

XXIV

The Hunt (Day 187 on Tashoo)

Once again I am sleeping and dreaming. As usual, I am dreaming of Tyarza. As this dream begins, she is walking toward me. Her lion-yellow skin is exotic looking as she walks toward me. She is wearing something similar to Roman sandals on her smallish feet. She is wearing the same leather dress that she has worn in almost every dream I have in which she is a character, and that is about 90% of my dreams. I have very strong feelings for her; my heart races as I see her approaching. I want to spend my whole life with her. I reach out for her, but, her image is leaving, fading away. As she is fading, I hear her saying, "I would be your mate, Mvilu. All you have to do is agree to it."

Now, it's getting dark, darker and darker. Why are my dreams of Tyarza so short? Why are my feelings for her so strong? I barely know her; I want to be with her and happy. But, she always fades away. Now she is completely and utterly gone.

After Tyarza fades away, I am alone in the darkness. Suddenly, the darkness is punctuated with blindingly white points of light. Now I see creatures, ugly, dangerous-looking creatures. What are they? The name Khorcha comes to my mind. But what does Khorcha mean? These creatures look like dinosaurs of some kind. But they are different. They talk. Dinosaurs couldn't talk. Could they? What are they saying? I can't hear or understand it. They seem agitated, but I don't know what they could possibly be agitated about. Despite the fact that they seem agitated, they do nothing even remotely threatening toward me. Perhaps it is because we are in what looks like a barroom, perhaps they are trying to convince me that they are my friends. Their agitation makes me nervous, but, at the same time, I don't seem to care about it.

Dreydos sounds a little irritated. "Leave the Yavkognians to us." He says. "We will handle them."

Out of the corner of my eye, I can see that Admiral Yamashita, being the politician that a man in his position has to be, is getting more than a little nervous about my attitude toward Dreydos and Rokshesan. Because I am being allowed the freedom to speak my mind, I care little about his nervousness. I am going to speak my mind and speak it I do. "As you wish." I turn and say, "So, what does all this have to do with me, Admiral? I am no politician, as you can tell from my attitude. I am a warrior. While I don't like war, I am trained to fight. The only negotiation I, as warrior, understand is at the end of a gun. If these, our enemies, wish to negotiate a peace, they should be talking to politicians, not warriors."

"I understand what you are saying, Commander," says Admiral Yamashita. "However, that is not why you are here. Ambassadors Dreydos and Rokshesan wish to study a human in order to understand why we are so willing to fight, and die, even against obviously overwhelming

odds. They also want to know what it is about us that would cause a peace-loving species, such as the Zyorkans, to be willing to fight on our side.”

“I still don’t understand what this has to do with me, Admiral.”

“They have heard about your fighting abilities, Commander. You were specifically requested.”

“Hmm. I wonder why that has anything to do with it. I don’t suppose it has anything to do with the fact that I, personally, have accounted for more than seventy-five of their war craft, not counting capital ships. Perhaps they want to find a way to take me out of the fighting. Would that be it, Ambassador?”

Admiral Yamashita answers for Dreydos, “You have a very sharp tongue, Commander. Even though you have freedom to speak freely, you need to curb that tongue a bit. However, as I understand it, it was your willingness to take on overwhelming odds at Tonojen while you were still in training that got their attention.”

“I still don’t like it, Admiral. They could have chosen any other human, or military person for that matter. Despite what Ambassador Dreydos has said, I still don’t understand why they chose me in particular.”

Admiral Yamashita is starting to get a little exasperated with me. It shows in his response. “They wanted someone that represents the typical human soldier. I couldn’t disagree with their choice of you. You are the typical soldier.”

During this exchange, out of the corner of my eye, I can see the Khorcha watching the Admiral and me like two cats watching a pair of mice. This causes chills to run down my back. I don’t like being stared by humans. But, to be stared at by two creatures that are obviously killing machines in their own right is difficult for me to bear. I can almost imagine them planning their dinner menu with the Admiral and me as the “guests of honor.” Rumors abound about what the Khorcha use prisoners of war for. Despite my upbringing to be nonjudgmental, this does not make me feel any better during this time.

“Typical?” I say, incredulously. “Admiral, I don’t think I’m the typical warrior. Not to sound my own horn, sir, but, you know that most pilots have significantly fewer ship to ship kills to their credit than I do.”

“I understand, Commander. I accept that you aren’t the ‘typical’ soldier, perhaps you are a more aggressive pilot than the Khorcha are used to dealing with. I have read numerous reports about you in battle. I have no doubt that the Khorcha have heard about you as well. That could be the reason that they want to study you.”

I am moaning and thrashing in my bed. I can feel sweat rolling off my body. I know that sooner or later, Ara is going to come into my room to try to wake me up. I feel a small warm body pressed against my chest and stomach. What is this? What does it want with me? I ease my hand toward the body and touch it. I feel soft longish fur. Now, I feel rounded triangular ears. I can hear—purring? I open my eyes and see a shape but I don’t recognize the shape. It’s solid black. No, wait. I see light reddish-purple stripes. Now, I recognize him. It’s Chy. He’s asleep next to me. His presence calms me and I’m no longer feeling the fear that I was experiencing because of the nightmare.

Now I hear scratching on my door. I hear a soft creaking as my room's door swings on its hinges. I hear Ara's voice softly calling my name. She only enters my room a couple of steps. I think she remembers what happened some time back and does not want to experience a repeat. I don't blame her.

