

# Brach And Amile.

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*With everyone she loves gone in a fire, Amile decides to get revenge on the one who started it - The King.*

*Accompanied by Brach, one of the few other survivors, Amile sets out on a journey - of danger, mystique - and a very real possibility of love.*

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## 1 - The Burning.

I crested the hill and gazed at what used to be Malsuma. My black hair was in a braid to my waist, but wisps were escaping around my forehead and blue eyes. I sat down in disbelief. My mother had sent me away, along with the other children when the first of King Amyras' guards appeared on the far hill. My whole town had been burnt to the ground. I don't know if Mother or the Elders are even still alive. Tomorrow was supposed to be my Womanhood ceremony, making me the oldest of all the children of Malsuma - with the exception of Brach, who is my age. Brach has shoulder length sandy-brown hair, and deep brown eyes with green flecks.

It looks like Brach and I will have to take charge of the others. I don't mind taking charge, but with Brach? Brach and I have been in competition since we were tiny. Now we have to work together. I can't believe Amyras would do something like this. Actually I can. I'm going to find him. He killed my mother. I'll leave Brach and the children in the next town and find him. I went back down the hill.

"So?" Brach asked.

"Gone." I said, starting to tear up.

"All of it?"

Now all I could do was nod, I was crying that hard. Brach grabbed me and dragged me away from the children.

"Stop it." He commanded me. "They'll all start in a minute."

I wiped my eyes before glaring at him.

"Fine. It doesn't matter anyway." I said with a deep breath, attempting to calm down.

"It doesn't?" I could see the surprise in Brach's eyes. I knew he thought all females were too emotional for their own good.

"I'll have my cry once I leave you and the children in the next town." Brach's jaw dropped. Reasonably calm, I walked off.

"Ok. There's been a fire." I tried to say gently. Many of the children started crying. "It's ok. Were all going to Evrep. You will be taken care of there. But for tonight, we stay here."

The children were still crying. I went around calming them down, giving as much information as I could. When they had stopped crying, we camped out. Brach crept over to where I was going to be sleeping.

"You can't go find Amyras on your own!" he exclaimed quietly.

"Why not?" I challenged, propping myself up on my elbow.

"You'll get hurt."

I looked at him. He was sincere.

"Thanks," I said in a softer tone "but I can take care of myself."

"I'm coming with you."

"What?"

"You heard me."

"I'll think about it." I said, rolling over to go to sleep.

I heard him give a little sigh, then go back to his spot.

When it was morning, Brach got some rabbit meat for the children to share. He managed to get a little bit from them, and offered it to me. I refused, knowing I would eat after the children and Brach were in Evrep. So he dropped it in my lap and got up. Now I sighed, and started to eat. When the children were ready, we started walking. Evrep is about a half days walk normally. With all of the children, it took most of the day. We could see Evrep in the distance when Brach came up to me.

“So?” was all he said.

I had thought about him coming a lot.

“Fine. You can come. I can’t hunt like you can.”

He nodded slowly, and then leant in.

“It didn’t matter what you said. I was coming anyway. You need protection.” Brach whispered into my ear.

I didn’t have anything to say to this, so I walked faster.

When we arrived in Evrep, we immediately sought out a carer for the children. While Brach explained what happened, I tried to tell them that Brach and I would come back for them. None of them listened. Brach returned with the carer, and introduced her as Ezmai. I watched her heard the children off and started to cry again. This time, Brach put his arm around me.

“Amile. You are too emotional for your own good.”

“Well, I have to be emotional enough for the both of us.” I scoffed, wiping away my tears.

“I managed to grab this before we left.” Brach held up some money. “Go buy some blankets and water-pouches.”

“What are you going to do?” I asked

He handed me some of the money then left, my question still hanging in the air.

An hour later I had several blankets, two water-pouches, and some leftover money. I stepped out of the crowd, and scanned for Brach. There! I scrambled between two men who whistled at me, and dodged in between other pole until I had nearly caught up with Brach.

“Brach!” I called. He turned his head and spotted me. He came over and took the blankets off me, and led me out of the crowd.

“We’ll start tomorrow before dawn. We have rooms at the Inn.” Brach said.

I didn’t know what to say. This is MY trip. And HE’S organized it! I suppose I should be grateful, but it irks me.

“Ok.” I said finally.

Brach led the way to the inn. Talking to the innkeeper, we found our rooms had become a room.

“But I asked for two rooms!” Brach argued.

“Well there’s only one! So you and your girlfriend will have to share!” The Innkeeper exclaimed, slamming the window.

Brach turned, with the key he’d been given hanging from his fingers.

“Come on.” He beckoned for me to follow him. We got to the room and found that there was a double bed and so room for the both of us.

“You take the bed. I’ll sleep on the floor.” Brach said, unwrapping the blankets and making a bed for himself.

“You can have it if you want – I don’t mind.” I offered. But Brach had already lain down and rolled over. I sighed. Brach could be so stubborn. As I drifted into sleep, I thought about if I would even be able to find Amyras.

## 2 - The Journey.

"Wake up. We're going soon." I woke to Brach shaking my shoulder.

We had bought traveling clothes at the market the day before. Brach had changed while I was asleep, and now stood facing the wall while I changed quickly. I started to take some food out of our bag.

"Don't." Brach said.

"Why not?" I asked indignantly.

"Because we should save it."

"Must you tell me hat to do all the time? This was my idea, so I should be in charge!" I raised my voice to the point of yelling.

"Fine. If you want it like that, I won't do anything."

This surprised me. Was I still talking to the same person? He usually put up a fight.

"Uh, ok. Thanks. We should go now." I put the food back into the bag and hoisted it over my shoulder.

"And no, you're not taking it. It would block access to your quiver and your bow."

"But what about the food?" Brach asked in a sarcastic tone.

"We have to go." I gathered up the last few things and stuffed them in the bag.

I walked out of the inn and into the market, coming to a stop in front of the crossroads sign.

"Which way?" Brach asked.

"Uh..." I looked from left to right and my gaze finally rested on the sign. "Left."

"Do you know where you're going?" Brach looked at me, one eyebrow raised.

"No." I shook my head, sending my braid flying.

Brach looked at me pointedly.

"Fine. You lead then."

Brach turned right and started walking.

"This path will lead to Bakid. At Bakid, we turn right again, which leads to the town Amyras' castle is in." Brach said.

We walked in silence for a while, until a thought struck me.

"How did you know to go this way anyway?"

"My mother has a map of Ashielat. Although, I feel like I've been this way before."

"You haven't though, have you?"

"No. I've never been out of Malsuma."

We fell silent again. I listened to the crunch of the gravel under our feet, and started when Brach suggested we stop for lunch.

"Why do you think Amyras did it?" I asked, the memory of the guards on the hill making me tear up.

"I don't know. He's just an evil person I guess." Brach looked over at me. I looked away.

"Come on, we should keep going." I stood up and brushed myself off.

"But you've barely eaten anything."

"I don't care." I said, more vigorously than I meant to. I started to pack the food away, including what Brach had yet to eat.

"Hey. Just because you're upset, doesn't mean I can't eat!" Brach said heatedly. I turned away.

"Amile. Look at me. I'm sorry if what I said made you upset. But we need to eat." Brach stepped over and took the bag from my hands. I just stood there, my mouth open just a little.

"What? But..." I faltered.

Brach passed me an apple.

“Fine. You win.” I took a bite, not realizing how hungry I actually was.

