

The Creatures that History Forgot

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Smashwords Edition

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[What Lies Beyond the Shadows](#)

I yawned flexing my long tail then jumped from my thick plush bedding made of fluff encased in fabric. My bare feet landed lightly on the cool floor as I arched my back to the ceiling feeling my vertebra shifting into place. I stood erect though it felt odd and unnatural with my forepaws dangling uselessly at my sides. I swiveled my left ear outward as I released a gust of air through my nostrils, in an amused gesture. I did not need to behave like a princess in the privacy of my own room I thought before I pounced back onto my bed. I landed heavily in the sinking mass but quickly sat upright with my tail wrapped around me as I stared out toward the large glass dome where the heated copper wire glowed as a powerful electric current coursed through it. There was a soft meow as I turned to see a sand colored cat strolling toward me.

“Zabuza,” I exclaimed as the cat leap onto my bed pressing its body against me as I stroked its back. Its throat vibrated with contentment as I looked to the other side of the large room where there were two glass bowls. I looked down at the striped cat that raised its head to stare at me questioningly.

“Zabuza what would you like to eat this morning? Do you want tuna or a pigeon? ” I asked noticing the cat stopped at the word pigeon.

“Do you want a flaky bone filled fish,” I began as Zabuza rubbed her face against my arm.

“Or the plump juicy flesh of a bird?” I continued as Zabuza pulled away, looking at me with what I believe to be distaste.

“Fine I guess today you will have the tuna. Tuna must simply be your favorite.” I stated as Zabuza continued purring, tickling my chin with the tip of her tail.

“Come on let’s get some tuna.” I said as Zabuza leap down gracefully before glancing over her shoulder. I landed beside the cat a few seconds later then led the way to the two glass bowls. I rose onto my hind legs then grasped the bowl and placed it on the floor in front of Zabuza.

I sat on the floor with my long legs stretched out as I watched Zabuza eagerly snap up the fish, devouring them, head and all. I waved my tail in a wide arched pleased I was allowed to keep Zabuza for cats were a sign of royalty since they offered no benefit yet needed to be provided for. I was glad I was the leader’s daughter if it meant being able to keep Zabuza as a pet.

Zabuza looked toward the door then meowed loudly in greeting before my mother entered. Her cream colored fur was hidden under her black Death Stalkers uniform leaving only her black tail and feet exposed. Her large black ears were alert as always and her blue eyes were cold like those of any warrior. She stood upright which is a sign of both vulnerability and strength. An inch or so below her elbow she wore a complex black band with a black scorpion forever frozen within a hulk of hard plastic. It was the band the human was wearing when he killed my father on one of the Death Stalkers’ many missions. My mother killed the human single handedly and kept the bracelet in remembrance of my father. There was a good reason why the group was called the Death Stalkers and my mother was their fearless leader.

“Kyzudo I am going with the Death Stalkers to replace the worn parts of the generator, so behave yourself in my absence.” she said as I nodded.

“I guess I will see you later.” I said as she left, obviously in a hurry. I got up then followed her. I raced down the hall but paused when I saw the Death Stalkers gathered around her.

“Kyzudo stand up straight. You are my daughter so behave like it.” Mom said as I unsteadily rose onto my hind legs.

“Are you ready to go your majesty?” asked one of the Death Stalkers bowing low with his ears lowered and his face practically touching the floor.

“Yes lead the way.” Mom answered then followed the dark clothed group using all four of her feet, as lithe and nimble as I ever hoped to be.

I turned away but paused when I saw Maya standing by the doorway. Maya was my mother’s adviser and one of the most intelligent of my kind. She understood everything about our society and even knew a few things about the humans” vast amount of technology.

“Maya can I ask you something?” I asked as Maya slowly turned my way, her green eyes skillfully concealing her annoyance as her bronze tail froze in an effort to hide her emotions.

“Yes Lady Kyzudo,” she said respectfully being forced to look up since I was still standing upright like my mother instructed.

"You are the wisest and the most intelligent of our kind why is that so?" I asked as she rigidly bowed in gratitude.

"I am honored that you believe this to be true..." Maya began but I cut her off for I was truly curious why some were raised up in our society for possessing certain qualities while others were ignored. Was Maya simply born with superior intellectual abilities while others were not? Was I born a princess because I possess the qualities of a leader, of my mother?

"Yes but why are you so wise?" I continued as Maya looked up at me curiously though kept her head bowed and her tail grounded.

"All have the ability to gather data and form generalizations but in my opinion one who is thought to be intelligent is simply the one who understands when a generalization should be made."

"Um explain."

"The foolish gather data without ever drawing a conclusion yet the naïve draw conclusions before enough data is gathered therefore the intelligent understand that all facts cannot be known and that data without meaning is not worth gathering. That is what it means to be intelligent nothing more."

"Um thanks uh could I come with you to the workshop."

"Of course Lady Kyzudo but I hope for your mother's sake that you do not choose to run off, again."

"I cannot promise you that my interests will not drift or that my body will resist its call."

"Of course, I will gather your guards then we can prepare to leave." Maya said as I nodded "Oh and it would be inappropriate for royalty to be in public without a robe. Her majesty would disapprove if you insisted on leaving without it."

"Fine, I will get dressed." I said flicking my tailed in annoyance before awkwardly walking back to my room with my front paws outstretched in an effort to steady myself.

When I got to my room I went to my closet where a silk black robe hung on a polished golden hook. I unhooked it then slipped it over my head fighting to get my ears through. I pulled my arms through the holes on the side then let the gown fall to my feet. I removed an elegant sash from another hook then tied it about my waist.