"Mvilu. Please wake up. I hate it when this happens to you. Every time you have these nightmares, it is harder and harder to get you to wake up. Please, Mvilu, wake up."

"I am awake, Ara." I say as cheerily as I can; however, I feel like I have returned from a three-day R&R and had no sleep during the entire leave. I never quite understood why they call it rest and relaxation when most of the military personnel get very little rest and almost no relaxation. I continue, "I am sorry that you have had to go through this with me."

"Are you all right, Mvilu? Can you get up or do you wish to try to go back to sleep?"

"Yes, I am all right and no, I do not want to try to go back to sleep. I will meet you in the kitchen as soon as I can move Chy and get dressed."

"Chy? Is he in bed with you again? You are going to spoil that chorothoo." She laughed quietly and left.

It took me a couple of athaloo to clear the remaining cobwebs from my head. This was by far the worst, most emotionally draining nightmare I have experienced since my arrival in Talo-Vy. I wish I knew why I keep having them; I wish I knew what they meant; but, I'm glad that Chy is here now to calm me from them.

Finally, I move Chy so I can get up, get dressed and meet Ara in the kitchen. Chy grumbles a little, as usual, as I move him; but, otherwise, he lets me move him. He's starting to put on some weight; he was significantly underweight when I found him 15 days ago; so, he's a little difficult to move. He looks over his shoulder as I gently push him away from me and doesn't offer to move on his own; however, as I get out of the bed, he jumps down and watches me get dressed.

As is normal, Ara refuses to let me do anything except talk to her. She even greets Chy as he follows me into the kitchen. She's a little put out that he's in her kitchen but otherwise, she doesn't say anything. Ara and I talk about all that has happened since I came to live with her, both the good and the bad; she still hasn't started considering that Chy's presence is a good thing, though. We talk about life in general in Talo-Vy since my arrival here. We talk about Rora and Kyta and how close they have become. We talk about Tyarza and me and how wonderful our relationship could be. Chy sits in a corner and watches us with intelligent eyes that give me the impression that he understands every word we're saying.

For some reason, when we talk about Tyarza, I get nervous and jittery. I don't know why; I just do. The very thought of her makes my mind go blank and I can't think of anything in

particular to say, especially when I talk with her, yet all I do is talk. She has told me that she has a secret. A secret she wants to tell me, but acts like she is afraid to do so. She talks of this chohachy from her village that she is supposed to be mated to in glowing terms but, in her eyes, I see only loathing when she mentions him. She will speak to me as haughtily as any princess in any fairy tale you can think of, and at the same time, I see a sparkle in her eyes when I approach or talk to her. She gets so angry, so easily, with me that I wonder what I have done, and then she will as quickly regret her actions and forgive me for my trespass, eventually. She confuses me and intrigues me at the same time. I have never had these feelings about any other woman I have ever known and, even though I didn't remember it at the time, I have known quite a few women in my twenty-five years of life, but none has ever affected me the way Tyarza does.

By the time we, Ara actually, have finished preparing the nakvyv, Rora has arrived at the dining table. With Chy on our heels, Ara and I bring the meal to the table and take our seats. As the food is passed around, we make small talk, Ara and I mostly continuing our conversation from the kitchen.

I had thought that Ara could prepare wonderful meals when all she had was vegetables, but when she was presented with meat, both from Sha'-Naky and when Rora and I started hunting recently, her meals became greatly improved.

I had started training Chy to not beg for food as soon as he arrived in Ara's home. Therefore, when we sat down, Chy sat behind my chair and calmly waited as we ate. He knew that as soon as we finished eating, I would be feeding him in my room.

Just as I came out of my room from feeding Chy, we heard someone scratching on the door. The three of us looked at each other questioningly. We did not have to ask the question we were all thinking, because we all shook our heads. I know that I was thanking God that I had taken Chy to my room. I'm pretty sure that Ara and Rora were thinking the same thing.

After a couple of athata, Rora rose and opened the door. A chohachy that none of us had ever seen before entered without the traditional invitation. From my position at the table, I saw a look of mild irritation cross the faces of Ara and Rora. Nobody *ever* enters the home of another without the traditional invitation to enter, even if they had been invited to visit. Even the Ka'yno would consider the consequences about being so bold, although on occasion he has violated the typical Mory tradition protocol, especially when visiting Ara.

After the ahi'nu of training that I had been putting Rora through, he felt he was prepared to protect his home from an intruder; however, for some strange reason, he looked at me as if he were asking for permission. Not knowing the chohachy, nor his intentions, I shook my head. The head shake was almost imperceptible, but Rora noticed and relented but, his hand stayed resting on the hilt of his short sword.

The stranger looked directly at me and I calmly stared at him. He stared intently at me for a few athata like he was trying to intimidate me before speaking. "You are Mvilu Uatusun?"

“Chitekuro, stranger. Yes, I am Mvilu Uatusun. To whom do I have the pleasure of speaking, my Lord?”

Before he could reply, Ara spoke in a very irritated manner. “I care not to whom we are speaking! I care only that this stranger barged into my home uninvited! He is lucky that my choroohoo respects Mvilu enough to do as he suggests!”