When Brach was satisfied that I’d eaten enough, we started walking again.

“Will we reach the next town by nightfall?” I said, thinking out loud.

“No. Brach looked around. “We’ll have to camp in the forest.”

“There’s a forest?”

“I’m pretty sure. It was on the map – it may not still be there.”

“Doesn’t this bother you?” I asked, remembering that Brach hadn’t showed any feeling.

“Of course it does. Do you think I’m heartless?” He snapped.

“No! But you’ve been blank and not telling me anything. At least I cried.” I was starting to get defensive.

“Right. So just because I don’t cry means I’m heartless and unfeeling does it? I lost my mother in the fire too. I’m just not a crybaby about it!”

The word ‘crybaby’ hit me like a slap in the face. I started to tear up.

“And there you go again.” Brach said impatiently, rolling his eyes.

We had found the forest. As we walked past, I seized the opportunity and ran in, twisting and weaving, hitting branches and leaves that made it their purpose to be in my way. I didn’t look back, fearing that if I did, Brach would find me.

“Amile!” I could hear him calling in the distance.

I kept going until I came to the river. I looked around. I saw no way of getting across, so I dropped to my knees and started sobbing. Brach suddenly crashed through the trees.

“Amile!” he crouched down beside me. “Why did you run away like that?”

I looked him, tears brimming through my lashes.

“Why should I have stayed?”

“For your safety, I suggest you both LEAVE NOW!”

### 3 - The Village.

Brach and I looked around.

“Heed my warning!”

Brach put his arm around me. Usually I would have resisted, but at the moment I was too scared to care.

“I’ll protect you.” He whispered into my ear, his breath tickling.

There was an immense crash. I gasped. Then a barrage of scales and claws rained down on us. I screamed and scrambled under a tree, not even thinking about Brach. When I was in the relative safety of the tree, I looked around. I saw that Brach had managed to get under another tree. And I saw what had landed on us. A Dragon.

The dragons’ scales were a deep, majestic purple, and there were trails of smoke escaping from between his claw like teeth. His black eyes were unreadable, as he swung his big head back and forth looking for us. His wings had been tucked neatly in beside him, so I couldn’t tell how wide they were. His tail was as thick as the tree I was hiding under, and possibly just as tall. The final thing I noticed were the spikes that lined his back and down his tail.

“I told you to GET OUT!” he roared, lashing his tail.

I ran over to where Brach was hiding, avoiding fallen branches as I did so.

“Come on!” I grabbed his wrist and yanked him away from the river through the trees. All of a sudden, I tripped, and came down hard on my wrist with a loud crack.

“Amile!” Brach helped me up. I clutched my wrist, biting back tears.

“It might be broken.” Brach started rummaging through his pouch, trying to find something that would do to bandage my wrist “we need to find a doctor”

A couple of minutes later I had my wrist bandaged and so we tried to find our way out of the forest. Night was falling and it got darker and darker between the trees. We were on the verge of giving up and making camp for the night when we stumbled onto what looked like a small village. We went around to the nearest hut and Brach knocked. A few minutes past, then the door opened, and an Anthro stepped out.

“Humans!” She exclaimed. The Anthro hustled us inside, muttering to herself. “Ooh, if the Chief sees you...”

I took a good look at her then. She had short orange hair, and fox ears poking out of the top. She had soft brown eyes, beneath which her nose extended to a pink point. Her arms and legs were human until you looked at her wrists and her ankles, where they extended subtly into paws. As she turned, I caught sight of a red and white tail extending out behind her.

“Why are you here?” she demanded.

“We were trying to get away from the dragon when I fell on my wrist. Now we just want to get out of the forest.” I explained in a hurry, wincing as my wrist gave a particularly painful pang.

“Give me your wrist.”

“I unwrapped it and handed it over. She examined it.

“I can fix this.” She put her paw over where my wrist hurt most. She had fairly covered it, but as she concentrated, a soft orange light surrounded my wrist, seeping out from under her paw. It was beautiful – I couldn’t take my eyes off it. Then it was gone.

“Your wrist should be fine now.” as she let go of my wrist, I knew that whatever had happened, wasn’t likely to happen again soon.

“Thank you.” I said gratefully, flexing my wrist.

"My name's Sensa."

"Mines Amile and this is Brach." I gestured behind me to Brach.

"Oof!" Brach gasped as my gesturing caught him in the stomach.

"Sorry!" I apologized.

Sensa laughed.

"You can stay here until morning – you don't want to know what will happen if the chief finds you." She led us over to a back room. "Here. You can stay in this room."

"Thanks." Brach said.

The little room was fairly bare, with only two single beds and a small table between them.

As soon as I saw the bed, not thinking, I crawled straight under the bedclothes.

Brach didn't, but perched on the end of the bed I was in.

"Amile." He started.

"What now? I want to go to sleep!"

Let me say this, and then you can go to sleep."

"Fine." I yawned, putting my head back on the pillow. "But make it quick."

"I want you to go back to Evrep and stay with the children."

"What!" I sat straight up, now wide-awake. "No way!"

"It's getting way to dangerous out here. There are Dragons, Anthro, and you've been injured already."

"So?" I said, throwing back the covers and standing up. "This is my fight. Not yours. I bet you wouldn't even be here if it weren't for me."

"You're right. I wouldn't be. And now I'm going on alone!"

"But why?"

"Because I love you and I don't want to see you get hurt!"

I just stared at him, dumbfounded. I ran past him into the main room. I needed someone to talk to.

"Sensa? Sensa!"

"Yes?" she trotted out of another room.

"Can I talk to you?"

"I suppose so, seeing as you're already talking to me."

I managed a weak laugh.

"What's wrong?" I could hear the concern in her voice.

"Well, Brach just told me he loved me."

"I wondered. I saw deep love in his eyes as he gazed at you." She looked at me carefully. "Yours to."

"You can see that? Wait - my eyes? There can't be deep love in my eyes for Brach... unless... it was for mother" I lowered my eyes.

"We Anthro can see many things. Meddling with them is not our job."

"So what should I do?"

"Whatever you think to be best."

"Thanks for your help." I said with just a little bit of sarcasm. Sensa said nothing. I went back into the little room that Brach and I were sharing. Brach had buried himself in his bed.

"Brach?"

The covers muffled his reply.

"I just wanted you to know that I was thinking about going back." I got back into bed, tossing and turning before finally falling asleep.

## 4 - The Truth.

“Amile! Brach!” there was frantic knocking at the door.

“Huh?”

“The chief knows you’re here! He wants to see you NOW!” Sensa said worriedly, barging into the room.

Brach seemed to realize what was happening, and fell out of bed. I was trying to sleep still, so as Brach shoved his feet into his shoes, Sensa had to zap me awake with a little of her magic.

“Yah!” I scrambled to get out of bed “I’m awake!”

Sensa led us out to the center of the village, which we hadn’t seen the night before.

“Wait here.” Sensa whispered, going over and taking her place in a circle of Anthro.

“Humans.” An Anthro stepped out from the circle. He had moose antlers, and the legs extending from his hooves were covered in fur. “My name is Chief Cifilo.”

The circle of Anthro bowed. Brach and I hurried to do the same.

“You have come to the Anthro Village uninvited! Give me your names. Only then will I see to your punishment.”

“My name is Brach Collan.” Brach said boldly.

“And mine’s Amile...”

“Did you say Collan?” Chief Cifilo boomed.

“Yes, Sir.”