I walked over the full length mirror to look at myself. The loose fitting fabric hid all but my bare feet, the tip of my tail, my hands and my head. The only cream colored fur was located around my face. My blue eyes shown like gems in contrast to the black, I looked like an awkward less intimidating version of my mother. I stuck out my tongue in distaste when Zabuza meowed by the door. I looked up to see my four usual guards.

"I am ready so let's go." I said as they nodded then led the way to the door. Maya joined me as the guards surrounded us. I looked around for it felt odd towering over

the others dressed in my ridiculous robe. This all felt unnecessary since I am sure many of these cream and black furred guards must be my relatives.

We marched upholding society's silly traditions. The guards formed a perfect square about Maya and me. Their long tails were raised and their ears were pricked. Their vigilant green eyes scanned the area and all sported the traditional black scarves, which were wrapped around their necks and upper torsos as a sign of their societal role as royal guards.

Beyond our group young children raced each other and wrestled playfully, rolling across the ground. Their eyes confirmed their carefree lifestyles. Their movements seem lively and wonderfully random without worry of the opinion of others, free of tedious planning. They were free to do whatever they wished. I wish I could be like them.

The large light in the center of the huge room came to life putting the smaller surrounding lights to shame. Everyone stopped, including us, to turn toward the central light. Everyone sat with their tails rose proudly as they began to chant the folksong like they have for generations.

We are the rulers of the night
Silent shadows that prowl across the land
Forging an existence just out of sight
Our society is lost from the sun's reaching light
Instinctively feared yet unknown to man
We are the rulers of night
We are survivors preserved by our undying might
We stand having marked our place in the sand
Forging an existence just out of sight
We stand for what is right
Striving to stake our existence even though we have been banned
We are the rulers of night
We form a society that is sewn tight
Mirroring humanity technology whenever we can
Forging an existence just out of sight
We are the patrollers of the stars working for those who have fallen's delight
We are plotting in the darkness waiting to overthrow humanity's ruling hand
We are the rulers of the night
Forging an existence just out of sight

After the chant everyone bowed with their long ears plastered against their heads then continued do whatever they had been doing before, for this was a daily routine that is rarely broken.

"Um come on Lady Kyzudo." said one of the guards as I nodded then followed them across the expansive room to a small side room where Maya students were

waiting for her with pieces of technology stolen from the humans above ground. Everyone paused when we entered then dipped their heads and briefly lowered their ears in a causal bow before continuing with their work. I sat down as Maya glanced at me disapprovingly but I chose to ignore her. The guards spread themselves around the room for maximum coverage though many were soon distracted by the new technology that the Death Stalkers brought in for analysis.

“What is their function?” as one of the guards.

“We are not sure but they are pretty high tech. Some of them don’t even have buttons just this pressure sensitive screen.” Maya said holding up one of the devices when the device began to vibrate, causing Maya to drop it onto the table. Everyone gather to watch the device skitter across the flat surface causing the table to buzz.

“Maybe you upset its defense mechanism.” one suggested as I snuck out the room while everyone was distracted. I ran along the wall pausing in the shadows, where I took off my robe then continued on free of the restricting cloth.

I ran pass the large enclosure where plump pigeons, which bred for having useless stubby wings and meaty bodies, waddled about. They gathered together for safety though our main interest was in the eggs, they lay on a daily bases.

I continued on pass the rodents, which stood over four feet high and crowded together, their lack of a tail allowing them to cram in tight. Their large sensitive ears were raised as they listened for the deafening bark of the Rodent Herder, which is a large black dog with long fluffy fringes though it main attribute was its oddly shaped ears. The dog’s ears were small and rounded with only a slight point at the top, being covered in a thick layer of fur to protect its sensitive eardrums.

I hurried pass those hard at work commanding the dogs as I dashed into the corn field. Here the brick flooring was replaced with soft dirt where rows upon rows of corn grew. Above a thick copper wire ran along the ceiling glowing with such intensity that to stare at it would mean being briefly blinded followed by the attempt to blink away the afterimages, that last for quite some time. The thick wires were covered with a glass covering to protect the crops from the danger of fire or drying out.

I continued on until the large underground lake was in sight then I sat on the ground as I imagined the world above. My father had been a member of the Death Stalkers so he saw the land above and he told me all about. He said that above ground the sky is without an end and that there are bodies of water at race toward the horizon before falling out of sight. He told me that the corn plants remind him of trees, which he described as great pillars topped with branching expansion tipped with wide leaves that blotted out the sky. He said there was a ball of blinding light that hovers above the world, warming it in its radiance. I can’t imagine such a world but I want to see it one day despite the danger.

I sighed looking out across the still water pleased. My life was so structured that I rarely feel free to simply be, to wish of a future that is truly my own. Here I feel free

to do whatever I please. Here I was not royalty, here I was not cast in my mother's shadow. Here I was whatever I chose to be. Well at least until I am dragged back to my structured life.

I often come here to stare at the lake's tranquil water for hours at a time. I stroll down the lane of corn imagining great trees in their place until the world my once father described is alive in my mind's eye. I scooped handfuls of dirt then allowed it to slip through my fingers as time passed without remorse, my mind completely at rest.

I relished in the faint earthy scent of the soil. Each whiff contained a memory. The ground was like an archive of the past experiences. In the soil my father still lived because if I close my eyes I could still see him preserved forever within my memories.

His silver tail would dance among the crops as it swayed as if in remembrance of an enchanting song. A majority of his coat was a dazzling white and was soft to the touch. His eyes were a striking blue that held traces of green which he assured me was the same hue as the ocean.