The chohachy responded as if he had just noticed her. “Please forgive me, TaAra. Chitekuro. I was ordered here by the Ka’yno. He told me in no uncertain terms that nothing was to prevent me from speaking directly to the Uany slave, Mvilu Uatusun. Permit me to introduce myself. I am called Za-Shooto. I have newly arrived in Talo-Vy and been accepted as a door guard at the Suala Ka’ynony. I wished to make a good impression on my first day. Once again, please forgive me.”

By this time, Ara and Rora had calmed a bit, but not much. Even though I had been a bit irritated by this young chohachy’s brashness, I had managed to keep it in check. My training in sword play and other martial arts had taught me how to read an opponent and interpret his possible future actions. Because this chohachy entered with his sword undrawn, I had my doubts that he intended to harm anyone here. Besides, I knew that, if he had attacked me, I could defend myself because a) Mory Law allows a slave to defend himself with deadly force, if he was attacked without provocation and b) my aforementioned martial arts training should be sufficient to disarm, and possibly kill, any attacker, even a Mory chohachy, without the use of weaponry.

I said, “So, my Lord, Za-Shooto, what is so important that the Ka’yno would have you violate Mory traditional protocol so blatantly.”

He glared at me, another attempt at intimidation, I guess. I calmly continued staring at him and started to smile. After a few athata, he averted his eyes, looked at Ara and said, “The Ka’yno warned me that this slave is insolent to the extreme. I see that he did not exaggerate. How can you tolerate this attitude in a slave? In my home village, he would have been beaten senseless until he learned his place.”

Rora took a step toward the chohachy, but Ara rose from her seat and, with her hands on her hips, confronted him. “Let me tell you something, you who still has milk dribbling from his mouth.” That statement got his undivided attention, since it implied he wasn’t old enough to be away from his mother. “Mvilu is more than a slave in this household. He is an honored guest. I treat him like I treat my own choroohoo. You would be wise to do likewise.”

I had never seen Ara so upset, or talkative. I believe if she were a human, her face would be as red as an overripe strawberry. Her fur was fluffed out making her look ten to twenty-five percent bigger than she actually was. The pupils of her eyes had dilated so much that you could barely see any color. She moved her hands from her hips to the table and had her claws fully extended. I could see that every important muscle in her arms and legs were tensed to launch her into an attack on this brash young chohachy. Ara was literally a lioness ready to protect her cubs.

The chohachy, while brash, was no fool. He saw everything I saw and was slowly backing away from Ara. Rora had advanced to a step behind him and was reaching to grab him. I had to do something and quickly before the situation turned into a bloodbath. I reached over and softly touched Ara's left arm. She turned to me furiously and had drawn back her right arm to strike at the one who would dare to interfere with her. I calmly caressed her arm and smiled at her. These actions calmed her; but, she was still upset.

I said to her, "Mistress, remember, he is an emissary from the Ka'yno and he has a message for us. It would not look good for him to be injured on his first day as door guard at the Suala Ka'ynony and be unable to deliver his message."

Looking at the newcomer, I said, "My Lord, I admit that I can be insolent but, I am insolent only to those who deserve it. As I barely know you, I would show you no insolence."

By the time I had finished saying this, Ara had calmed down almost to the calmness she had been experiencing before Za-Shooto barged into her home. I calmly turned to him and said, "My Lord, you said you had only recently arrived in Talo-Vy. Where were you born?"

He turned his attention to me when I called him and I saw unrestrained fear in his eyes, something that is rarely expressed. He replied, "I am from Te'ka-Jy."

Rora and I looked at each other with mild surprise. Za-Shooto looked at us and asked, "What is wrong?"

I asked, "How is my chorothy doing?"

"Your—chorothy?"

"Yes. The Ka'yno, Sha'-Naky, adopted me as his chorothy about forty days ago. I had killed his blood chorothy in a battle when they attacked Talo-Vy."

"So, you are the one." Again, that phrase. "I heard so much about you from the surviving achohachy and the Ka'yno. I did not recall until you mentioned the Ka'yno being your tochorothy. Please forgive my attitude. He said that you are a chohachyny chohachy." (1)

I was impressed and showed it in my reaction. I knew I had impressed Sha'-Naky, but I didn't realize how much but, I had to find out what the message was that the Ka'yno had sent to me. So, I asked, "What is the message that the Ka'yno sent with you, my Lord?"

"He commands you to present yourself to the Ishoo'se Aka'ny immediately."

"Allow me a couple of athaloo and my master and I will be ready to leave."

"Your master has not been summoned."

Rora and I exchanged a look of surprise. Speaking as I turned my head back to look at Za-Shooto, I said, "I thought slaves were not allowed to enter the Suala Ka'ynony and the Ishoo'se Choko Aka'ny unescorted."

"They are not; however, I have been appointed your escort for the day."

Rora and I looked at each other again. I saw in his eyes what I knew had to be in mine. Is this the Ka'yno's attempt to have me killed? Would my allies on the Ishoo'se Aka'ny be there to protect me?

I asked Za-Shooto, "Is the full Ishoo'se Aka'ny in attendance?"

"Yes. All eight of the Aka' are there awaiting you."

I glanced at Rora and Ara and saw the look of relief in their eyes that I was feeling. I asked Za-Shooto, "My Lord, what of my master? We, he and I, have duties for the village we are supposed to be performing today."

"The Ka'yno has relieved you and your master of all duties until you return from a mission you are being sent on. The Ishoo'se Aka'ny also told me to say that your master's pay would continue even though he would not be performing the duties that he should be performing during your absence."

