of a mighty tree, and the women, who went to the fields and brought back the long stalks of dried grass, which were all doused in oil to ensure that they would ignite. The sun was setting, and it was proclaimed by Aladarin that she would be burned at high noon tomorrow as the final touches on her pyre were completed. Sarah rolled over; it was the first movement she had made of her own accord since her squirms to escape the grasp of Aladarin that morning... it seemed so long ago. Sarah had long ago cried her eyes dry, and now the salt encrusted fur picked up the small amount of dirt it had been touching as she lay on her back, staring, but not looking upward, on his way back into his hut, Aladarin stopped and said, I a voice, quiet as death.

"it was me..."

Shocked Sarah turned her head, eyes gleaming with new tears; shocked he would say such a thing... he only looked at her and smiled before walking into the hut. Sarah closed her eyes

Night came, Sarahs Star was one of the first visible, and upon seeing it, a new wave of tears crashed over her and she wept silently for her mother and father, and for her two younger brothers, yet to be given pack names yet, but loved all the same. Sarah cried until she fell asleep. The last thing she saw was her star, the star Kivhel had given to her.

"Sarah!" a strained whisper tore through the shroud of confusing dreams that had plagued Sarah since her departure into the realm of sleep.

"Sarah, please answer me!" the whispering voice pleaded "Sarah! Sarah please doesn't be dead!" the whispering voice was Kivhel. Sarah tried to move, she was so tired though...

"Sarah... Sarah please gets up!" Sarah let out a slight groan and stirred, opening her eyes to see Kivhel a white bandage wrapped around his head, knife in hand, on top of the cage, frantically cutting away at the lashings.

"K-Kivhel?" Sarah said voice hoarse from crying all day "Kivhel!" Sarah jumped up and grabbed his hand. "What are you doing?"

"I'm going to free you, then we're both going to run away." he said, cutting at the lashings

"Kivhel you can't! You'll be caught!" Sarah said, torn between her own desire for freedom and her fear that he would end up with the same fate as her.

There was a small pop as the tight lashing broke free and fell to the ground. "One down, one to go!" Kivhel said in a strained whisper as he moved over to the other lashing and began sawing.

"Kivhel... you don't have to do this, think about what you're doing..."

Kivhel stopped; he lowered his head into the cage... "Kiss me again"

Sarah hesitated for only half a heartbeat, standing upon her toes so she could reach. They shared a kiss, deep and passionate, muzzles intertwining, tongues wrapping around each other, their saliva flowing from their own mouth into the others... when Kivhel pulled away he looked into her blue eyes and said

"I will never leave you"

And with that there was another small pop and another set of lashings fell away. Sheathing his knife then climbing down half way Kivhel lifted the top of the cage up so Sarah could get out. Once she was Kivhel jumped to the ground and then stooped over to retrieve a spear, bow, and quiver of arrows.

"Come on" he whispered

"Wait" she said "I... I want to say goodbye"

Kivhel understood immediately, and though he hadn't planned for it he should have expected it. They walked hand and hand, as quiet as ghosts to the hut that had been the home to Sarah for the last 10 years.

Sarah stopped and said "Kivhel, give me your knife"

Confused but not saying anything Kivhel pulled the small knife from its sheath and handed it to her. Sarah pulled her tail around from behind her and grasped at the longest bunch of fur she could find. She took the knife and cut the fur, holding it together she approached her house and placed the bunch of fur on the threshold.

"Goodbye" she whispered so quietly not even Kivhel heard her.

Turning around, Sarah handed the knife back to Kivhel and the two of them quietly made their way to the edge of the village. Then, hand and hand, the two ran into the forest... never to look back.