He told me of the soft plants that blanketed the ground forming a sea of greenery that stretched on for miles, carefully trimmed to a unified height. He told me about large tufts of fine fibers that drifted along the air currents being lighter than the surrounding air. They were fluffy and white like the fiber used to stuff cushions. He also use to go on for hours about the mysterious lights that appear in the sky at nightfall. He said they were called stars and that they make up the fabric of the heavens. He said that the dead are alive among the stars, just beyond the veil of darkness that forms the night sky.

I let the rich soil slip from my hands as I continued to look out across the large pond. I use to splash in its cooling waters with my father countless times in the past. I use to cast my robe aside before diving under its surface. I use to laugh as the water rose with a hard slap of my hand as my father shook himself off before flinging water towards me with his tail. It did not matter if it was a proper activity for one born into the ruling family. It did not matter that I could be doing something more suitable to prepare myself as the future ruler. It did not matter if I presented myself poorly because to my father I was simply me, I was simply Kyzudo.

"Lady Kyzudo you should not run off when there is danger about." said one of the guards as I looked up seeing my guards rushing over to me. I got up turning toward them annoyed for I knew I would be forced to return to the palace.

"I know but you knew where I was so I don't see much harm." I explained when one of the guards stepped forward.

"If you like this place so much why don't you simply let us take you here." the guard continued as the other presented me with the robe I discarded.

“Because that would defeat the purpose of coming,” I said annoyed taking the robe.

“Do you need assistance Lady Kyzudo?” asked one of the guards as I struggled to locate the opening of the sleeves.

“I am not be my mother but I am not helpless.” I growled as the guard bowed, muttering an apology into the loose soil.

“I am sorry just lead the way home.” I said touching the guard on the back with my fingertips.

“There is no need to apologize to the likes of me Lady Kyzudo.” the guard said looking up modestly.

“We can’t march in formation in the corn field, so Lady Kyzudo lead the way and we will follow you at a distance.” a guard said as I nodded.

“Don’t worry I know my way home.” I murmured to myself as the guards surrounded me.

The walk home was carried out in silence. It was such a common sight to those who collected pigeon eggs and commanded the dogs that I only received a slight bow of recognition. The guards were silent for this was more of a routine than an event.

Then suddenly I paused when I saw a Death Stalker, still in his uniform, racing toward me. The guards formed a wall with their bodies to protect me but the Death Stalker slowed calling to the guards. The Death Stalker stopped a few yards away bowing low as two of the guards went to check if he was carrying any weapons. Only after the search was completed and every fold of his uniform was inspected, was he allowed to approach me.

“I am sorry to alarm you Lady Kyzudo but I came to inform you that your mother has been injured.” the Death Stalker said as I lowered my tail in horror.

“I need to check on her!” I exclaimed pulling the robe over my head.

“What are you doing Lady Kyzudo?” the Death Stalker asked for it was not proper for royalty to be without their robe and seemed like I was going out of my way to break that tradition.

“My mother needs me and I am going to be there for her!” I yelled, casting the robe onto the floor, before leaping past my guards.

“Wait Lady Kyzudo!” the guards yelled as I ran home using all four of my legs to increase my speed. I did not care about upholding tradition when my mother maybe dying. I don’t know how I am going to save her but I am not going to lose another parent, not if I can help it.

A Warrior's Attire

“Lady Kyzudo, come back!” the guards yelled as I sprinted home, my youth and small stature adding to my speed. The Death Stalker was also chasing me but he seemed to be holding back, he seemed to understand my burning desire to get to my

injured mother as soon as possible. All who saw us hurried to get out the way watching us pass fearfully though I was beyond caring about how they saw me.

I dashed into the house to see the members of the Death Stalkers gathered around my mother. They parted when they saw me so I rushed over to see my mother, who standing in the center of the group. She bared her fangs with her tail thrashing wildly about behind her. She looked perfectly healthy I thought until, one of her servants touched her hind leg, which had a deep gash.

“Calm down I am alright.” my mother said hobbling forward as I looked away ashamed for I doubted if I could ever be that strong, strong enough to replace her as the leader.

“I need to tend to your wound in order for it to heal, your majesty.” the servant said as my mother nodded having understood.

“Fine but then I need to inform the people that the Death Stalkers were able to obtain the supplies for the generator.” Mom said as everyone turned to her worried.

“You can” go on that leg.” the servant exclaimed having temporarily forgetting her manners.

“I am needed so I must.” Mom stated simply ignoring the rashness in which the commit was stated.

“Well I suppose in a few hours...” the servant began but Mom cut her off with a sharp gesture of her tail.

“No I am going as soon as you tend to it.” Mom stated boldly renewing everyone sense of worry.

“But you need to rest.” the servant insisted.

“My people need information about the generator as soon as possible.” My mother stated as if denying that a hindrance existed.

“Maybe one of the Death Stalkers can make the announcement for you.” suggested the servant.

“No then they will think I am incapable of delivering the news myself.” Mom said whipping her tail back and forth.

“You currently are not capable of such a task your majesty.” the servant stated mildly though Mom did not take offense.

“That is where you are wrong I am more than capable of delivering this message for I can’t allow for weakness.” she stated calmly but the servant would not give up that easily.

“But you can barely walk. If you do not want to appear weak then you may not want to go before them limping on all fours, your majesty.” the servant continued dulling her message with her polite words.

“I will walk upright as always.” Mom stated boldly.

“But your leg?” the servant questioned.

“It will support me.” she stated confidently.

