

Part 32. Naltag

As it was, the creatures said nothing ever again.

The whooping girls used the end of her shaft to bludgeon their heads. The backs of their skulls caved upon impact, and they collapsed.

Jeremiah gaped. Kilah stared with non-judgmental interest at the murder.

Naltag was the only one to thank the girl, who nodded at the acknowledgement.

"If I hadn't done 'em, they'd a done you, den come-a do me. No, siree."

She barely came up to Jeremiah's shoulders, but she somehow seemed larger. It was the way she carried herself, taking up more space with her confident tone and stance.

Her compound was empty, or near to empty. Those inside were dying or dead, and the girl wasn't having a part in it.

"Hot skin, hot eyes took my people, but not Graylyn."

The compound withered in the last year, until she remained as the last hale citizen. She emerged from time to time, gathering food, hunting scadogs, and mapping the surroundings. At the edge of the wood, she detailed brown and barren wastelands. Her elders warned her away from these, sharing the legends of sickness and death. Desperation nearly drove Graylyn to cross into the desolation, but the warnings were too deeply ingrained. Graylyn seemed strong, and capable of surviving on her own, but fear trapped her, creating an island of a few acres for her to scavenge from.

She couldn't have known the wastelands were free of sickness, or at least to some degree. Radiation rates declined every passing rotation, and as generations had passed since the atomic explosions, the wastelands might be safely travelled. For Graylyn, concrete knowledge of the past was irrelevant. She understood limited facts about her self, let alone what had occurred four hundred years prior.

Naltag studied her as per studied all Kimurians. The differences between her perceptions and Jeremiah's grew as the sky faded from azure to a burnished orange. Naltag invited her to join their adventure. The children's body mass suffered from lack of protein. Graylyn's skill in hunting scadogs would provide a necessary food source. Already, she had killed, skinned, and attempted to roast one. Naltag prevented the fire, not wishing to attract more predators.

She realized her error and apologized. Suddenly, Jeremiah asked her if she was a woman. Graylyn only scowled. Then she mentioned the need to retrieve belongings from the compound.

Her humility had apparently revealed her sex to Jeremiah. However, Naltag viewed the apology as a recognition of fault, and accounting for it. Naltag's three mothers had taught her much of the same.

Not a decade passed before Graylyn joined them again. A small pack rested on her back, which seemed to stir a mix of nostalgia and jealousy in Jeremiah. In contrast, he had left his compound with nothing, having been essentially run out. This girl had been able to choose, to have a voice in leaving, also deciding on what to take and what to leave.

Naltag planned to record any friction developing between the two children. Their ideologies were bound to crash, and the results could be illuminating.

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