

Chapter Thirteen/Morning

Though accustomed to sleeping in the woods on hunting and gathering trips, Maunea had never been alone overnight.

At home, she slept in a bed with her younger sisters, and occasionally the cat and dog. Her parents slept in a closed bed in the same room, and her brothers slept in a small loft with the dried and drying herbs and fish.

At home, the cheery light and sound of the crackling fire lulled her to sleep and lingered in her dreams, and the smoke as it died down near morning called to her to wake and add new fuel.

At home, she and her parents were the first ones awake. She would stoke the fire and begin preparing a mash of grain while sleep still lingered in her eyes.

Her mother would dress and then wake the younger children as the light came through the window and door of the cottage. The children would tumble out of bed and race to grab their bowls of mash while it was still hot.

Her father would come in with a load of wood for the fire after tending the animals, and sit down by the door where he could get the best light while he sharpened blades or whittled the ends of a harness or toggle.

It was a busy time, morning in their hut.

This morning, Maunea had slept fitfully, startled awake by a loud crash once as a buck went racing over her small lean-to. And once a mouse skittered past her nose while foraging.

So when the light began to slip through the branches that formed the roof of her simple home she was awake quickly, but still groggy. At first, she wasn't sure where she was. She looked through the branches, noticing the fog lingering in the clearing.

Pushing back the satchel and baskets aside, she crawled out and surveyed the surroundings. The air was stirring gently as the air began to warm. Dew had fallen during the night and the tops of the grasses glinted in the light.

She could see the boulder farther up the hill, and hear the sound of a creek nearby.

Straightening her clothes, she sat on the log and ate the rest of yesterday's meal. The pie and the cake were cold, but tasty. Her hunger sated, she picked up her things and headed into the woods toward the creek.

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Walking toward the forest, the birds began to sing up the mountain, and she set the baskets down on a stump to fix her cloak more securely.

A rustling in the shrubs caught her attention, and she moved toward the sound. A small bird fluttered on the ground, its wing at an odd angle. Gently, she bent down and lifted it up. The bird held still, its heart beating hard against her hand.

The wing was definitely broken, and it would be hard to set. Maunea pulled a handkerchief from her pocket and bound the wings gently, hoping it wouldn't hurt too much. A bit of moss formed a soft nest in one of the baskets, and she set the bird gently into it. It shivered and closed its eyes.

Picking up the baskets, she began to walk again toward the stream, pausing every so often to call out and listen for a reply.

Soon, she could hear voices, and called out again, relieved.

A few minutes later, she was surrounded by friends, and munching happily on a fresh cake from her mother.

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