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When an older Viera, it was impossible to say how much older, found them he did try to be comforting.

But his words were spoken to soothe the wrong fears.

Staring up at the far darker skinned man, with his white hair clipped short to prevent anyone using it

against him in a fight, Rael saw only the pain of a future wished for utterly denied. They tried to fight,

but at all of twelve it was child's play for the trained warrior to pluck them from their hiding place. They kicked and yelled to be let go, that their place was village, but it fell on ears as deaf to the reason

as the women had been. And the time of comforting words didn't last.

They were hoisted up by the older male that had found them and carried to the edge of the village where the males who had come of age had been assembled. After a small ceremony, the details of which Rael had never bothered to learn, certain of their role in life being elsewhere, their elders led

them away into the jungle. Rael could stop themselves, looking back with tears in their eyes as their

home vanished into the trees.

One of their escorts, the same male who'd found them hiding, tried to cheer them up. They'd be back in

a few summers, he said, to help with the mating. Rael's reply was a flood of silent tears, the pain they felt too

deep to give words. They had tried to explain, and no one had listened, no one had even tried to understand.

The small caravan's arrival at the training camp went all but unnoticed to the distraught Ravan, and

they barely heard their assignment to a squad. They just stood in place in the small drill area, tears still

streaming down their cheeks, until a sympathetic soul took them by a hand and guided them to the little

nest that would be theirs to sleep in.

They tried to imagine the future ahead of them now, growing older in a body that wasn't right. No happiness found them in that place. Yet creeping into their dreams at the end of their tears, there came

different visions. Ones where their body changed to grow into what they had always imagined for

themselves, where they could be known as what they knew they were. Where they could be a mother.

Their training began at dawn. Rael was taken out of the camp with their squad and set to learning patrol routes, but they couldn't focus on it at all. Despite the skill of their trainers, and the scolding that soon began to be heaped upon them for their distraction, none of it could penetrate the wish for their desperate dream to come true.

It didn't take long for those dreams to overcome fear. If there was to be even a shred of happiness to their life, Rael decided, it couldn't be here. Less than a moon after being brought to the camp, they slipped away in the night. Once out of the camp and past the obvious watchers, they put the conditioning the camp had forced upon them to good use. Voices called out in pursuit, but they didn't care. Not even that running away like this would cause them to be banished forever from the village. All they wanted was the chance to be happy.

Perhaps they were faster than the guards. Perhaps those guards could not stray too far from their posts

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