“Just for a tradition but that is stupid. You should not have to put yourself through that much pain for nothing.” I exclaimed as everyone turned to me in surprise, for a normal child my age such an outburst would be punishable.

“You don’t understand the gravity of the situation.” Mom stated unconcerned about the content of my statement.

“If you insist on going you may lean on me.” one of the Death Stalkers offered but Mom declined.

“That would be a sign of weakness, of incompetence. I cannot allow it.” Mom said harshly as the Death Stalker nodded understandingly.

“I guess there is no swaying your judgment so I shall prepare the bandages.” the servant announced then dismissed herself with a bow.

When the servant returned she quickly bound my mother’s injured leg. The result was a swollen mass that left Mom’s leg stiff and virtually immovable.

“Are you still sure about this?” the servant asked after she was done binding her leg.

“There is only one option so I have no other choice than to choose it.” Mom stated grimly as the servant bowed, backing away.

“I will be back with your clothing.” the servant whispered then disappeared.

The servant returned shortly with a black outfit that was almost identical to the uniforms the Death Stalker wear except it had red stain sashes tied around the calves, upper arm and midsection. The Death Stalkers’ uniforms including sashes in a similar arrangement in black but the red sashes of the leaders clothing were to represent the blood of those who had been killed while benefiting our society. The leader’s clothing is never loose so it allows for free movement associated with fighting while offering the regality of fabric.

Next Mother was presented her twin machetes which were classily painted black with the sharpened silver gleaming in the light. And of course she still had that scorpion bracelet, for she was never without it.

“Um I would like to come as well.” I stated as my mother nodded.

“Ok but you need to get dressed.” she stated as I hurried in search of the guards, who sure enough had my robe.

“Thank you.” I said taking the robe from them then slipped it over my head as the guards did their best to hide their emotions.

“I hope you do not take offense but we would like to accompany you.” said one of the Death Stalkers as a few others nodded.

“That would be wise. I must admit that I have been weakened so the fact I do not usually travel with guards is irrelevant. Having you with me will increase my strength.” Mom said as the Death Stalker, who spoke nodded then organized the others as my usual guards joined in our massive group.

“Lead the way when ready” my mother commanded as the group slowly proceed.

Despite the strength of our group many could not help noticing that their leader walked with a slight limp so anytime someone stared longer than usually or forgot to bow at the sight of us my mother would growl until they planted their faces into the ground with a stream of apologies. As we approached the center of the crowd that was gathering about the huge lit dome we passed a great line of people lying flat on the ground in respect though when we reached the place where we usually speak, whispering began to build. Mom walked in front of the guards, slashing her blade expertly before her causing the keel metal to whistle as it rent the still air and with that everyone fell silent.

“It is no secret that I have been injured but my strength has not diminished. I am still your leader and I promise to all of you that I will not allow myself to fail.” Mom said as the crowd produced high pitched yips of joy.

“I came here to inform you that the Death Stalkers have succeed and got the parts needed for the generator so you can all be at ease.” my mother continued as a new wave of yipping began.

“Um I don’t mean to be rude but what happened?” asked someone near the front, who made himself known by briefly raising to his feet to enable us to locate him.

“If you do not mind your majesty I would like to explain.” said a member of the Death Stalkers, modestly.

“By all means Dabu.” my mother said as he nodded then stepped forward.

“We managed to steal the parts alright but a blinding light came on, as if it could sense our movements. This alerted the guards who were armed and fired at us but we managed to take refuge in an area enclosed by a wire fence. We did not know at the time but there was a dog. Our leader fought off the dog with her bare hands and she was faring rather well but there was another dog, we all failed to notice. The other the dog took her by surprise and sank its jagged teeth into her hind leg. Luckily we found a crowbar and killed the dog. I just wanted you to know our leader was not injured due to cowardice or lack of ability. I believe that she is more than capable to continue leading us.” Dabu said as the yipping grew quickly into a mind numbing racket.

“I know our leader is strong but we can’t ignore the fact that she is weaker due to this incident. She is limping already can we really expect her to be able to continue leading the Death Stalkers in this condition.” someone stated rising up and only seemed to fall due to lack of balance rather than politeness.

Mom snarled then threw one of her machetes toward the one who had spoken. The crowd scattered as the blade implanted itself into the crumbling mortar so its wooden handle stuck straight up.

“Is that a challenge?” my mother demanded.

“Of course not your majesty, I was simply stating a fact. This tragic incident has weakened you. As you so elegantly announced your injury is not a secret.” she

explained coolly but she did not bow as expected or even lower her ears or tail out of respect.

"I am not weak!" my mother yelled as the one who spoke awkwardly walked over to my mother's blade, standing upright like one of the royal family. She used the blade to prop herself up as her dark brown tail aided her balance.

"I am simply reminding you that being the leader is no position for the weak, your majesty. I am only concerned that you may currently lack the ability to complete your duties for they require one who is in peak condition, your majesty." She continued as she pulled the blade from the ground with a mighty heave, a feat of great strength that everyone present observed. Many of those assembled began muttering to themselves when my mother spoke.

"I am more than capable of completing my duties for my devotion to the people is greater than..." Mother began when she stumbled forward, wincing as a wave of pain caught her off guard.

"What if you can't? What are we expected to do in the event of your failure? She questioned as everyone looked to my mother for answers, but she didn't provide them with one.

"I will deal with that situation when I must." my mother answered as her challenger continued to advance dragging the blade behind her as everyone watched her stunned into a state of inactivity. Even the guards were conflicted as she neared. They did not force her to drop the blade they simply watched her as she neared their leader. There was something haunting about her vivid blue eyes, something unsettling about the intention they concealed within their depths.