Chief Cifilo smiled. “I knew you looked familiar to me. I knew your father.”

“You knew my father?”

“Yes. I wed him and your mother. You look lot like him. But your eyes are mixed between them.”

“What was he like?”

I knew Brach well enough to know that he had always wanted to know about his father.

“He was a good man. He would look at every possible option before acting. Annoyed a lot of people – the ones who wanted things done fast. Your father was a good friend of mine.”

“what was his name?”

“Are you telling me you don’t know your own father name?” Chief Cifilo seemed to swell as his voice rose.

“My mother wouldn’t tell me anything bout him.”

“nothing?”

“Nothing.”

Chief Cifilo looked Brach straight up and down.

“Your fathers name was Salven, King of Ashielat.”

I saw Brach’s jaw drop. He staggered.

“Brach!” I caught him, staggering myself. He had gone ghostly pale.

“King?” Brach asked weakly.

Chief Cifilo nodded. “If I had realized before, I would have shown you the proper respect and hospitality you deserve. But then, you didn’t even know who you were!” He guffawed. He took a closer look at Brach. “Maybe you should go lie down or something.”

Sensa helped me drag Brach back to her hut.

“Can you do something for him?”

“Not for the shock. I might be able to wake him up though.” Sensa put her paw on Brach’s chest.



There was the orange light again. “there. He should be all right now.”

“Brach... Bra-ach. Wake up!” I ordered him, while shaking him.

It didn't work. He was still breathing, so I just decided to leave him alone, and start filling Sensa in on what had happened in the last couple of days, starting with Amyras' Guards coming.

“And now were going to kill Amyras for setting our village on fire” I said “Although, Brach being a prince and having his evil Uncle kill his father is probably a whole other problem, bound to make this one worse.”

Unbeknownst to either of us, Brach awoke as I said this.

“Brach saying he loves me complicates these things even more. I don't love him. I don't think I can love him. Its Brach.” I drew my feet in underneath me. “Sensa, you're not going to say anything him are you?”

“of course not.”

“Cant love Brach, huh? What's wrong with me? I'm a prince now. You could have anything!” Brach had come running out of the other room.

“Brach!” Tears started flooding from my eyes. I lowered my voice to a whisper. “I'm sorry.”

Brach looked at me, a mix of longing and sorrow in his eyes. I couldn't take it anymore. I fled from his piercing gaze. I ran the way Brach and I had come. But I didn't go to far – I was very wary of the Dragon. While I was alone, I started thinking of what I was to do once Brach continues on. I was thinking so hard; I didn't even hear Sensa come up behind me.

“Hey.”

I started, almost falling off the log I was perched on.

“Oh. Hey Sensa.”

“What were you thinking about?”

“What I'm going to do when Brach keeps going. He wants me to go back to the children.”

“What do you want?”

“I want to stay here. I want to learn magic – especially healing magic.”

“What if Brach were to stay here too?” Sensa said slowly.

“Brach is staying? Why?”

“He's thinking of staying. He wants to learn more fighting skills before going on to battle Amyras.”

“Well... I'd live with it.”

“You're sure?”

I nodded. Sensa led the way back to the village. She stopped outside her hut.

“You go in, I have something I have to do.”

I went inside. Brach was there.

“Hey.” I offered. Brach ignored me. “Look, its no good ignoring me. I'm staying here, with you, to learn magic.”

This got Brach's attention.

“You're what?! I thought you were going were going back!”

“Uh, no. You said I was going back, not me. I'm going to learn healing magic.”

“So long as its nothing dangerous.”

Sensa came in then.

“It's all arranged.” Sensa announced. “You can both stay here for one year. That's it. And in that time you will get along if you're living under my roof!”

## 5 - A Year of Studies.

I looked at Brach. He didn't seem exited. I went and gave Sensa a hug.

"So, who's going to teach me magic?"

"I am." Sensa grinned like she had a secret. "Anything special you want to learn?"

"Yeah. As you knew, healing magic. Aaaaand... a little bit of battle magic." I shot a look at Brach. His mouth had fallen open in disbelief.

"Ok. We'll start in the morning. Brach, Chief Cifilo said that he would teach you whatever fighting skills you want to learn. You're to go to him in the morning."

"Of course." Brach nodded.

"Do you want some lunch? You didn't get breakfast."

"Sure." I helped Sensa get lunch, and the three of us sat down. It was silent except for the sounds of someone taking a bite. Brach and I were tense, and I could tell that Sensa didn't want to get in the middle of it. I wolfed my lunch down quickly, just so I could get out of there.

"I'm going to look around." I left Sensa's hut and started exploring the forest. I made it through all of the forest around the village, listening to the sound of the wind through the trees. I was about to re emerge into the village when I heard Brach's voice. I slipped behind the nearest tree, in case Brach was meeting someone privately, and didn't want me stumbling in. a couple of minutes past and the talking had stopped. I stepped out and went back to Sensa's hut.

"Find anything interesting?"

"No. The wind was nice though."

I went and got into my bed. I had stayed out longer than I had meant to. Several thoughts started to race through my head at once.

Brach loves you. But you don't love him, do you?

"No! Of course not." I said out loud in answer to my thoughts.

And now he HATES you for it!

"I know. But there's nothing I can do!"

You have to live together for the whole of the next year!

My thoughts were taunting me. I tried to think of my magic lessons tomorrow but my thoughts always went back to the one concept: But you don't love him, do you? I rolled over. Going to sleep seemed impossible at that moment, but before I could even register the thought, it was morning. I was exited at the thought of being able to learn magic, but I was beginning to have some doubts. What if I couldn't do magic at all? I went into the main room of the hut, nervously biting my fingernail. Sensa was already there, waiting for me. She promptly grabbed my wrist and dragged me outside.

"Sensa!" I cried indignantly "What are you doing?"

"We have to test your magic."

"Test my magic!" I shrieked.

By now, Sensa had dragged me to the biggest structure in the village. Inside was a stand with an orb sitting delicately on top.

"What, do I have to lift it?"

"No."

"Then what?"

"You just put your hand on it."

I stopped. "That's it?"

“Yes. It will show you what colour your Glow will be, and whether you have magic in your blood.”

“Oh. What do you mean by ‘magic in my blood’?”

“Whether your ancestors used magic or not.”

“Does it matter?”

“Not really. If you have magic in your blood it makes learning magic a little easier.”

A little more confident, I put my hand atop the orb. My Glow started as a soft greenish colour that you couldn't really see. It started to get brighter, and as it did it changed to a deep, intense blue. My eyes widened.

Sensa was nodding. “Yep, there's definitely some magic in you somewhere.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Look at how clear and strong your Glow is. Come on. We should get started.” Sensa stepped away from the orb. I followed suit, then Sensa magic'd it away.

“Right. The first step to healing is plants. Plants are vital to healing in that they can make anecdotes for poison, which magic cannot cure. They also make various lotions.” Sensa indicated to a dead plant on her left that I hadn't noticed before. “See if you can make this plant bloom.”

I put my hand out and screwed my eyes shut tight. Nothing happened.

“How do I do this?” I asked desperately.

“Okay. Here, you just put your hand over the plant, or whatever it is you're magic'ing. Then, you visualize what you want to magic – happening!” Sensa grinned. “But remember, that's only for healing or domestic magic. Battle magic is different but we'll get to that some other time. Now try again.”

This time, instead of just putting my hand out, I put my hand on the plant. In my mind I watched as the plant grew from the shriveled brown stick it was to the green, leafy wonder I knew it could be.

