

FATE

"Come on Sarah! We can't stop here"

Kevahl said, stopping to grab Sarah's hand and pull her back to her feet. The two continued their run. In the distance the shouts of Aladarin had faded into the distance but not the ominous beat of the drum which beat constantly, always reminding the two of what would happen to them should they stop. Sarah stood for a moment, dazed, and then continued sprinting forward. Concentrating on the bare feet of the boy fox in front of her, she watched as they hopped over fallen limbs, stones, and low growing shrubs. The sky was dark, and grey with clouds ready to burst with water. The light that managed to filter in through the clouds was dark and made running hard. The pair had only run a few meters before Sarah collapsed again, the pounding of Kevahl's feet stopped, but the drum continued...

"I... I can't go on... Kevahl... I can't..."

Kevahl stopped and turned towards Sarah, who had fallen to her knees in exhaustion.

"Sarah!" he shouted, returning to her side, he grabbed her arm and tried to lift her to her feet. Sarah did not budge however, exhaustion had taken her and she was now unconscious. Kevahl dropped down and took Sarah's head into his arms... in the distance the drum beat began to get louder. The shouts of Aladarin were now audible, but not intelligible...

"I have to find a place to hide" thought Kevahl. He looked around frantically but saw nothing. Slinging the bow he had in one hand over his shoulder he picked up the spear Sarah had been carrying and tied it to the side of the quiver with a loose thong of leather. With his hands now free, Kevahl lifted Sarah as best he could and stumbled forward. The drum behind him pounded as fast and hard as his own heart. Legs pumping, Kevahl ran as best he could with the extra weight, the strain made him painfully aware of his head injury.

The quiet whisper of the wind through the leaves suddenly became a hissing roar as large drops of rain finally fell. The sound of the beating drum all but disappeared in the cacophony that followed. The dull thuds that sounded as the rain hit the ground, the squelch of Kevahl's feet as he ran over mud and the sodden plant life that made up the forest floor, and the roar of the wind.

The rain now was coming down hard and the beat of the drum faded. A full day and night had passed since they had made their escape and neither of the two foxes had slept, instead they had run as far as they could. Now the two of them were fatter than either of them had ever been before. As Kevahl ran he did his best to stave off his exhaustion but his head throbbed painfully and made it seem that with every step he took he had traveled for a hundred miles but only moved an inch. He continued running until his foot hit a patch of slick mud, dropping Sarah, Kevahl thrust out his arms to catch himself... and ended up in elbow deep mud. Picking himself up Kevahl looked around him, he was in a very old part of the woods, the trees here were far taller than those around the village, and much wider around the base. Kevahl moved over to Sarah, who still had not awakened, he lifted her up and began again to run, though at a much slower pace. Kevahl knew the drum still beat behind him, he had been on the drum-hunts, he knew that the trackers and hunters would not stop until the drum stopped, and the drum would not stop until Aladarin commanded them to, and Aladarin would not stop the drum unless both he and Sarah were caught... or dead...

Kevahl knew that as long as he ran the trackers would find him, rain or shine, sleet or snow... he had to hide, the problem was that he had no idea where. Kevahl began to slow down; the fear of being caught was slowly being overcome by his need to rest. Kevahl began to look frantically for a place to hide, any place. When he heard the drum beat over the sound of the rain he knew that the trackers were close, he scanned the area again for anyplace he could stash himself and Sarah. Eyes frantically flickering from place to place he finally as he crossed a shallow stream he saw a section where the earth under the roots of one great tree had washed away after a storm. The tree now stood with half of its roots bare to the outside, and the other half firmly sunk into the rich solid of the forest floor, running over to the tree Kevahl concluded that it would provide adequate cover, the drum boomed, closer now than it had ever been since the beginning of their escape. Kevahl pressed himself as far into the bank as he could, cradling Sarah's head in his lap.

The drum boomed louder...