"A mission?" I looked at Ara with surprise and a little fear. "I am not allowed to leave the village unescorted or I will be killed upon my return." I looked at Za-Shooto expectantly.

He noticed and recognized the look and said, "I know nothing more than what I have just told you. The Ka'yno did not elaborate and I did not pry."

"Very well, my Lord, that being the situation, I am ready to go." I turned to Ara and Rora, who had moved to his mother's side. "From the way the message is worded, I suppose I will see you again soon. Take care of yourselves and, master, please continue practicing what I have been teaching you. The more you practice, the better you will become. Perhaps your friend, Zo-Kyna will be willing to practice with you. Also, and please insure that my other duties," I indicated my room. "Are fulfilled during my absence"

"Do not worry, Mvilu. I will continue to practice until I become as good as you are and fear not because all of your duties will be performed by either me or Norotha."

After Rora said that, Za-Shooto and I left and headed to the Suala Ka'ynony. Za-Shooto was as reticent as any Mory chohachy, if not more so. I don't know if that was because of the confrontation at Ara's house or if he was just naturally like that.

I said, "My Lord, I do hope you will forgive my master and his norotha. They stand on tradition and, unfortunately, you overstepped it, as I have no doubt you know. My mistress does

truly love me as a chorothoo. I have nightmares regularly and she is worried that they will be my mental undoing.”

“I understand her actions and, if what my former Ka’yno says about you is true, her feelings as well. Ka’yno Sha’-Naky spoke highly of your bravery, honesty and concern with tradition. If you are worried about my lack of conversation, I am merely wondering how you, as a Uany slave, have managed to gain powerful and protective friends among the Mory.”

“I am what I am, my Lord. I can be nothing else. I say what is on my mind and do not worry about whom or to whom I say it. As I understand it, the Mory value this attitude above almost anything else, except maybe an ability to fight and I have proven my ability to fight, too.”

“Yes, we do value those things above everything else but, we are here.” He opened the door and, as he crossed the anteroom, said, “You wait here until I announce you to the Ishoo’s Aka’ny.”

He left through the door that I had entered so many times previously. I did not know where the switch to turn on the speaker was located so I couldn’t hear what was going on; therefore, I just waited in the middle of the room. I looked around the room and saw things had changed a bit. Paintings had been moved, except for a series of paintings of Mory achohachy that were hanging on the wall in three rows opposite the door we had entered. I walked over and examined them more closely. I noticed a painting of a chohachy that looked very familiar. I looked closely at it and saw that it was a painting of the Ka’yno, Lo-Nachoo, except both ears were complete, there were no scars and it looked a lot less menacing than he really looked. I looked at a painting next to the one of Lo-Nachoo and, once again, noticed that the face in the painting looked extremely familiar. I stared at the face for several athata before I realized that the Ka’yno in the painting looked like Rora.

After about 30 athata, Za-Shooto returned and ushered me into the Ishoo’s Choko Aka’ny. I looked at the dais and saw the Aka’ and Lo-Nachoo sitting upon their thrones. This time, however, I was not on any kind of trial. The only one with a scowl on his face was Lo-Nachoo; however, the extra throne was on the dais again and seated upon it was my friend, Lo-Katoo. Now I understood why he wondered if I knew the Ka’yno’s name; now I understood why Lo-Nachoo’s name sounded familiar. Lo-Katoo was the Ka’yna, first brother to the Ka’yno.

The Ka’yno was speaking. “Uany, it has come to the attention of the Ishoo’s Aka’ny that you and your master are very proficient at hunting. It is rumored that the two of you are using a method that has never been used by the Mory to obtain your meat. The Ishoo’s Aka’ny by a vote of six to two, and against my better judgment, has decided that you are to join Ka’ Mu-Nakany hunting party when it leaves in the morning to go on a hunt. You will be staying with the hunting party at their hunting lodge tonight and in the morning, at first light, you will leave with the party and trek three days into the forest and attempt to find meat for the Ka’na of Mu-Naka.”

“I will do my best to not fail, Great One; however, if you, and the Ishoo'se Aka'ny wish me to be successful, I have a need to return home and obtain a few items that will help me to be effective in my attempt.”

The Ka'yno turned to Naka and said, “Ka' Mu-Naka, take the slave to his home and have him obtain that which he says he needs and then take him straight to your hunting lodge. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Great One. I understand. We will leave immediately.”

Katoo stood up and said, “Chorothy, I wish to join the hunting party this time. I have not been allowed to go on a hunt since Tamoo died over a year ago.”

The Ka'yno said, “No, Katoo. I will not allow it. I cannot afford to lose another chorothy. Therefore, you will not go.”

“But, Nachoo. I will do everything in my power to not get killed. I beg of you to let me go.”

“NO! I—will—not—allow—it!”

I looked around at the Ishoo'se members. Nobody was offering any kind of assistance to the Ka'yna. So, I spoke up. “Great One. If you fear losing your chorothy, allow me to offer my protection.”

He looked at me and laughed. “YOU? Protect my chorothy? That is a good joke. It is as good a joke as I have ever heard.” He laughed all the harder.

“Hear me out, Great One. I believe I have a solution that you will find agreeable. I will offer up my life in exchange should your brother be killed. Is that not an acceptable exchange?”