“Very good.” Sensa gave me a small clap. “You're a natural.”

For the next year I learn my magic, working and working, making progress, and making mistakes. Sensa had only let me start battle magic once she was fully sure that I had grasped healing. Battle magic was a lot harder than I anticipated it to be. It was a simple concept, but the execution was hard. Unlike healing magic, battle magic used a channel to pinpoint what you wanted your magic to do. Point your channel, then say or whisper the medium. Sensa made it look easy. She carried a small dagger to use as her channel. Brach's skills were improving too. He was becoming more agile, and was fluent in the use of the sword after only having used a crossbow prior to this. Brach has also not spoken about his love for me all year. This made it only slightly easier to live with him. My eighteenth Akinday had come only two days ago. Brach and I both knew that soon we would have to leave the village in pursuit of Amyras.

“Amile!” Sensa came in, interrupting my thoughts. I had discovered a short time after our arrival that Sensa was the same age as me. I also discovered that she was a magical genius. The Abeora. She could do magic most adult Anthro couldn't. She was also destined for greatness above all others.

Sensa hadn't found this out until her eighteenth Akinday.

“Amile?” this time Sensa waved a paw in front of my face. I snapped back to reality.

“Sorry.”

“Where were you? Certainly not on this planet.”

“I was thinking.”

“Well disregard those thoughts. I have some news for you.”

“Really? What?”

“There's good and bad.”

“Oh goody.” I deflated a little “Bad then.”

“Chief Cifilo says you have to leave in two days.”

“And the good?”

“I'm coming with you.”

I looked at Sensa. Her eyes were full of determination. I saw that it was pointless for me to argue.

“You know it’ll get messy with Amyras?”

“I know”

“So there’s nothing I can say to change your mind?”

“No.”

“Then welcome aboard.” I extended my arms to give Sensa a hug. I drew back a little. “How are we going to tell Brach?”

“Let me do it. I’ll tell him tomorrow.”

Brach stayed at Chief Cifilo’s that night and that morning. He came back as I slipped out to say goodbye to the forest.

## 6 - The Dragon.

The forest had become one of my favorite places to sit and think – I would miss it. I was walking through trees, reveling in the quiet when a piercing roar shattered my silence. I instinctively knew that it was the dragon. It sounded like it was in pain. I didn't know whether to go find the dragon or turn back. Another roar sounded, this one a mix of pain and frustration. I knew I had to go and help the dragon. I crept cautiously toward the origin of the roars. I finally came to see what had the dragon so agitated. He had gotten one of his humongous wings caught between two very close trees. It dawned on me how long his wings actually were. The Meeting Hall of the village was 9 egku's long, and his wing had to be at least that long. Every time he tried to get free of his tree-prison, his wing would scrape against the bark, and the claws would catch. I could see blood oozing from his fresh grazes.

"Dragon" I said with a lot more confidence than I felt. "I can see that you're in a lot of pain. I'm a healer – I can help."

"Human. I have a name. It is Malidan." Malidan cringed as he once again tried to free his wing. "But I would be grateful for the help."

I smiled reassuringly at him. I knew that I had to free Malidan's wing before I could heal it. I could see how his wing was wedged – the trees curved inward which is where it had caught but then they curved out again afterwards.

"This might hurt a bit." I warned, grabbing Malidan's wing. I hefted it above my head. It scraped against the trees, Malidan howling in pain. Finally I got it so that Malidan could pull it the rest of the way.

"Ok, now pull!" I said.

Malidan pulled, and his wing came free. "Thank you Human."

"My name's Amile, and I'm not done yet." I put my hand on Malidan's wing gently. In my mind's eye, I saw the grazes healing over, and the new scales coming through. I took my hand away. Malidan admired his wing.

"Thank you... Amile. I am in your debt."

"Don't worry about it. My friends and I are leaving tomorrow."

"Where are you going to?"

"To Amyras." I said. Malidan shrank back at the name.

"What would you want to go see him for?" he asked angrily.

"To kill him." I said. "He burnt down our village, killing my and Brach's Mothers."

"I'm sorry for your Mothers. I have a wish to see Amyras dead myself. When he came to power he killed all of the dragons he could. He was afraid of them. He took my mate, Exia, just after she had laid her egg. I gave the egg to the Anthro Village to look after."

"I'm so sorry. Why didn't he find you though?"

"I fled. That, and I cloaked this forest with my Dragon-Magic so that anyone who wanted to find it couldn't."

I stepped away. "It's getting late – I should go."

Malidan nodded slowly. "If you need help getting to Amyras, come find me."

"Sure. Thank you." I retreated out of the forest, mulling over Malidan's words. When I got to the village, I immediately sought out Sensa.

"Sensa, can you show me Malidan's egg?"

"You've already seen it."

"Excuse me?"

"Last year, when you first found your glow."

"That was Malidan's egg?"

"Uh-huh."

"Where is it now?"

"In its incubator. We haven't been able to make it hatch yet."

"Can you take me there?"

Sensa led me through the village to a small hut, nearer to the forest than all of the others. She let us in, where the heat was more intense than anything I had ever felt before. Sensa indicated to the egg, on a stand, in the middle of the room. I stepped towards it.

"No!"

"Don't worry. I'm not going to hurt it." I put three fingers on the egg. A jolt of electricity shot through me. I took my hand off the egg and shook my head to try and clear it. I turned away from the egg and saw Sensa gasp.

"What?!" I exclaimed.

Sensa pointed behind me. I whirled around. There was a huge crack in the egg. I went pale.

"Oh. My. God." I whispered.

"Amile, what did you do?"

"I don't know!" My hand went to my mouth nervously. As I did this, a chunk of eggshell fell to the floor. I turned as pale as I possibly could. The rest of the eggshell just fell apart, leaving a baby dragon in its place.

"You hatched the egg!"

"Apparently." I said, eyes wide with shock. The baby dragon, which had light blue scales, with the inside of its wings being lavender, leapt into my arms.

"He knows who you are! He knows you're the one who hatched him!"

"She." I corrected Sensa, cradling my dragon. "What's your name baby?"

The dragon just looked at me with her impossibly big blue eyes.

"Sensa, I'll be right back."

"Where are you going?"

"To see Malidan." For the second time that day, I tromped off through the forest.

"Malidan?" I called.

He landed heavily in front of me. "Yes?"

"Guess who I've brought to meet you." I held out his baby dragon.

"She looks like Exia." Malidan said sadly. "What did you name her?"

"I haven't yet. I thought you would like to."

Malidan thought for a moment. "Apiia. It means 'hope' in the dragon language."

"Apiia." I tested it out. "I like it. Do you like it baby?"

Apiia nodded, smiling and showing her pointy little dragon teeth. I set her down.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm leaving her. She should stay with her father."

"No" Malidan shook his head. "She would be safer with you."

"But Malidan -"

"No! Take her! Be good to her." With a kiss to his daughter, Malidan took off.

"Right then." I turned towards the village. "Come on Apiia"

Walking back, I looked down every couple of minutes to make sure that Apiia was still trotting along beside me. By the time I had gotten back to the village, everyone knew that I had hatched the Dragon Egg. People stared at us as we walked past. I walked into Sensa's hut, shut the door, and then threw myself against it, sighing with relief. Then I saw something move out of the corner of my eye.

“Aaaaah!” I screamed, throwing one of my hands up to protect my face.