She raised the blade then pointed it at my mother's chest as the guards stared at her unresponsively as if they temporarily forgotten their sworn duty to protect the royal family at the cost of their lives. A few of them bared their teeth with displeasure but they were otherwise frozen just like everyone else, waiting for the challenger's next move. Dabu stepped forward as his anger slipped through his clinched teeth with a hiss.

"Oops that is not the proper way to return one's blade. I would hate for it to cut you." She stated as she flipped the blade over in her hands then presented the handle to my mother. My mother snatched it from her hands before turning away.

"Of course not your majesty" she said coolly but she did not bow as expected or even lower her ears or tail out of respect.

"I have had enough of this, lead the way home." Mom said as the guards nodded then complied.

After we got home and all of the guards left to patrol the area and the Death Stalkers to get some rest after completing their mission, we were left alone. My mother stripped off her robe as the servants prepared a tub to clean her wound. My mother's ears drooped with exhaustion as she let herself fall onto all fours. She took a

few steps forward wincing, her movement stiff and painful. She was no longer an unfeeling warrior but simply a creature in a great deal of pain for she had stripped away her ferocity and brevity leaving nothing more than my mother in need to help I could not provide. She was a warrior yet being a warrior simply meant donning a certain temperament in the presence of the public only to reveal flesh and bone in the privacy of one's own house. Being a warrior is a temporary mindset that conceals the mortal fearful beings we all are. It is separate entity from who we are yet defines how others see us, like the royal robes I was forced to wear.

"Your majesty the tub has been filled. We are now ready to begin cleaning your wound." the servant called.

"I am coming." Mom said as I watched her drag herself toward the sound of the servant voice.

I followed hoping that by removing the dried blood that clung to my mother matted fur that I would realize that everything was going to be alright. I peeked around the corner as the servant pressed the steaming cloth to my mother's leg as she pulled back her ears hissing through her teeth. The wound was deep and a large tuft of thick fur was missing. It was no longer bleeding yet it was swollen and it seemed off colored.

"I think it infected." said the servant fearfully.

"Then disinfect it," my mother growled as the servant pulled back her large ears, closing her eyes in despair.

"I don't have the means to disinfect it. I don't know what to do." the servant stated as I turned away afraid of what to think. My ears dropped on their own accord as a mournful cry erupted from my jaws.

There was a chance I would lose my mother, there was a chance that she would die. I got up then ran to my room in an effort to escape from my mother, who would only ask me to state my fear aloud. All four of my feet moved in sync in an effortless manner as I darted into my room. Zabuza veered out of my way as I leap onto my bed. I pressed my face into the soft material that muffled my cry.

I could not lose my mother when I had already lost my father. She was the only parent I had left. I may not be too close to her because of the nature of her work but I knew she cared. She may seem cold and see me as her successor but I knew she also saw me as her daughter. If she died there would be no one left, who is close enough to see me as anything other as the leader's daughter. She was my mother and I could not bear lose her, to be left all alone.

[Emerging from the Shadow of a Great Leader](#)

A night has passed and my mom has come down with a fever. She has become too weak even to pretend to be in good health. The Death Stalkers have come though I fear the only purpose of their visit is to simply pay their last respects to their dying leader. All of the servants are tending to her and the guards are whispering their fears

in the halls. I fear my mom's health is declining and it is showing no signs of recovery.
I fear soon I may truly be alone.

Zabuza meowed as one of my mother's servants entered. She told me that my mother wanted to speak with me and I feared she wished to cite her will. I climbed from my bed as the servant bowed before exiting. Zabuza meowed sympathetically as I pat her on the head then walked slowly down the hall, afraid of what I might find.

I edged down the hall passing a group of Death Stalkers on my way. They were whispering near the corner. They had their backs to me as if they did not want to be seen. A high ranking female, named Merula seemed to be doing most of the speaking.

"I hate to state my fears aloud but what will become of the people if the leader dies? We need a leader at all times but I am not sure if a commoner can best a trained warrior. Syrugia is right about thinking about the future of our people but I think that the next leader needs to be one of us." Merula suggested as her peers nodded solemnly in agreement.

"Kyzudo is next in line for the throne but she is merely a child. I fear you may be right Merula. We may have to abandon tradition." one of the Death Stalkers reluctantly agreed when Dabu stepped forward.

"No Sanoka will pull through this. We must follow tradition for the sake of the people." Dabu informed the others, not accepting the possibility of her mother's death.

"Hopefully you are right," a Death Stalker agreed as I continued down the hall to my mother's room.

I entered as the servant, standing over her, bowed then left us alone. I edged around the large bed peering at the mound of covers piled on top of my mother's still body.

"Mom," I called when Mother's hand firmly grasped my upper arm.

"I need for you to promise to me that you will take my place if I am unable to lead the people, if I die." she told me as I pulled my arm free from her grasp.

"You are not going to die." I told her angrily though I could feel hot tears gathering in my eyes.

"I don't know about that but I am going to die one day and when that day comes I need to know that you will take my place as leader." she explained as I backed away, hoping to hide within the shadows stashed secretly away in the corners.

"But I can't, I am not like you." I told her when her eyes found me amongst the gloom.

"I know you can do it and you are the only one who should." she assured me as I stepped forward knowing that I could not hide from her gaze.

"What about your brother?" I asked her as she scoffed at the idea as if it were ludicrous.

“He is a male. I am sure they will not take him seriously.” She reminded me when I thought of myself in comparison.

