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Adira clutched her stone-tipped spear and sucked in a sharp breath. With narrowed eyes, she stared into the coal-black orbs of her prey. The buck was lean, with broad shoulders and tense muscles that rippled beneath a smooth, shiny pelt.

She had not planned to chase after the animal, but deer rarely ventured into the moorlands. One that size would keep Torion and herself satisfied for several suns.

More importantly, she hoped the kill would be enough to keep harsh words from his mouth when he eventually caught up to her. He'd told her to stay close and not wander off, as she so often did during their hunts.

Adira never knew what came over her – if it was boredom, or anxiety, or a mix of the two. Whatever it was, it made hunting with Torion akin to slow torture. He rarely enjoyed the hunt and seldom chased after his prey. More

often, he would set traps, or sit waiting behind some overgrowth – intensely still – for an animal to happen by.

Where is the fun in that? she thought.

When she saw the fresh deer tracks in the soil, she'd considered it an opportunity to finally feel the rush of the hunt. Torion told her how the tribespeople hunted: many people in large groups using strategy to pick out weaklings from a herd and overwhelm them with sheer numbers.

But she had no tribe, so she stalked the deer alone.

The buck, oblivious to the dangers downwind, continued to graze.

Just as she was about to throw her spear, the sound of an unfamiliar voice shocked Adira. She hesitated, turning her head towards the noise. The voice was too high-pitched to be Torion's. As she tuned into the sound, she heard a chorus of at least three other voices joining the conversation.

She gasped.

Could it be... a tribe?

She lowered her spear and angled her ears towards the speech. To her astonishment, the voices did nothing to agitate the deer, which continued to mill about the clearing. She knew it would be foolish to leave such a vulnerable animal without planting her spear into its hide first, but she couldn't help herself. There would be others.

Drawn by the unknown tribespeople, Adira planted her spear into the ground before flattening herself against the thick trunk of a nearby tree.

She rarely saw tribespeople; when she did, it was from

afar. These individuals were close to her. Probably closer than any other tribespeople had ever been. Yet, from the sound of their fast-fading voices, it seemed they were on the move. She didn't want to approach for fear they might be hostile. So, she thought of an alternative way to satisfy her curiosity.

Adira found a low-hanging tree branch within reach. She grabbed the smooth bark with her calloused fingers and pulled herself up with practiced ease, then shimmied towards the next branch and pulled herself up to it. She repeated this until she was nearly halfway up the tree.

She had no interest in climbing further. From there, she had a bird's eye view of the moorlands below: high enough to see everything, yet low enough to make out details.

Below her, the buck still gorged itself on grasses and leaves. Further out was a group of bodies – the tribespeople. There were six in total, all men. The youngest tribe member, who seemed to be nursing an injury, was sitting on the shoulders of one of the larger men. Adira wondered what it might be like to be surrounded by so many people, to rely on a group instead of just an individual. To acquaint with others her age and share fond memories and experiences.

To belong to a tribe.

She shook the thought from her head. There was no sense in hoping for something that could never be. She knew Torion had secluded them from the tribespeople for a reason.

Her heart sank into her chest as she descended from

the tree. At the lowest branch, she dropped to the earth, cracking a small heap of brittle leaves beneath her feet.

It was then that she remembered the deer.

The creature's head snapped up, its eyes finding her. The deer took only a moment to assess her as a threat before it jerked its body into motion and darted away.

No!

Unwilling to lose her prey, Adira ripped her spear from the ground and gave chase. Her feet pounded against the waterlogged terrain of the moorlands. Hideous squelching noises followed every hurried footstep. It was no use – the deer's long legs quickly carved out a cavity of space between them.

The deer's perky tail taunted her until even that disappeared. Soon, all that remained of the animal were the echoes of where it had once been: the prints of its unmistakable clover-shaped hooves stamped into the soil and the rustle of the foliage that it disturbed in its swift escape.

Realising the deer would be lost if she didn't act that instant, Adira paused for only a moment. She closed her eyes and listened for sounds of movement in the direction in which the deer had taken off. At the faintest rustling, she took reckless aim and hurled her spear into the mass of green before her. There was a dull *thunk* as the spear lodged itself into what sounded like the bark of a nearby tree.

She grunted in disappointment and paused again, but all she heard was grasses rustling in the breeze and rodents pattering along the underbrush.

The deer was long gone.

Sighing, Adira trudged towards her spear. She found it in moments, its stone tip buried half a thumb's length into the bark of a willow. Whether this was a testament to her strength or Torion's craftsmanship, she couldn't say.

She gripped the spear's shaft, pressed her foot against the side of the tree to give herself some leverage, and yanked, stumbling back as the spear pulled free.

'Adira!'

Shudders ran down her back as the familiar rumble of Torion's deep voice cut through the open expanse. The sound of his yell was only a ghost, but she'd be facing the full brunt of it soon enough.

That thought alone was enough to make her feel ill. He was not a cruel or sadistic father, and he took no joy in punishing her, but she had no interest in gritting her teeth through one of his lectures – especially not after she'd already disappointed herself by losing her prey.

Still, it wasn't as if she had much choice.

Adira turned back the way she came, casting a final glance over her shoulder, then marched back to Torion.

They reunited in the clearing where the deer had been grazing. Torion could be likened to a bear: large and bulky, and terrifying when angry. His long, shaggy hair was unkempt and wild. Though she had never seen him in a fight, he wore the hardened expression of a brawler.

Approaching him, she felt like the deer she'd pursued. Torion's harsh gaze was as piercing as the tip of her spearhead.

How the hunter becomes the hunted.

‘You walk away from me,’ he growled. ‘I tell you to stay, yet you do not listen.’