“What are you doing?” Brach. Of course. I took my hand away.

“You scared me!”

“Obviously.” Brach was kneeling on the floor with his hand on Apiia’s head. “I leave you alone for one day and you go and bring home a dragon.”

“Her name is Apiia.” I told him about my day.

“Wow.” Brach pushed himself up “You should get some sleep. You have your Kate` tomorrow.”

I smiled and pushed past him into the bedroom, Apiia following me like a puppy. I crawled into bed, Apia settling near my feet.

“G’night Apiia” I mumbled, falling asleep almost instantly.

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NOTE:

Kate` : (Ka-Tey) - a proving yourself test. has the first two letters of your skill/profession in front of it. For example - BaKate`. Battle.

there was something else...

## 7 - The Kate`.

When I woke the next morning, I could feel a lump at the foot of my bed.

“What...?” The events of last night came back to me. “Oh, Apiia.”

I looked over. “Apiia!” Apiia had doubled in size overnight. I pulled my feet out from underneath her, waking her in the process.

“Come on. It’s a big day today. I have my WiKate`, then we have to get going.” I dressed in the ceremonial WiKate` robes that Sensa had left for me. I also put a wreath of flowers in my hair at Sensa’s instruction.

“Do everything that they tell you too, and avoid speaking. A Students WiKate` is usually performed in silence.” Sensa commanded me. When I was perfect to her inspection, Sensa led me to where the WiKate` was to be performed. It was a little circle of trees, just outside of the village. I entered the circle and saw three Witches standing there. They all wore dark cloaks with their hoods pulled up. I sighed inwardly. I knew this would be hard.

“Amile Rosna of the Humans, student of Sensa of the Anthro. The day of your Kate` is here. Are you ready?” The witch in the middle spoke. I nodded my assent.

The witch on the left stepped forward. “Firstly, you will be tested on your healing skills.”

I nodded again.

“Come forth.” The witch called out. I started forward, but she put her hand out to stop me. I stopped, puzzling as to why she had called me forward, and then told me to stop. But then the answer walked in. ‘The answer’ was five Anthro with sickness or injury.

“You must heal all five of my fellow Anthro. Perfectly.”

I swallowed, and then motioned for the first to come forward. I could see that she had broken one of the bones in her lower arm – badly. I touched her arm, and she visibly winced. I smiled what I hoped to be a reassuring smile. Then I concentrated. I saw in my mind the bones setting straight, and the muscle tissue repairing. When I opened my eyes there was not even a hint that anything had happened. The next three patients were, for want of a better word, easy. I came to the last one and the witch stated that he had the eye-disease. He was blind. I put three fingers on each side of his head, near his eyes. It took me much longer to fix his eyes than it had for me to heal all of the four others. When at last his eyes flickered open and he looked me in the eye, did I stop.

“Well done.” The first witch stepped back into line, and the middle witch, the one who had spoken to me earlier, stepped forward.

“Amile of the Humans. You have passed your first test. Now, it is time for your battle magic conductor.”

The second witch indicated to a small table over to my left.

“On this table are: a simple wooden wand, a small dagger, a Sikaan, and a knife. You will put your hand on each in turn. Whichever responds most effectively will be the conductor that has chosen you.”

I nodded, and stepped over to the table. I picked up the wand, and waved it. Nothing happened. I put the wand down and picked up the dagger. I waved it and a slight breeze picked up the leaves from the ground and twirled them around us. I put the dagger down and picked up the knife, which responded little more than the wand did. I put it down, feeling sure that the dagger would be my conductor. Then I picked up the Sikaan. For a moment it seemed like time stopped. I held the Sikaan out in front of me. I swiped it through the air, fighting someone invisible, watching in awe as bursts of flame escaped from my Sikaan.

“The Sikaan is your power channel.” The middle witch intoned, making the rest of the instruments



disappear. He stepped back, and the third witch stepped forward.

“Time to test your battle skills.” She said shortly. Her voice was familiar. Unlike the other witches, this one threw back her hood and revealed her face. It took me a second to register the familiar features. It was Sensa. My mouth fell open in surprise. She drew out her dagger, and shot a bolt of lightning towards me. I deflected it, and then shot a billow of blue fire towards her. She dissipated it. The back – and – forth of my test went on for about an hour. By then, I was exhausted. I stopped to take a breath. As I did, Sensa sent a surge of water at me, knocking me off my feet. Sensa stood over me.

“You pass.” She walked over to the other witches. “You have passed both tests, and chosen your power conductor. You may go now.”

I got up, dusting myself off. Once the first two witches had left, Sensa came over.

“Are you okay?” she exclaimed.

“Yeah, I’m fine. I wondered where you’d gone.”

“I wasn’t allowed to tell, I swear.”

“I know, don’t worry.”

“Lets go see how Brach’s BaKate` went.”

“Why not?” I looked down at my now muddy robes. “But I’m going to get changed first.”

“When we arrived back at Sensa’s hut, we found Brach already there.

“Hey. How’d your WiKate` go?”

“I passed.” I grinned at Sensa. “And your BaKate`?”

“I beat Chief Cifilo.” A proud smile beamed from Brach’s face.

“Wow! Brach, that’s great!” I smiled, but I was slightly unhappy inside. I glanced around the familiar room, knowing that we had to leave it soon.

## 8 - Brach's Plan.

I looked sideways at Sensa.

“When should we leave?”

“As soon as we possibly can.”

I nodded, pausing in my doorway to survey the room.

“Amile?” Brach hovered behind me.

“Sorry.” I moved aside to let him through.

I hadn't accumulated many personal things, so they would all fit into the one bag. I went in, kneeling on the floor to get the bag out from under the bed. Noting that Apiia had doubled her size again, I moved around the room, collecting my things. I was back in the main room in a matter of minutes, Apiia trotting at my side, now too big to be carried. Sensa had beaten me there, and was hoisting the strap of her bag over her head.

“hey, Sensa?”

“Yeah?” Sensa looked up from fussing with her bag, her hair falling into her eyes.

“Why is Apiia growing like she is? Is it normal?”

Sensa brushed her hair out of her eyes carelessly. “She is completely normal. Dragons grow at a faster rate than humans, that's all. She'll reach her full size soon, I would think.”

“Thanks.” Sensa's words had reassured me.

Brach emerged. “I've been thinking.”

I resisted the urge to say something sarcastic. “yeah?”

“well, when you helped Malidan, he said to call if you needed him right?”

“Yeah.” I drew the word out slightly, already suspicious.

“Well, if he owes you a favour, we could ride to Divoil on Malidan's back!” Brach announced with a hint of triumph.

“Would he let us?” Sensa thought aloud, “We couldn't let anyone see him. Or Apiia.”

“Were going to defeat Amyras from Dragon Back!” Brach started doing a victory jig.

“WAIT!” I yelled over the noise. “Hold on.”

“What?” Brach had stopped, and now had an impatient look on his face.

“we still have to ask him. He may not even let us.”

Brach looked at me like I might be stupid. “then go ask him.”

“come on then.” I motioned for Brach and Sensa to follow me. It didn't take long for us to get to where I had talked to Malidan before.

“Malidan!” I called, starting to feel bad for thinking of even asking him this.

He flew down. “Yes?”

“Uum... you said that if I wanted help traveling to Amyras, to ask right?”

“Mmm?”

“Well, we were wondering if you would fly us there.” I said in a rush.

Malidan rose what would have been an eyebrow at me.