The Ka'yno's eyes widened until you could see the whites of his eyes. In his eyes, he finally had me where he wanted me. I believe I actually saw him smile in happiness for the first time since I arrived in Talo-Vy, but at the same time it was a sly smile. I had a feeling he would try to use anything negative that happened to Katoo as an excuse to kill me. So, I said, “Great One, I would ask that my offer be written down. I believe it would be a good idea. By doing so, I could not find a way out of my obligation to you.” I was hoping he would rise to the bait and not figure out what I was doing. I was not disappointed.

Gleefully, he said, “That is a wonderful idea. Ka' Ky-Kikoo prepare the statement and have the slave sign it.”

Kikoo said, “Yes, Great One.”

Kikoo brought out paper and a writing utensil, pen for want of a better descriptive word, and wrote down what I had said, word for word. He showed it to the Ka'yno who said he approved of the wording. I asked to look at it. The paper was brought to me and I read what was

written. It said, “I, Mvilu Uatusun, offer my life in exchange for the life of the Ka’yna should he die while in the company of the hunting party of the Ka’ Mu-Naka.”

I accepted the wording and signed the paper. I suggested that the Ka’yno sign the paper as well. I used the excuse I used earlier of attempting to find a way out of my obligation. Once again, the Ka’yno jumped at the chance. I found it almost laughable as to how gullible the Ka'yno was at times.

After the Ka’yno and I signed the paper, it was returned to Kikoo; then, Naka and I left. We went to Ara’s house and retrieved my bow, arrows, quiver, spear, and atlatl. While I was in my room, as I retrieved other items I needed, Chy came up to me begging for attention. I reached down and petted him, telling him that I would be gone for a few days.

I returned to the living room and told Ara what the meeting was about and what was being asked of me. She was worried that the Ka’yno would attempt to have me killed while we were out hunting; Naka calmed her fears by reminding her that all of the hunters had been hand-picked by him and could be trusted to the utmost. He also said that, if the Ka’yno attempted to replace any of the hunters, he was allowed to refuse to accept the chohachy on the hunting trip and the Ka’yno knew this.

Ara told me that Rora was behind the tree in our training area and practicing along with Kyna. Naka and I went around back and I told them the same thing I had told Ara. Like Ara, Rora was a bit worried as to whether or not this was an attempt by the Ka’yno to have me assassinated. Kyna said that since he was a member of the hunting party and, as a result, knew most of Naka's hunters, he wasn't overly worried. After this conversation and with no one around other than Naka and Kyna, Rora showed me the sign of friendship that the Mory achohachy show each other and I returned the favor; afterward, Naka led me to the hunting lodge.

After a walk of about ten athaloo, we arrived at the hunting lodge. When we entered the lodge, every eye in the room became fixed on me. A large number of achohachy in the Ka’na of Ka’ Naka had never seen me before, due to their “job” in the Ka’na of being hunters, although they had heard of a Uany slave who was digging the ditch that would protect the village and the anohachy. As I walked into the room, several of the achohachy glared at me as if I had just called their mothers anovyshoo.

One of the achohachy arose, approached and blocked my way. He stood there with his hands on his hips, such a human gesture I almost laughed at him, blocking my progress. I looked up at him and said, “My Lord, please let me pass. I have no quarrel with you.”

He glared at me and said, “Well, I have a quarrel with you. Why are you here in our hunting lodge, Uany?”

Before I could answer, Naka spoke up and said, “He is here at the request of the Ka’yno, Ja-Kajy.”

Ja-Kajy turned to Naka and said in a surprised voice, “The Ka’yno wants him here? Why?”

“The Uany has had much success hunting with his master when no one else in Talo-Vy has. As a matter of fact, he has had significantly more success than we have had. The Ka’yno believes that he has knowledge that could be useful for us on hunting trips.”

Just as Naka finished saying this, the door to the lodge opened and Katoo entered. Every head turned at the opening of the door and a hush fell on the group. There was a silent reverence shown to him as the achohachy recognized who it was. He surveyed the room and walked directly up to Naka and me.

Ja-Kajy stepped between us and, indicating me, said to him, “Be careful, Ka’yna. This is a Uany slave that your chorothy has ordered us to take with us on this hunting trip.”

Katoo looked at the chohachy for a couple of athata before responding. “You are—Ja-Kajy are you not?” Ja-Kajy nodded. “I remember you. Ja-Kajy, I know that my chorothy requested that Mvilu accompany you on this trip. I was there when he did so. When I heard that Mvilu was going to accompany you, I volunteered to join you. I wanted to spend some more time with my friend.”

“Your—your friend, Ka’yna?”

“Yes. I consider Mvilu a friend. He and I have spent some good times together walking around the village and chatting. You would do well to listen to him. He is one of the most intelligent Uany I have ever had the pleasure of talking to. The mota and akatooeka that are being constructed around the village are his ideas.” This revelation confirmed everyone's suspicions about me and more than one-pair of eyebrows were raised.

“I am sorry, Ka’yna. Perhaps I may have let previous experiences and prejudices color my reaction. Please forgive me.”

“There is no problem, Ja-Kajy. You did not know. However, it is Mvilu you should apologize to. Now, it is getting late. Perhaps we should eat the nakymoty and get some sleep. We have a long trek ahead of us starting in the morning.”

