

## Part 27. Naltag

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**Two days were all** that could be spared. The children were hungry, and Naltag's supplemental tablets didn't sustain them past an hour. Kilah was the only one vocal about the hunger. Naltag could tell Jeremiah was hungry from his growling stomach, but there wasn't much else to tell about him.

He had stopped drawing circles (a habit he had kept up for 16 hours straight), but still hadn't spoken.

"Broken?" Kilah asked, stroking Jeremiah's head.

He napped in his sleeping pack, never stirring as his sister continued ruffling his hair.

"Mayhap," Naltag said.

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Another day passed without a change. Though hydrated, Kyla was lacking in concrete nutrients. Her mood went from irritable to lethargic rather quickly. She asked why she couldn't go back inside the compound to obtain food.

Naltag took note that the question wasn't about going back home and staying there, nor did Kilah cry, or say she missed her parents. Nay, she was practical, and it was food she needed, and thus it was food she wanted to get.

"Once Jeremiah wakes, go."

Kilah's face scrunched up at the sentiment. Naltag shrugged, and would rather not have said anything like it. However, she hoped to motivate Jeremiah into waking, but he wasn't moved.

After one more day, Kilah couldn't wait. While the citizens slept, she crept back into the compound, using the vent system. Naltag showed her how to use the disapperator, for added safety. Within 20 minutes, Kilah reappeared from the vent opening, a huge grin on her face, mouth moving up and down. Naltag realized she wasn't trying to speak, she was chewing.

Naltag had waited without worry, because the child was capable, but had felt an emotion close to worry. Kilah's grin had displaced some of that anxiety (a word pulled from the endless tomes Jeremiah once had access to). Finally, Kilah crawled completely in to view, a sack tied to her leg.

"No trouble?" Naltag asked, helping to untie the bag.

"None to be had. I did see Eva, though. She was sad."

Jeremiah's mouth twitched, but otherwise, he remained unchanged.

All in all, her journey yielded four loaves of fativa. It was sufficient to see the children through for a few days.

Kyla put a slice of fativa in Jeremiah's hand. He neither acknowledge the action nor ate the bread. His other hand was busy running over a tuft of green sprouting from the dirt. Back. And forth. Back. And forth.

Naltag didn't like it. Instead of tracing circles in the dirt, the child was stroking grass. Repetitive action could be soothing, and the child needed soothing to be sure.

Sometime later, Jeremiah's ration of fativa was gone from his hand.

"He ate!" Kilah pointed and clapped her hands.

Naltag nodded, and instructed the sister to lead the brother back to their encampment.

A sneaking suspicion drove Naltag to scan the pathway thoroughly. Tossed in the dirt, she spied the slice of fativa, untouched.

Kilah need not know

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