“We also want your help to fight Amyras.” I admitted.

“Ah.” Malidan thought it over, but without showing any sign of doing so.

“Please? You said you'd help.” I pleaded.

He turned his head and eyed me. “I told you I would help you. I wanted to make you wait before I told you.”

“So you’ll fly us there?”

“The three of you?”

“And Apiia.”

“Actually,” Sensa spoke up cautiously “Apiia should be able to fly in a day or two.”

“Perfect!”

“Do you have everything that you would like to take?”

I looked around at Brach and Sensa. They nodded. I turned back to Malidan.

“Yes.”

“Then climb on.” Malidan crouched down so that we could. I settled myself between his shoulder blades, legs dangling. Both Sensa and Brach had to sit between the wing joints, cross-legged. We had to work the sitting around the rather large spikes on Malidans’ back and neck.

“Are you ready yet?” He growled once we had stopped moving around.

“Yeah.”

“Hold on.” Malidan leaned back on his haunches before taking off.

“Malidan!” I screamed, to be heard over the wind.

“What?” he roared back.

“Go down!”

Malidan landed back in the forest and I scrambled off his back.

“Why did you have me do that?” Malidan asked impatiently.

“Because we can’t let anyone see you. You’re our secret weapon.”

“Then how are we going to get there?” Malidan said condescendingly.

“You’ll have to fly at night.” A thought struck me. “Can you do that? Fly at night, I mean.”

“Yes, I can. It’ll still take at least two weeks to get there.”

“We don’t mind.”

“Very well.” Malidan said, twisting his neck around so that he could watch Brach and Sensa climb off him.

## 9 - The Distraction.

Brach grabbed my arm and dragged me away from the others.

“Ow!” I wrenched my arm out of his grasp. “What is your problem?”

“Look, we’ve spent a year in the same house, right?”

“So?”

“So, I wanted to see if your opinion of me had changed.”

“What do you mean?” I asked cautiously.

“Well, when I first told you I loved you, you didn’t love me back, right?”

“Right.” Now my voice was full of suspicion. I could see Brach take a deep breath.

“Do you love me now?”

“Oh, Brach! Don’t do this!” I said, exasperated.

“Tell me.” He looked into my eyes, and I could see the flicker of hope hidden in his own.

I looked around wildly, as if one of the trees would give me my answer.

“Tell me.” He said insistently.

“No!” I blurted out. I put my hand over my mouth. “Brach...”

Brach nodded slowly. “Ok. I won’t bring it up again.”

“I’m sorry.”

Brach turned and walked away. I debated over whether or not I should tell Sensa, and then decided against it. She looked at me; her eyes filled with the question I knew would be there. I shook my head slightly. She shrugged, as if to say ‘your choice’.

“So, what are we going to do during the day, now that I can’t fly?” Malidan harrumphed, disgruntled that I had made him land so soon after taking off.

“Well,” I hesitated “we still need a plan of action for when we get there.”

“We fly in, we attack, then BOOM! no more Amyras.” Brach said, using excessive hand gestures.

“We’ll need a distraction.” I said. This caused Brach to stop and think.

Sensa sauntered over gracefully.

“Well, we could...” I started. Brach and Sensa whipped around to look at me. I started. The sudden attention caused the idea to disappear. “Never mind.” I murmured.

“What about an army of Anthro?” Sensa said simply. She smiled, showing white, pointy teeth that were more fox than human.

“Would Chief Cifilo agree?” Brach mused.

“Of course.” Sensa said, gesturing to Brach. “You are, after all, a prince now.”

“True.” Brach said thoughtfully.

“This means you have to go ask him, Mister Prince.”

“What? Why? But...” Brach sputtered, trying to get out of doing it. “I don’t know my way through the forest.” Brach said. “Amile led us through before, remember?”

“I told him I would take him back to the village. “You have no excuse now.”

“Fine.”

While Brach was in the village talking to Chief Cifilo, I waited just inside the edge of the forest. It had been a long time since Brach had left, and I was unsure whether or not I should go to him. I took a few steps forward then decided that if he was still in audience with Chief Cifilo, he didn’t need me. I shook my head, and turned around. A hand appeared out of nowhere and appeared on my shoulder. I jumped out of my skin and screamed.

“Amile.” The voice attached to the hand on my shoulder spoke. It was familiar, calming. It was Brach. He turned me around.

“So,” I tried to be casual “what did Chief Cifilo say?” I stuck my hands behind my back so that Brach couldn’t see how badly they were shaking.

“He said he would do whatever he could to help. But that’s not important right now.” He looked at me closely. “You’re shaking. Did I really scare you that badly?”

I nodded, fearing that if I spoke, I would start crying. I took a deep breath.

“Lets get back. You’ve been gone for ages.” I turned away from Brach and started walking. We made it back to the camp in relative silence.

“So?” Sensa demanded as soon as she saw us.

“Chief Cifilo is willing to help.” Brach said.

“Where’s Malidan?” I asked.

“Asleep. Just over there.” Sensa pointed to a bunch of trees. “He wanted to get some sleep now if he’s going to be flying all night.”

“You two should do the same.” Brach said. “I can sleep while we’re flying.”

“No thanks.” I chirped. “ I can sleep on Malidan’s back too. We’re low on food. I’m gonna go find some.”

Brach opened his mouth as if to protest.

“No.” I held my hand up. “Do you want to starve?”

Before Brach could say anything, I had turned around and walked off. I went in the opposite direction to the village. I spotted what looked like an apple tree up ahead. I was still about an egku from the tree when a little man jumped out of the bushes.

## 10 - Queen M'Lady

"Oi! You there!" he yelled up at me. "Why're you walkin' on the soils o' M'Lady?"

The little man could have been no higher than my knee.

"I wanted to pick some apples off the tree."

"You wanted our apples?!" the little mans face flamed red, and he grabbed a fistful of my skirts.

"Aah!" I had no choice but to follow him. He led me through the bushes to another apple tree. This tree was nearly identical to the first, but it had green apples, not red. The little man walked straight into the tree, taking me with him. The illusion around me cleared. There were houses so small they could only accommodate people as mall as the man who led me. Rising from the middle was a regal palace. The landscape was a blur as I was quickly dragged towards that palace. It wasn't long before I was pushed into a large empty room, with stairs at one end.

"Introducing Her Majesty, the Queen M'Lady."

Two doors at the top of the stairs opened. A stunningly exquisite Lady stepped out. As she started to walk towards the little man still hanging onto my skirts and I, I could see that her golden hair was so long it would have dragged on the floor, if not for the child holding it up. Her eyes were emerald green, and glinting in the light, bearing even more resemblance to the jewel. The wings on her back were like a dragonflies, and very delicate. Her skirt was a deep, eternal green, and her bodice was also green, but in a lighter shade. She stopped. The little man bowed. I quickly followed with a curtsy.

"Norm, what have you brought in front of me?" the Queens clear, sweet voice rang through the room.

"She was 'bout to pick some apples offa our tree, that, and she had the stench o' a witch on 'er. Both good and bad majics, M'Lady." Norm said. M'Lady turned her gaze on me. "Is that so?"

"My friends – and I – were starving. I didn't realise I was stealing."

"What magic's do you practice, Witch?"

"I practice healing, but I'm trained in battle magic should I need it."

"What is your business in our forest?"

"Not to be rude Your Majesty, but its not just your forest. A village of Anthro and a dragon live in this forest as well. But in answer to your question, my companions and I spent the last year in the Anthro Village. Now, we are traveling to the palace. To kill the king." I could tell that I could trust the faerie queen.