We all moved into the dining area. Knowing my situation and its requirements, I stood back and waited until I was told where I could sit. While I was ignored for the most part, I did notice several of the hunters would look at me as if I had snuck into a meeting of an ultra-secretive society; however, if I wouldn't let the Ka'yno intimidate me, I most certainly wasn't going to let them intimidate me. I just stood there listening.

I overheard a hunter say under his breath, “I do not know what this slave can do that we do not already know.”

I told the story of the attack by the achohachy of Te'ka-Jy; I also told them of the success that Rora and I have on our hunts. When he heard this, the chohachy that just spoke turned to face me and said, "You are the one?"

I thought, "*Will I never hear the end of that phrase?*"

He continued, "I have heard about you and your fight. I also understand you are a great sword fighter. Is it true you are training some achohachy in sword fighting?"

A familiar voice answered, "Yes, it is true. He is training me."

I turned toward the voice and saw Zo-Kyna standing in the doorway to the dining area, smiling. I answered the hunter, "As my Lord Zo-Kyna has said. Yes, it is true. I am training him and my master. Why do you ask?"

"Would you consider training me?"

"What is your name?"

"I am called E'-Anoo."

"I would be happy to train you my Lord, E'-Anoo, if Ka' Mu-Naka sends you with his written permission to the tasho vaorado (1) behind the home of TaAra but, you must be willing to do whatever I tell you to do without question. Are you willing to accept those terms? Are you willing to accept a Uany as your training Ka'?"

"Yes. If you can train me to be the kind of swordsman I have heard you are, I will call you, my Lord."

I laughed lightly and said, "That will not be necessary. But, if you will learn what I have to teach, the way I will teach it, you will become a great swordsman. Just ask the Ka' Mu-Naka."

After I spoke with E'-Anoo, he, and the hunters around him, invited me to join them and eat with them. I felt strange sitting with these fierce achohachy. They easily sat head and shoulders over me. But, they treated me like I was one of them, only shorter. They joked and laughed with me and every one of them wanted my training.

While we were talking, I stole a glance at Naka and Katoo. Both of them were watching us and smiling. It seemed to me that they were hoping that this would happen. They both had experienced my ability to defuse a potentially dangerous situation by being disarmingly charming and honest. It seemed to me that charm was something that Mory achohachy had very little experience in dealing with; however, along with being disarmingly charming, I was also disarmingly honest, something the Mory valued more than almost anything else.

After eating, fifteen of the twenty hunters who were at the lodge when I arrived headed off to find a bed to sleep. The other five were involved in a game of chance. Despite breaking the ice with the hunters, I was still the outsider and a Uany. So, I was just sitting alone in a chair beside one of the walls near a window. I was resting my head against the wall and listening to the sounds from outside. I heard a couple of large animals moving below the window. Even though the mota was less than 500 meters from being finished, it was dry and these animals could still find their way into the village. I had decided that just before the ditch was completed, I was going to have a few achohachy move through the forest between the village and the river to try to scare the dangerous animals away. I saw no sense in killing animals needlessly, even dangerous ones. I also heard the animals stop and sniff near the window. Obviously, these animals knew there was potential prey just the other side of the window, but they could not figure out a way to obtain it so they moved on to potentially easier targets. I found myself hoping that they did not find these easier targets inside of Talo-Vy.

While I was sitting there, I had my eyes closed in contemplation. I heard the sound of a chair being placed beside me. I opened my eyes and saw Katoo sitting next to me. I smiled up at him as he looked at me.

He said, “Are you sleepy, Mvilu? You should go find a bed to sleep in. There are thirty rooms in a hunting lodge.”

“I am not sleepy, my Lord. I am just contemplating.”

“What are you contemplating, Mvilu?”

“I am contemplating whether or not I should show the hunters how I am able to kill prey animals so easily. I am also contemplating my promise to your chorothy. I have no desire to die, so, likely, I will not be able to hunt properly.”

“Do not worry about me, Mvilu. I can take care of myself.”

A roar of derision followed by loud laughter caused Katoo and me to look at the five hunters. Katoo continued, “I wish I could be more like them. If my chorothy had been content to remain a simple chohachy, I could.”

“Why did he decide to overthrow the previous Ka’yno?”

Katoo looked around, then whispered, “The previous Ka’yno, his name was Ne-Raro, had decided to overturn the Mating Law and the Chorotha-Rothoo Law. I am not certain why he wanted to do this. I just know that he did. Unfortunately for him, my achorothy thought that was not a good idea.”

When Katoo mentioned the name of the previous Ka’yno of Talo-Vy, I immediately knew how Ara knew what her father looked like. So, Rora was named after his grandfather in a manner of speaking. I asked Katoo, “Why did he want to overturn those laws?”

“Like I said, I am not certain as to why. It is said that he had fallen in love with a nohachy and wanted her to be his official mate, his Noka'yno. He also believed that the population of Talo-Vy had grown large enough to support the idea of changing the laws. After my chorothy killed the Ka'yno in battle, I went to the home of the nohachy and discovered that she had a norothoo that was about two years old.”

“That is an interesting story. I guess your chorothy thought that the Mory lifestyle would be damaged if those laws were overturned. May I ask you a question?”

“What is it?”

“Suppose, for the sake of argument, you were to become the Ka'yno. Would you overturn those two laws?”

Again, he looked around himself. He whispered, “In less time than it took to tell it, I would overturn them. I would not even ask the Ishoo'se Aka'ny to approve it.”