‘Father—’

‘No,’ he cut her off. He pursed his lips together, then continued, ‘I am wiser. I am older. And you,’ he said, jabbing a finger in Adira’s direction, jaw stiffening, ‘fail to listen. Fail to follow. You know the fate of a bison who strays from the herd?’

Adira’s face burned with shame. ‘He is hunted?’

‘He is hunted!’

She stared at the dirt below her feet. If only she’d caught that deer. Torion might not be so angry if she had something to show for her disobedience. At least, she hoped not. With him, she never could tell.

‘You will follow me next time,’ he said.

‘I will,’ she replied.

‘You will listen to me next time.’

‘I will.’

Torion let out a tired sigh. Adira knew his faith in her ability to follow directions was waning. Things had been much easier when she was a child. She used to follow him around like a duckling.

But she’d grown bored with his slow pace. She needed something faster. Something more challenging. And she knew he would never give that to her, so what else was she to do?

‘Why go off?’ he asked after a long silence.

Adira shrugged. ‘I saw a deer.’

‘Deer do not come here. There is nothing for deer in the moorlands.’ He shook his head. ‘You saw something

else.'

'No. It was a deer.'

A strange look crossed Torion's face. His eyebrows knit together.

'What is wrong?' she asked.

'If a deer was in moorlands, the deer was chased into the moorlands.'

'By what?'

'I hope we will not find out,' he said. 'Hurry, now.'

With a huff and a shake of his head, he turned and beckoned for her to walk behind him. She obeyed, though she had to subdue the urge to run off again, if for no other reason than to spite him.

'Hurry,' Torion commanded again.

'I am coming!' Adira snapped back.

Perhaps it was the lingering irritation of being scolded, but she could not bring herself to understand why a deer in the moorlands would concern him. It was true that deer often kept to flatter, grassier areas, but surely it was not uncommon for an adolescent to wander into the moorlands in search of water or shade.

Adira helped Torion collect what they caught in his traps. It was a suitable haul: two fat black grouses and a hare. After they untangled the animals from their snares, she reset the traps. She worked in silence while he instructed her to tie the traps tighter.

The two carried the haul back to their camp.

It was uphill on a low rise, resting comfortably above the moorlands, and bordered by a ring of stacked boulders. It was spacious enough for the two of them,

consisting of two conical hide huts for sleeping, a raised slab of rock used as a work surface, and a long bark container for storage. The remaining space held a central firepit and spit for cooking, with ample room remaining for any chores that needed to be done.

A small stream curled around the camp, though it was not deep enough to fish from. They only used it for water and washing.

As Torion struck up a fire, Adira carried their catch to the slab to be skinned and gutted.

‘I was worried about you,’ he said.

He had already produced enough friction to start the beginnings of a flame and cupped his hands around the tinder as it began to smoulder.

‘Why?’ she asked with a roll of her eyes. She had assumed the scolding was long over; she should have known she wouldn’t be so lucky.

‘You do not understand how it works,’ he said.

‘How what works?’

‘Hunting.’ He blew into the hearth as he built a structure of dry wood around it. Adira had always admired the practiced skill with which Torion built and nurtured fires. ‘Hunting is not all chasing. Hunting is also waiting.’

‘I know.’

‘You do not!’ He drew his hands from the fire as it outgrew the tinder and began to gnaw at the heartier pieces of wood. ‘I try to teach you. I tell what I know. I give you tools to survive. And you—’

‘I fail?’ she asked through gritted teeth. Her fingers

tightened around the hare as she began to peel back the thick hide with a sharpened stone.

‘You have the speed and the skill of spear, but you do not have the *focus*. You think I am here forever? Adira, what will you do when I go to the stars? If you do not learn lessons now, you will not survive later.’

‘I know how to hunt.’

‘You know how to chase an animal. How to catch an animal.’ He sneered. ‘Not the same as hunting.’

‘No different,’ she shot back.

‘Much different! Catching is easy. Hunting is being silent. Hunting is waiting. Striking at the right moment, all with focus.’ Torion rose from the fire, turning his back to it. The warm tongues of flame created an orange halo around his broad body. ‘How do you catch an animal in drought? How do you catch an animal in the cold?’

Adira opened her mouth to speak, but he refused her the chance.

‘You think you are wise? You are not,’ he snarled. ‘Continue acting like a child, and you will never survive alone.’

‘I would not be alone if I were in a tribe!’ The words burst from her mouth before she could stop them. Something wet and sticky dripped on the back of her hand. She looked down to find she had cut straight through the hare’s neck in anger. ‘Why are we alone?’ Her voice cracked. ‘Why are we not part of a tribe?’

He was silent for a moment, his jaw set as he ground his teeth together and his nostrils flared in anger, yet his eyebrows turned up to reveal sadness. He always took it personally when there was any talk of associating with

others. He swallowed hard before speaking again. 'We have discussed on many occasions why. I should not need to repeat. I give you everything.'

'It is not enough!' Adira yelled, slamming the hare and the cutting tool down on the slab. Her breath came out in uncertain trembles. Then, quieter, she repeated, 'It is not enough.'

With that, she stood, trying not to look down at the mutilated hare or imagine the tender, juicy meat it would bear. Her stomach rumbled and ached with hunger, but the thought of eating with Torion sickened her in that moment.

'Adira...' He reached out to her.

But she had already made up her mind. She shook her head. She needed time alone.

'Do not follow me,' she said, her voice firm.

She marched downhill, back into the moorlands. She kicked some passing weeds, and once sure that she was out of Torion's sight, she broke into a run.

Adira did not look back, even once.



TRIBE OF THE ACCORD

Thank you for reading!