“He is a member of the Death Stalkers,” I reminded her as she nodded impatiently.

“I know that he is capable of taking on the responsibilities as leader but the public needs to accept him and after having a matriarchy for so many generations the change would be radical and would spark a civil war I am sure.” She explained as I continued to think of someone else, anyone else that could perform the duties expected of the leader.

“What about any one of our relatives?” I questioned.

“Their bloodline is too diluted for the unanimous acceptance needed. No it needs to be you.” my mother confirmed as I backed away again.

“What if I fail?” I asked her but she did not give me a straight forward answer.

“You are the only legitimate leader. If the people are allowed to choose their own leader then they will become split which will spark a civil war. We heavily rely on each other to survive so such a division could harm our dwindling population.” Mom continued to explain.

“So if I fail our entire species could be in jeopardy?” I exclaimed fearfully.

“I am sorry but I need for you to try to lead them.” she instructed me as I allowed her to grasp onto my hand. She squeezed it weakly as I forced myself to look up into her eyes.

“I guess I don’t have a choice, do I?” I asked for confirmation as she smiled weakly.

“You need to be strong for the sake of your people so don’t show any sign of weakness or they won’t see you as their leader.” Mom continued to explain.

“Yeah that is all I need to do.” I agreed though my head still seemed to be spinning.

“I will be here as long as I can so ask me whatever you like.” She told me as I nodded before pulling myself free from her slacken grasp.

“Ok I would like to think about all of this alone.” I said then left the room, my mind clouded with the idea of taking my mother’s place. I wandered into the royal hall, stopping before the throne. My mother’s twin blades were rested on the seat along with her of robe which had been neatly folded. This was the hall of my ancestors, which held the history of my people.

This hall was built to honor my ancestor, the one whose bloodline the royal family all share. She was the one who suggested that instead of hiding from the humans that we should live within their shadow, in hopes of learning their secrets. If my people did not listen to her the humans would have found us in time and wiped out our species like they have with others of their kind using weapons of amazing power. My ancestor was the one who believed the humans were only more technologically

advanced because they rise up those with innovative ideas instead of adhering to tradition. She was the wisest of us all and I have no hope of ever coming close to matching her greatness. I was not like her and I was nothing like my mother. I was just a child so how could I lead the people?

I looked up at the crossed blades thinking of my mother's strength. My mother was strong for the good of our people though that does not mean she had extraordinary powers. She was just like the rest of us. She was not a great leader because of her bloodline or her genes but because she had to be, like I have to be to prevent a civil war from forming amongst the people. I may be young and naïve but I have to try and hopefully then I will gain the same strength as my mother.

I picked up my mother's robe then slipped it over my head. I squeezed my limbs through the narrow openings then I picked up her twin blades holding them firmly in my forepaws with my head raised proudly. I may not be my mother but I would not fail her or my people I thought as I raised one of the blades in victory.

"Your Majesty I was not informed of your recovery." someone said as I turned to see Dabu, my mother's brother, standing at the entrance of the hall.

"Kyzudo?" Dabu stammered looking carefully at loose fitting cloth that hung off my small childish frame and the two blades I held awkwardly in each hand.

"What are you doing?" he inquired as I looked away embarrassed.

"Um well I spoke with my mother and she told me that she wants me to take her place." I muttered as Dabu turned away fearfully, refusing to believe me.

"Wait! Come back here!" I yelled dropping the blades to run after him. "Stop!" I yelled when I saw him a few yards ahead of me as others poured into the hall to see me in my mother's uniform.

"I promise that she told me to take her place. I would never choose this for myself." I yelled as Dabu stopped to face me.

"You are not her and you will never be. You could never lead these people." he yelled as I lowered my ears and tail, looking less like a leader every second. Dabu rushed away to speak with my mother as I returned to the hall to escape everyone's judging eyes. I took off mother's outfit, folding it and laying back onto the seat of the throne. Then I picked up the blades and laid them on top. He was right I was not my mother and I could not lead my people.

Dabu returned but I did not even look at him. He walked down the hall then turned to face me. "I spoke with your mother and she confirmed that she wants you to take her place as leader and she wants me to train you." Dabu said as I turned toward him then nodded before reaching for my mother's royal clothing.

"Um you need to earn the right to wear this and I believe the blades maybe a bit too dangerous for you." Dabu said as I glanced at him utterly confused.

"So what am I supposed to do?"

"I have the perfect task that will enhance your fighting abilities. I will meet you in your room." Dabu said as I nodded then left the hall. When I got to my room I waited on my bed as Zabuza sat beside me purring all the while. After a few minutes passed, Dabu entered with a large chunk of wood. He set it up on a platform of cinderblocks, which two guards helped him carry then turned to me to explain.

"A Death Stalker needs to be able to fight and there is little time so I believe that I must skip the easier tasks." Dabu began as I looked at the thick plank of wood mystified

"So what am I supposed to do?" I asked confused.

"You are to break this plank of wood with your bare hands. Tell me when you have completed the task so we can move on." Dabu said as I nodded leaping from my bed as Zabuza followed me curiously.

"Good luck Lady Kyzudo," Dabu said as I nodded then smacked the wood with my bare hand.

'Ouch,' I exclaimed holding my hand in pain. There was no way I could crack such a thick plank of wood but I had to try for the sake of my people.

I hit the wooden plank as hard as I could for at least an hour but paused when someone entered. I was hoping it was Dabu to tell me a hint but it was one of my mother's servants, who informed me that my mother wanted to speak with me. I backed away from the raised plank. My hand was sore and I could feel it throbbing. I needed to take a break and my mother may have something important to tell me.