I smiled. “As I understand it, you would not need their approval anyway. Would you take the nojasa you love as a mate afterward?”

“Nohachy. If she would have me, I would. I wonder sometimes. She rarely speaks to me, in the daylight anyway but, if I can get to her home in the middle of the night, she will see me.

“As for needing the approval of the Ishoo'se, it's always a good idea to have them on your side if you make a decision as life changing as that one would be.”

“Nohachy? Do you mean to tell me that she has arothoo?” I asked this question even though I already knew that Ara was the nohachy to whom he was referring.

Conspiratorially, he looked around to make sure no one was within hearing range and said, “Yes. She has a chorothoo, my chorothoo.”

Equally conspiratorially, I whispered, “My Lord, I know of the law. Why have you not fulfilled your obligation, if you know who your chorothoo is?”

He thought for a few athata before replying, “Because I despise that aspect of the law more than the preventing of simply acknowledging being chorotha of a rothoo.”

I smiled again. It explained some things I had heard in the middle of the night. I had heard talking in the dining area and other sounds that I won't divulge here. It seemed that Ara wasn't as proper as she made herself out to be. To protect both of them, I decided to keep this knowledge to myself. I did say, however, “More than likely, that is because of the Mating Law.”

“I can guarantee it. She wants us to be exclusive but, as long as the Mating Law is in effect, we have to meet secretly because I believe that my chorothy has his eye on her as well. Of course, it might not make any difference, if he was not the Ka'yno.”

About the time that Katoo made his statement to me, we heard another roar and laughter. We looked at the group again and I saw Kyna stand up and come walking over to us shaking his head. He was smiling a wry smile as he approached. I looked at him and, smiling, said, "What is wrong, my Lord, Kyna? No luck?"

"No. I have not had luck of any kind lately, not even with—" He suddenly noticed that I was not alone, and who was with me, so he said no more.

"With what—or whom, my Lord?"

He smiled and said, "Never mind, Mvilu." He pulled up a chair and sat on the other side of me. He continued, "Soon, I will have to leave Talo-Vy. I have started experiencing the desires of adulthood but I have been able to hide my feelings. I just do not know how much longer I will be able to do it." Kyna suddenly got a shocked look on his face, so he added, "But, the desires are not very strong, Ka'yna."

I smiled as I said to him, "I know someone else that is starting to have those same feelings. I fear what will happen if he is forced to leave." All three of us knew to whom I was referring.

I sat there for a couple of athata before continuing. "My Lord, Kyna, tell me about the game you were playing earlier."

"It is called Zocha. It is played with up to five players and a cube. On the cube are six different symbols. Each player is given fifty wagering discs. To start the game, each player guesses which symbol will show up after the disc is rolled. The one who guesses correctly states which symbol he believes will show up on the next throw of the cube and places a wager in the middle of the group. The player to his right will either make a guess of the remaining five symbols and matches the wager or passes. The wagering continues to the right until the final player. After all the wagering is made, the one with control of the cube will roll the cube. Whichever symbol shows up, the one who named that symbol wins the discs, gains control of the cube and the wagering starts again."

"You said no more than five players are in the game. What if the symbol that wasn't chosen shows up?"

"Then the one who has control of the cube will start the wagering all over again. He will also decide if he wishes to increase the wager and change his guess. If he changes his guess, then everyone in the game will have to change their guess. The original wager stays and the new wager is added. I have seen as many as ten rolls in which no one guesses correctly."

"What if one of the players doesn't have enough discs to cover the wager, but still wants to play?"

"The wagering never exceeds the number of discs the cube holder wagers and he cannot wager so much that anyone is prevented from wagering. As each player loses all of his discs, he is eliminated from the game. The one who wins all the discs wins the game. Sometimes these

games go all night long. In those cases, the one who hosts the game will have a few anohachy there to serve refreshments. Every chohachy carries a Zacho cube and discs in his Etyma Jivekoo.”

“That sounds a lot like card games I have been involved in. Do those refreshments include alcohol?”

“Oh, no. We never serve alcohol when we play games. Quite often, alcohol has a negative effect on emotions and we do not wish to ruin friendships over some stupid game.”

“Too bad the Uany where I am from do not think the way the Mory do. Well, I guess I will go find a place to sleep. Sunup will come too early, if I do not. I want to wish all of you a good sleep.”

“Before you go, Mvilu, what are kardu games? I have never heard of such games before.”

“I will explain later. Suffice it to say that card games are similar to Zocha in many respects.”

The next morning, we packed our items and started our hike to the hunting grounds. I had my bow over my left shoulder and my quiver over the right. I had my arrows and spear in the quiver and my atlatl in my Etyma Jivekoo. We left the hunting lodge and headed toward the unfinished mota. When we arrived at the mota, we turned toward the south garden. We crossed one of the newly constructed akatooeka across the dry southern east/west transverse mota, dry since it was not completed at that time, and followed along between the main mota and the garden continuing south. It had been decided to start digging the mota in the middle and work both north and south toward the Kachunoo Katoorovodo. We crossed another katooeka near where I had been captured by Rora my first day in Talo-Vy and continued south-west into the forest. From this katooeka we could see where the digging had stopped for the next few days. We crossed the katooeka because it would have been going out of our way to walk to the end of the ditch and return.