Kevahl closed his eyes and said in a whisper

"Great gods above me, please, I beg of you, do not let us be found. Do not let my brother find us, do not let any of the trackers find us, do not let any of the hunters find us... Great gods above, please protect Sarah and myself... please, oh gods protect us, please oh gods hide us from—"

Thunder roared and the drum beat loudly, there was a splash and Kevahl opened his eyes and glanced over towards the source of the sound, a single tracker stood in the middle of the stream, he sniffed the air once and pulled out a small bone whistle he blew into it once, a sharp note, almost inaudible rang through the forest, the drum beat doubled its tempo and Kevahl sat under the tree staring terrified as more and more trackers and hunters began to fill onto the bank. Kevahl pushed his head back and shut his eyes tight. Whispering again he said

"Great gods protect us, keep us hidden"

The drum stopped and thunder roared and as soon as it stopped the unmistakable voice of Aladarin shouted

"Where are they?!? Why have you stopped?!?"

Kevahl slowly leaned forward and peeked through the roots, the tracker was silent at first then he said

"I have lost the trail, and I am tired. It is late in the day, we should rest..." he began to turn away but Aladarin shouted

"No! No resting! I don't care how late it is, that damned witch has my brother and neither of them has stopped since they left! I want my brother damn it!"

The tracker turned back to Aladarin and said

"You never gave a shit about your brother until he ran off with the witch, why only now do you care so much? My son is at home crying because he believes that one of his friends had his soul devoured by another friend, so I ask you, why do you care about your brother all of a sudden?"

Aladarins gaze narrowed, and in a cold as death voice he said

"You forget your place"

The tracker crossed his arms defiantly and said "nay, it is not I who has forgotten there place, it is you Aladarin, you are not chief yet, and I thank the gods for that, for I would rather die than have you as a chief."

There was a flash of silver and the next thing Kevahl saw was a knife in Aladarins hand and a look of shock on the face of the defiant tracker. The tracker stumbled back and grasped at his throat, which began to sporadically spurt crimson blood. The tracker fell to his knees as the look of shock faded away. Kevahl stared, hardly breathing as the trackers hands fell away from his throat, revealing the large gash that stretched the entire span of his throat. The tracker looked over at the tree Kevahl and Sarah were hiding in, the tracker saw Kevahl, locking eyes with him the tracker smiled, and Kevahl saw the life leave his eyes, just seconds before the tracker finally fell into the cool water of the stream.

Aladarin sheathed his knife and said

"Dose anyone else share his views?"

The rest of the trackers and hunters all remained silent.

"Good." Aladarin said "Now find my brother and the witch and bring them to me!" the hunter with the drum began beating again and the trackers and hunters all looked at each other for a moment before picking a direction seemingly at random they all started to jog off, spreading out amongst the trees as they did.

Aladarin took one last look at the corps of the tracker and spat before jogging off into the woods after the trackers.

The stream ran crimson.

Kevahl looked up and whispered

"Thank you"

Looking back down at Sarah he knew they were safe for the moment, he stroked the side of her face lovingly and smiled. Leaning back he closed his eyes and fell asleep to the sound of the rain and the splashing of the stream.

Kevahl awoke the following morning to the light streaming in through the roots. Sarah was still asleep in his lap, but this time when he ran his hand down her face her eyes opened. In the second that sleep and wake shared Kevahl saw the Sarah from before they were thrown into this mess, her eyes weren't yet fraught with worry, the edges of her lips pulled back in a faint smile, and the morning light that reflected off the stream danced across her face, making her look like an angel. Then the second passed, and the crushing realization of everything that had come to pass began to weigh the livelihood in her face down...

"Where? -- Oh gods, I passed out didn't I?!? We've got to run!"

She began to sprint out from under the tree but Kevahl reached out and caught her hand as it flew by and said

"It's ok Sarah, we're safe now... come back and sit with me for a second"

Slightly confused Sarah returned to Kevahl and sat down.

"Sarah" Kevahl began "the hunters passed us by yesterday evening... one of them defied Aladarin and, then Aladarin, he... he... he killed him... and his—" Kevahl stopped and swallowed to steady his nerve "—his body is still out there"

Sarah gave a slight gasp of horror at the news.