I followed the servant to my mother's room. A few of the guards were mumbling that they were told that the leader was recovering so I was hopeful when I entered as the servant held open the door.

"Mom," I called hopefully as I made my way to her bedside.

"Yes," she answered sounding weaker than ever.

"You wanted to speak with me?" I asked as Mom blinked slowly then took off her bracelet and handed it to me.

"I want you to keep that." Mom said as I took it with my forepaws shaking with disbelief. Mom would only give me her bracelet if she feared that she was on the brink of death.

"No I can't," I said refusing to believe that my mother was going to die as I handed the bracelet back to her but she showed no sign of taking it back.

"I want you to have it," she whispered as I pulled my large ears back filled with grief and sorrow.

"You are going to get better, everyone knows it." I said desperately but my mother did not seem convinced.

"I am not so sure, the servants say my health is still declining and they have no means to stop it." Mom said as an involuntary cry escaped from me.

"No, that can't be true,"

‘It is, the others may want to believe that I will get better, that things will simple return to normal but I am not so sure so I need to know that you will do all that you can to prove to them that you have inherited my strength. I need for you to continue training with Dabu for he is an expert fighter and he is family so he is very loyal to me and our family.’ Mom said as I nodded.

“I will do my best.” I said as Mom lovingly touched my hand.

“I know you will.” She said as I bowed respectfully then returned to my room to continue training.

I kept at it for hours into I was sure the bones in my hand must be broken though the chunk of wood was without even a hint of giving away any time soon. I growled pushing the plank from its platform frustrated. I was starting to believe this was an impossible task but I could not fail yet my strength was fading as time slipped away. I needed a brake so I could return refreshed. I needed to think of the trick before my knuckles are destroyed.

I ran out of the room thinking of the corn field and the sense of peace I associated with it. I would go there to renew my spirits. I paused by the door wondering if I should bring my guards but I was sure they would not allow me the sense of freedom I sought, besides my mother rarely relies on guards when she is out.

I ran swiftly keeping to the shadows for I was not dressed like royalty and I did not want to affect the way others view me now I was determined to take my mother’s place as leader. I ran pass the pen where the pigeons were kept and the fenced in area where the rodents roamed under the dogs unwavering surveillance. I was almost to the corn field but I paused when I saw a group had gathered just a few yards away.

“Syrugia, you would make a fine leader after Sanoka passes.” said one as I growled remembering that my mother warned of challengers that would spilt my people into hostile groups. As my mother’s successor it was my job to stop this before it got out of hand.

“Hey my mother is not going to die so show some respect.” I demanded as the group turned to face me.

“Are you Kyzudo, Sanoka’s daughter?” asked the one called Syrugia.

“Yeah and my mother is not going to die. She will pull through I just know it.” I said hoping from the depths of my heart that this was true.

“Maybe but her injury has weakened her.” Syrugia stated as I raised my tail high baring my teeth aggressively.

“She is still stronger than any of you.” I yelled as Syrugia stepped toward me with her tail raised in a challenging manner.

“She can’t lead us so a new leader must be chosen.” Syrugia stated as I whipped my tail in the air growling.

“And you think you have what it takes to be the leader?” I demanded as Syrugia stepped closer making the size difference more apparent. She was a fully grown adult and I was just a child.

“Well yeah, there is no one else to take her place.” she stated as I gathered as much courage as I could.

“Maybe there is.” I stated boldly though Syrugia only became farther in enraged.

“Who, you whelp? Do you think you have what it takes to lead these people?” she demanded as the ridge of dark fur rose on my back.

“I am the next in line so it seems logical that I should lead.” I stated as Syrugia pressed her ears forward as she snarled.

“You are nothing more than a child, why should anyone listen to you?” Syrugia demanded as I rose onto my hind legs a sign of royalty that I hoped she would respect.

“Because I am royalty and my mother’s blood runs through my veins,” I said when Syrugia spotted my mother’s bracelet around my arm.

“You have Sanoka’s bracelet so it has been finalized. She wants you to lead us in her absence.” Syrugia said as I looked down at her with my ears raised proudly.

“Yes I am her successor.” I stated as the others within the group crowded around to look at the bracelet in awe.

“Then it is as I feared. She wants us to follow the orders of a whelp; she wants us to die to preserve her bloodline. Well I won’t stand for it.” Syrugia said unsteadily raising onto her hind legs, so she was towering over me.

“What? No, I am supposed to lead the people.” I said, my ears falling as I caned my neck to look up at Syrugia.

“I will not let a whelp like you damage our functioning society simply because Sanoka wishes it. I will banish the whole royal family if they wish to destroy us. I will kill you if you don’t stay out of my way.” Syrugia announced as I fell to my feet, taken aback with fear.

A Royal Fiasco

My eyes were glued onto Syrugia’s wild blue eyes like a helpless animal in the presence of a predator. Her dark brown tail fought to maintain her balance as she towered over me. Her fangs were exposed as her supporters growled loudly behind her.

I backed away intimidated, knowing I stood no chance against her. She was right I was just a child. How could I be expected to lead these people? Maybe my mother was wrong. Maybe she is just simply afraid of change for surely there must be someone more qualified than me to take her place as leader.

“You are right, I have no right being leader when I am so young and my skills are so underdeveloped. My mother must have been mistaken to believe that I could handle such a responsibility.” I muttered backing away with my tail hovering just above the ground, submissively.

“You are correct you do not have what it takes to be leader so stay out of my way.” she yelled as I bowed my head knowing there was no way I could take her on. I had failed my mother but yet again I can’t imagine how I could have succeeded.