The Queens dainty eyebrows went up. "Kill the King? But why?"

"He destroyed our village, killing our mothers. That," another thought made its way to the front of my mind "and we have the rightful heir."

The Queen looked at me, long and hard. "How did you know?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper, but still loud.

"About Brach? He's lived in my village all of his life." I was slightly bewildered.

"Brach? Who is this Brach? I thought you were talking about the king."

"The king? The dead king? What about him?"

"Can I trust you?" the queen asked seriously.

"Of course, your Majesty." Now I was intrigued.

"The rightful king, King Salven is here, being hidden."

"What? Oh, my God. I have to go tell Brach!"

"Who is this Brach?" the Queen repeated.

"Oh, Brach. He's the prince. Salven's son." I waved a hand dismissively.

“Salven has a son?”

“Yeah. Brach. May I see the King?”

M’Lady gave a nod. “Follow me.”

The Queen turned and left the room. I hurried to keep up with her.

“Uh, M’Lady? I don’t think the king is being kept here.”

“of course not. These are my quarters.”

“why are we here?”

“You can’t go see the king wearing that.”

I looked down. As I had refused to wear the skimpy clothes of the Anthro, my dress was very tattered. The Queen was rustling through her closet. “aha!” she exclaimed as she found what she was looking for. M’Lady held it up. It was a set of black pants that would reach halfway down my calf, a black long sleeved shirt, and a pair of knee – high flat soled black boots.

“my old battle attire.” The Queen said proudly. “I do not need it anymore. You will. Take care when you go through towns though. You will need to put your skirts on over it.”

“thank you M’Lady.” I took the clothes and was led into another room to change. I went back to the Queens quarters, clutching my old clothes. There was no one there but Norm.

“I’ve bin instructed by M’Lady tuh take you tuh see King Salven.” Finding that he could no longer grab my skirts, Norm strode off.

“Norm?”

“Yah?”

“why is the queens hair so long?”

“nuna us faeries cut our hair.”

“really?”

“Yah.”

“why is the Queen taller?”

“because she’sa royal.”

Norm had led me through a maze of corridors, finally stopping in front of a door.

“king Salven? You gotsa visitor.” Norm motioned for me to go in. King Salven looked up. A frown creased his brow.

“who are you?”

“ I am Amile Rosna. I am traveling with your son.”

“my son?”

“yes. His name is Brach.”

“he would be eighteen now.”

“he is. Were traveling to Amyras Castle. Were going to kill him. He burnt down our villages, which killed our mothers.”

King Salven looked up sharply. “Angeel is dead?”

“yes. I’m sorry.”

King Salven looked at the floor, devastated.

“would you like to come with us?” I offered.

King Salven stood, his back straight. “ I would be honored.”

I nodded. “we should go tell the Queen of our plans.”

I walked out of the room, looking for Norm.

“Norm?” I called, the corridors echoing ‘Orm...orm...orm’ back at me. I looked at the King. “ if you know the way, could you lead?”

The king gave a nod and strode off down the corridor. He led me back through the maze of hallways and doors until we reached somewhere I recognized.

“hey.” I looked around with interest. “I think I know where we are.”

“Norm?” the King called.

Norm appeared from nowhere. “yah, King Salven?”

“I would like an audience with the Queen.”

“I’ll see what I c’n do.” Norm bowed his head and flew off. The King and I waited for about five minutes before Norm came back.

“My Queen’ll see yuh now.” Norm led us in before going to stand behind the Queen who was already inside. Norm only came up to her knee.

“Queen M’Lady.” King Salven bowed. Unable to curtsy anymore, I bowed clumsily.

“We have come to inform you that Miss Amile has invited me to journey with her and my son. I have accepted.” King Salven continued.

“as you wish.” M’Lady said. “But you will need a disguising spell. If you want to keep the element of surprise, no one can know who you are.” The Queen raised her hand. King Salven vanished. In his place stood a man who looked like me.

“you will go posing as Miss Amile’s father. And you will go by the name of Ordan.” King Salven bowed.

“Before we go, Your Majesty, can we get some food to take with us?”

“Give me your bag.” The Queen ordered. I handed over my bag, which was stuffed with my old clothes. The Queen raised her hand. “your bag is now full of food that will never run out or go off.”

I looked at my bag, disbelieving. It didn’t look any bigger. I opened it and looked inside. Sure enough, it was stuffed. I bowed my head.

“thank you Your Majesty. We will go now.” King Salven and I turned to leave.

“Wait.” The Queen’s sweet voice reverberated through the chamber.. King Salven and I turned back.

“ I wish to bestow a final parting gift upon your traveling party. Picture the rest of them on your head.”

I obediently pictured Brach, Malidan, Sensa and Apiia in my head.

“My gift is bestowed.” The Queen said. “None of your traveling party will tire until you’re your journey is over.”

Now that the Queen mentioned it, I did feel less tired.

“Thank you, My Queen.” I said.

“You may go now. And good luck to you.”

King Salven and I bowed again, and then turned away. We navigated back to where Brach, Sensa, Malidan and Apiia waited. I burst into the clearing.

“I’m back!” I said. “And I have a surprise for you Brach!”

“I hope its food!” Brach said, rubbing his hands together.

“Better.” I said, pulling Salven out of the trees. Brach looked confused.

“Who’s this?”

“Brach, this is your father.”

“No, its not. My father’s dead. Besides, he looks more like you than me.”

“Well, that’s because the Faerie Queen put a disguising spell on him.” I said impatiently.

“Faerie Queen? What are you talking about Amile?”

I gave a little sigh, and proceeded to tell the whole story. When I was finished, Brach peered at Salven.

“So, you really are my father?”

“Of course.” Salven’s voice was raspy with emotion.

“Then why don’t you look like me?”

“The disguise spell like of Queen M’Lady’s, like Amile said. I am supposed to pose as Ordan, Amile’s father.”

At this point, two big, fat tears rolled down Brach’s cheeks. I was shocked. In all the time I’d known Brach, he had never cried.



“Why are you crying?” Salven asked.

“I didn’t think I had anyone left. I thought you were dead, and then mother died. But you’re alive! I’m not crying for sadness, I’m crying for joy.”

While Brach was speaking, I had started crying myself.

“Oh, stop it Amile. You cry too much.” Brach said with a smile. I wiped my tears. While we were talking, night had fallen.

“Come on then.” Malidan grumbled.

We climbed onto Malidan’s back, now having to fit Salven. Apiia, not yet big enough to fly, nestled herself between Malidan’s claws. He took off. Malidan was a silent flyer, and being a deep purple, he blended in with the black night. We flew on until sunrise, whereupon we had to put a disguise spell on both Malidan and Apiia.

“Sensa, we have to go through Muti.”

“So?”

“People aren’t used to seeing Anthro walking around.”

“Oh.” Sensa magicked herself some new clothes – a full skirt and bodice. She then put a small disguising spell on herself to hide her other fox traits.

“Better.” I nodded.

“Now, we have to lay low for the day. Until its safe for Malidan to fly again.” Brach said.

“Ok, Mr. Boss.” I said. “So will we go into Muti or what?”

Brach nodded. “We can’t exactly stay out here all day. Besides, some of us need new clothes.”