"Sarah, I watched him die, and he... watched me watch him... he didn't die right away... he could have pointed out our hiding spot at any time but he didn't... he... he just looked at me..."

The pair of them were silent for a moment before Sarah said

"Let us bury him"

Without another word the two stood up and left their hiding place. Making their way over to the fallen tracker his eyes were glazed over, staring on forever but never seeing.

"The river of life flows on..."

Forever... forever..."

Sarah began to sing the traditional funeral dirge

"The end of the light is just the end of the beginning..."

This is only the body dying...

The soul will live on, live on..."

As Sarah sang Kevahl began to dig a grave along the shoreline. Sarah walked over to the opposing bank and plucked a single daisy as she sang...

"you have fallen now but you shall rise again

In the body the gods have made

To live a life anew, a life free of pain.

To live the life for which today you paid..."

Her song completed Sarah walked over to Kevahl and assisted him in the digging of the grave. Once completed Kevahl and Sarah gingerly lifted the body and set it into the grave. Filling the grave over with sand and then as many heavy rocks as they could find Sarah placed her daisy on top of their small pile of stones. Tears for their fallen comrade falling freely Sarah and Kevahl collected what little they had and walked down stream, hand in hand...

Eventually the small stream became a river and the pair had to move to the bank. They walked along the bank for a while eventually coming to a thicket that spanned the length of the river as well as deep into the forest on either side. Deciding that they must go through the thicket Kevahl turned and said

"Let me go first, I'll clear the way"

Sarah only nodded in response. Kevahl began to work his way through the mass of branches and vines, with Sarah close behind. For several minutes all Sarah saw was Kevahl's back until he finally broke free of the brambles and stumbled forward, Sarah followed closely behind him into dazzling sunlight the vista laid out before her seemed to be something out of a fairytale...

Standing in the foothills of a valley, Sarah and Kivhel looked out on fields of tall grass swaying in the breeze; in the distance keeping the grass short with constant grazing large animals could be seen walking about. The forest continued to their left, following the stream before being picked up into the hills. The great mountains, which normally could only be seen from the tops of the highest trees in the village, were no more than a few miles away; they ran along the horizon like the teeth of a giant and ancient monster. Between the mountains and the edge of the forest were grassy plains, vibrant green from the recent rain and directly in front of her sloshed the river they had been following. Sarah followed the river until her eyes met something she didn't quite understand... the pure vastness of what she saw was unlike anything she had ever seen before... Sarah gazed in bafflement at the ocean. Kevahl stood next to her equally awestruck. The two stood there for a while until a strong sea breeze wafted the salty scent of the ocean across their muzzles. Sarah smiled and turned to Kevahl...

"Want to go swimming?" she asked, excitement saturating her voice.

Kevahl, not taking his eyes off the deep blue waters that crashed up against the golden sand mealy smiled and said "Race ya!" before he took off running.

"HEY! NO FAIR!!! KEVAHL... WAIT UP!!!" giggling Sarah took off after Kevahl sprinting towards the beach.

Aladarin, seething with anger and covered with blood screamed a string of swears onto the canopy of the forest as he made his way back to the village. The murders he had just committed did not weigh on his mind; he would simply blame the witch. He marched into the stream where he had killed the tracker the day before. Only finding a pile of stones and a single daisy laying upon the top his eyes bulged wide with rage. Aladarin looked around for any sign of the girl and his brother seeing none he let out another scream of rage before sprinting downstream dagger in hand.... determined to find them... determined to kill them... a plan forming, arriving in the village with the head of the witch, and sobbing to his father that he had been too late to save dear young Kevahl... he grinned, his pelt would be the crowning jewel to his collection. Already thinking of where he would place it, perhaps next to the girls and her family, or next to his beloved father, once he got back he would be sure to reunite father and son... he licked his lips, the taste of blood excited him... his mind then drifted to another flavor of blood... and the thought if it excited him all the more...