About two ahi’nu before nightfall, we stopped in a stand of trees that had especially large, wide limbs several meters off the ground. I asked Kyna if we were going to stay here for the night; all he did was nod. I, then, asked where we were going to sleep. All he did was point into the trees. I looked and saw the hunters starting to climb the trees. I looked at Kyna questioningly; he just looked at me and laughed. He squatted down and indicated his back. Embarrassed, I climbed onto his back and, like a monkey with claws instead of nails, he climbed about six meters off the ground and set me down. He moved off a few meters and started preparing what looked like a nest. He collected a lot of branches and gave some to me. He showed me how to make a sleeping nest. The width of the limb, the fact that the top of the limb was relatively flat and the design of the nest made it a very stable sleeping platform in the tree. As I built my “nest”, I looked around and noticed a large number of these “nests” that had been

abandoned and were not being used. I asked Kyna why they were not used tonight and he replied that after one use, numerous parasites make their homes in them and will attach themselves to unsuspecting visitors. Not wanting to become a parasite's host, the Mory always build new nests every time they return to this tree. He also said that if the "nests" were to be torn down, the parasites would just move to the new "nests". I suggested that, perhaps, the new nests could be torn down the next morning to prevent the parasites from having a home. This might lower the incidence of possible parasitic infestation. He thought for a few athata then said he would make the suggestion to Ka' Naka tomorrow morning.

After we finished our "nests", Kyna and I shared a meal of dried meat and vegetables. As we ate, we chatted about the hunting trip. Below us, we heard several animals below the tree. Some of them would stop at the base of the tree and I could imagine them looking into the tree and hoping one of us would fall into their jaws. As each animal stopped, Kyna told me which ones they were simply by the sounds they made.

During our conversation, Kyna said, "Mvilu, you said last night that you would explain kardu games to me."

"Cards are thick pieces of paper. In a deck of cards there are fifty-two cards plus two extra that are occasionally used, but are not most of the time. There are numerous types of card games. Some of these games are played by one person, some by two and so on. Some of the games are played with more than one deck of cards, most are played with just one. Perhaps, one of these days, I will try to make a deck of cards and show you how to play."

We continued talking for about a hi'nu. Soon, we were all asleep.

The next morning, after we ate our nakyvy, more dried meat and vegetables, Kyna spoke with Ka' Mu-Naka for a couple of athaloo while pointing to the nests that we had slept in. Ka' Mu-Naka walked over to the nests, looked at each one, thought for several athata, and turned back to the hunters. He said, "I want all of you to tear down all the sleeping nests we have created in this tree last night. Do not tear down the old nests, though. Mvilu says he believes that by tearing down the nests we used last night parasites will not be a problem any longer."

After the nests were torn down, we resumed our trip to the hunting grounds.

The next two days and nights were pretty much repeats of the first day. When we arrived at our hunting grounds, we approached a particularly large tree and, to my surprise, entered through a door that was installed into the trunk. We entered the tree and each of us found a room. We were going to be here for several days, so we needed our own personal room. When we arrived, the sun was setting, so we couldn't do anything else that day, except eat dinner and get some sleep, even chatting and gambling was kept to a minimum. We decided before we went to sleep that all we were going to do the next day was split up into groups of four and just scout

and try to find where the animals were congregated. After we returned for the nakyvo, we would announce to the party where we had seen animals or signs of them. Because I was the “guest”, and a slave, I was assigned to be with my temporary master, Naka. Katoo wished to join us and Kyna was also assigned to our group. E’-Anoo and Ja-Kajy also wished to join us, but accepted the grouping. Naka assured them that they would be allowed to join us another day, possibly tomorrow and they were satisfied with the status quo.

The next morning, immediately after the nakyvy, my group of four headed off in our predetermined direction. As we walked, we chatted quietly. I asked Naka, “My Ka’, the hunting parties always go to the same area to hunt, do they not?”

“Generally, we do. How did you know this? Why do you ask?”

“I knew this because the lodging tree is already set up for hunting parties. I ask because I seem to remember something from my home village. If an area is hunted regularly, the game animals will learn this and avoid it. They also know the smell of a hunter and even how long it has been since the last time the hunter was in the area. Perhaps the Mory would fare better if they did not use the same hunting grounds all the time or even regularly. If, for instance, they hunted this area today and then not come back for two, or even three, months, then come back in a month, et cetera, then, the prey animals would never know when this area is going to be hunted again. If they do not know when the hunters will be in the area, they are much more likely to return when the hunters are there.”

Naka and Katoo looked at each other with surprise. It seemed that the Mory had never even considered this idea. Surprisingly, they even used honor in their hunting methods. They thought of the prey as just a different form of enemy and hunting a form of battle. Now that I had planted the seed, I decided to nurture it and, hopefully, it would grow to fruition.

“I see that you have never even considered what I suggested. I can also tell that you consider hunting a form of battle with its own set of rules of honor. My Lords, hunting is a battle only in the fact that it is a matter of life or death. If you kill prey, you eat and live. If you fail, you do not eat and could starve to death.” As I finished speaking, I felt a dull thump, some pain, sensed that I was sailing through the air, and then everything went black for me.

1-In essence, Shooto was telling me that Sha’-Naky had called me a man’s man or, in the ideal of the Mory a Mory’s Mory. I had shown honor to Naky’s brother and his belongings which is a high form of honor to the Mory.

2-training ground