Brach, Salven, Sensa and I walked into Muti, stopping at the tailors. Brach and Salven went in leaving Sensa and I to roam. A little while later Brach and Salven left the tailor to join us. At that moment I spotted a squadron of Amyras’ soldiers.

“Hey. Amyras’ soldiers.” A passer-by commented. “I wonder what they’re doing here?”

“Probably just passing through.” Someone else said.

## 11 - The Battle

I looked at Brach. He caught the meaning of my look, took Sensa's elbow and hurried out of Muti. "Come along now, father." I said, slipping my arm through the crook of Salven's elbow. We hurried back through the streets of Muti. One we had left the town, we broke into a run. I glanced behind me. People were running everywhere. I stopped.

"What's happening?" I yelled, my hair whipping around in the wind. Smoke started to rise from the town in front of us.

"He's burning it! Just like he did Malsuma!" Brach answered.

"But why?"

"He knows." Sensa said, a dark look in her eyes. "He knows about Brach."

"About me?" Brach had a look of panicked confusion on his face. "What's so special about me? Except the whole," he lowered his voice "Prince thing."

"Your mother. After... Ordan disappeared, your mother fled to Malsuma while she was pregnant. Amyras must have found out that Ordan had a son."

The flames were now leaping high, swallowing Muti.

"You mean he has someone following us?" I asked.

"Not necessarily." Sensa shook her head. "He can see things in his minds eye. He is a Sorcerer."

"We have to get to him as soon as possible!" Brach declared. "Before he burns down the whole of Ashielat."

"Call Malidan." Salven said to me.

"But people will see him!"

"Who cares? Amyras knows were coming anyway."

I shrugged. "Malidan!" My call went to the winds.

Malidan came soaring out of the sky, Apiia beside him, matching him for size.

"Apiia! You've grown!" I exclaimed as they landed.

"No time for niceties, get on!" Salven ordered.

I willingly obeyed, stationing myself at the base of Apiia's neck. Malidan sat back on his haunches and took off. We flew for days, the days and night blurring together. Divoil was only the next town from Muti. We arrived in the dead of night right outside the walls of the town.

"We attack at dawn." Salven announced. "We'll camp here."

I hefted my bag over my shoulder, dumping it in front of me. Brach had already started to build a fire. Even though I knew I shouldn't have, I set the logs that Brach was arranging alight.

"Hey!" Brach snatched his hand away.

"Sorry. I thought I was being helpful." I shrugged.

Salven strode back into the firelight. "No fires."

Brach stood up. "Why?" he challenged.

"Because we don't want them to know exactly where we are."

I put out the fire, giving a shiver and wrapping my arms around myself. The night passed slowly. I didn't sleep, - thinking about the battle that lay ahead worried me. Dawn broke behind the castle. Brach and Salven had been preparing themselves, as well as Sensa and I for the battle.

"I still don't think it's a good idea for you and Sensa to go." Brach said, sheathing his sword.

I swung around, planting my hands on my hips. "Well were coming, so get over it."

Brach held up his hands in surrender, and then backed off. I buckled my Sikaan around my waist, having

already stripped off my constricting skirts. I wore Queen M'Lady's battle clothes underneath it all the time now. The captain of the Anthro army came over while I swung myself onto Malidans back. A moment later Brach followed suit. Salven nodded to the captain, who in turn motioned to the rest of the army. Malidan spread his wings and took off. The Anthro army stormed the castle, Amyras' army finally getting wind of what was happening and pouring out of the castle. The sounds of metal on metal ensued. Malidan circled the battle overhead, keeping us safe until we were needed. Amyras' army outnumbered ours, but the Anthro had the advantage of magic. Bodies fell to the ground, already muddy with blood.

"Malidan." I leaned down so that he could hear me. "Now. While he's distracted by the battle."

Malidan answered by shooting into a steep dive, pulling up just in time to land on the turreted roof of the tower. Brach, not wasting time, shimmied down Malidans tail before swinging into the tower room. I followed. The room we were in was empty.

"Ok, what now?" I whispered.

"We wait. Knowing him, he'll want to watch the battle, and this is the best view."

There were footsteps on the stairs.

"Hide!"

"Where?" I looked around wildly.

Brach grabbed me and pulled me into the shadows behind the door, just before it opened. One of Amyras' guards stepped in. He glanced quickly around the room.

"There's no-one here, My Lord." He spoke to someone on the stairs. A moment later Amyras entered the room. He stood tall, with his waist-length brown hair hanging loose under the crown on the top of her head. He turned, and I saw his eyes. I let out a small gasp, Brach slapping his hand over my mouth. Amyras' eyes were blood red, with only a slit of black to serve as a pupil.

"Very good." His voice seemed to slither around him like a snake. "Go now. I will watch in peace."

The guard nodded and left the room. Amyras strolled over to the window.

"Brilliant" he said to himself "this is brilliant! It's all coming together. My bratty nephew down there when swipe! One of my soldiers takes his head off."

'Stay here' Brach mouthed to me. I shook my head no. Brach nodded yes, then immediately turned away, not giving me a chance to answer.

"One problem." Brach said. Amyras whirled around. "I'm right here."

"You!" Amyras snarled. He pulled a hidden sword out of the folds of his cloak. "I'll just have to kill you myself then!"

Brach pulled out his own sword and took the first swing. After blocking Brach, Amyras sent a blast of energy at Brach so hard that it threw him back against the wall. Amyras stood over him; ready to do whatever it took to kill Brach. I couldn't see him breathing, and stumbled out of the shadows.

"You killed him!" I screeched.

Again, Amyras whirled. "Who are you?"

"My name is Amile." I grabbed my sikkam from my waist and shot a strong bolt of lightning at Amyras. He blocked it easily. I could see Brach start to get up. Relieved, I knew I had to keep Amyras busy.

"Tell me one thing. Why?"

"Why what?" Amyras sneered.

"Why kill Brach? Why kill King Salven? Why burn down Malsuma? Or Muti?" tears started down my cheeks. I brushed them away.

"I killed my dear older brother because he was in my way. So was his dear son."

"In the way of what?"

"My power!" Amyras blasted energy at me. I didn't even try to block it. It didn't kill me, but another one like that would. Amyras sheathed his sword. "But now that, Brach, was it? Yes, well now that he's dead,

there's no one to stand in my way. Except you, of course."

Brach was on his feet now, and breathing heavily. "Hey Amyras?"

Amyras spun.

"Do I look dead to you?" Brach plunged his sword straight through Amyras' chest. Amyras fell to the floor, dead.

"Oh my God, Brach!" I ran into his arms. "I thought he'd killed you!"

I hugged him tighter, if only to prove to myself that he was actually there.

"I'm sorry." he said.

"What for?"

"I didn't want you to come in the first place, then after I told you I loved you I pressured you to go home when I knew you wouldn't. Oh, and for almost getting you killed just then."

"But I do." I spoke into his shoulder.

"You do what?"

"Love you." I looked up into his eyes. "I love you, Brach."

I had barley finished my sentence before Brach was kissing me. He rested his forehead on mine on mine for a minute before letting me go.

"What are you doing?"

Brach turned to the window, raising his sword into the air. "Telling them who won."

## 12 - Epilogue

Brach strode into the castle bedroom. Amile lay in the bed, pale, and with her black hair plastered to her sweaty forehead. In her arms, two babies. She looked up as Brach came in. Amile smiled, and handed him one of the infants.

“Your daughter, Giphany,” She gestured to the baby in her arms. She then gestured to the other infant. “And your son, Dimitri.”

THE END.