“Of course, why would I interfere when this is none of my concern?” I muttered backing away when Syrugia fell back on her feet.

“Good, so I don’t have to worry about you anymore.” she said relieved.

“Well I guess I should be going.” I said turning away when Syrugia looked down at my mother bracelet again.

“That bracelet is interconnected with Sanoka. It almost symbolizes her and her leadership. It would strengthen my chances of becoming leader. Give it to me.” Syrugia said as I looked up at her, anger replacing feelings of fear.

“No my mother gave this to me because it represents my father. I may not be the next leader but I will not allow you to take my inheritance.”

“It was not a question of rather you wanted to part with it. It was an order.” Syrugia said stepping closer with her tail raised.

“I am a part of the ruling royal family and thief would not be taken lightly.” I said proudly raising my large ears as I slashed the air with my agitated tail.

“You are a part of a dying regime and whatever power you hold is soon going to be mine soon. Now give me that bracelet before I take it from you, whelp.” Syrugia said arching her back so the ridge of dark brown fur was clearly visible.

“That is the only way you are going get it because I refuse to give it to you.” I yelled as Syrugia sprang toward me.

I leap out of the way though I turned sharply in midair to prepare for an attack but I notice that Syrugia’s stance was unsteady, since she was currently landing. I leap forward knocking Syrugia onto the ground before her hind legs ever touched down.

“I may not have what it takes to be the leader but I refuse to give up to the likes of you.” I yelled as Syrugia growled attempting to smack me but I leaned away as her hand whisked by my face, missing it by a few millimeters.

“You can’t defeat me, whelp, so give me that bracelet!” Syrugia yelled leaping toward me as I ran in hopes of protecting my mother’s bracelet. I came to a stop when I was met with Syrugia’s followers who formed a wall, preventing me from escaping. I turned slowly to see Syrugia raised on her hind legs as she bellowed the cry of a fierce warrior.

I cowered as she pinned me to the ground by firmly holding my shoulder down then snatched the bracelet from my arm with her other hand. She released me to put on the bracelet then waved her tail in a wide arch to show her happiness. I got up growling arching my back so the black ridge of fur stood on end but Syrugia turned away unconcerned.

"I don't need you anymore so you are free to leave if you like." Syrugia said as she walked away.

"Don't turn your back to me." I yelled chasing after her when someone grabbed my shoulder, pulling me backwards onto the ground. I looked up, with my vulnerable belly exposed, as Syrugia's supporters walked passed me, arrogance radiating from their expressive gestures.

"You don't know when to give up do you?" Syrugia said glancing coolly over her shoulder.

"I am not letting you get away with my mother's bracelet." I yelled getting to my feet as Syrugia and her followers slowly walked away.

"You are not letting me take your mother's bracelet? You make it seem like we need your permission, like you are capable of stopping us." Syrugia said jokingly as I caught up with her group looking for a weakness to get to Syrugia but her supporters would not let me pass. I was simply too small and weak for they were all physically mature. I did not stand a chance but I was not planning on leaving without my mother's bracelet.

I followed Syrugia and her group toward the lit dome where announcements are usually made. The group paused for there was another group already there. It was Merula, a member of the Death Stalkers, along with a few others. She was standing on her hind legs like royalty clothed in her Death Stalker uniform. Her fawn colored tail was raised and her pale silvery grey eyes were commanding.

"Our great leader, Sanoka, is dying and she will not be able to continue leading us for long. I wish this was not so but it is true. I have a great respect for Sanoka but I can't allow her ten year old daughter, Kyzudo, to lead us. I may not be of royal blood but I am a member of the Death Stalkers so I am strong and experienced. I will not fail you. I wish Dabu was telling the truth about our leader's recovery but it was simply a lie to calm us in our time of need, to protect the royal family. We can't ignore the truth and all of you need to understand that by refusing to choose a new leader, by remaining loyal to Sanoka you will be supporting Kyzudo as your future leader and I doubt she can handle that much responsibility. We have to choose or our fates will be sealed." Merula said as the crowd, that had gathered, yipped when Syrugia made her way to the front to confront Merula then rose onto her hind legs as well.

"My name is Syrugia and I promise that my strength will not wane in the face of adversity. I may not have a drop of royal blood in my veins or be a member of anything as prestigious as the Death Stalkers but I believe these facts make me stronger. I am just like any of you and I do not believe myself to be superior. I stand for equality and I will lead the Death Stalkers to victory for the betterment of the people." Syrugia said raising the arm with my mother's bracelet, a great show of dexterity and balance, since non royals were unaccustomed to bipedal walking. The

crowd yipped at the sight of the bracelet obviously impressed for the only possibilities seemed to be that she proved to be stronger than Sanoka or Sanoka gave it to her as a gift to sway the people in her favor. I am sure none of them considered the possibilities that she attacked a child half her age while in the company of others for backup.

“Syrugia is a thief! Now someone give me my mother’s bracelet this instant.” I said rising onto my hind legs as everyone turned toward me.

“Is that Kyzudo?” everyone whispered as I cursed myself for not wearing my robes for this was most likely the only time I was embarrassed for appearing average, it made me look less like royalty.

“Lady Kyzudo we have been looking for you. Dabu said you went missing and that it was the utmost important that we find you as soon as possible.” one of my guards yelled as two of them rushed over to me.

“Guards that lowly servant has my bracelet!” I yelled fling my forearm in Syrugia’s direction.

“Bracelet?” asked one of the guards coming to stand beside me.

“Yes Sanoka’s bracelet.” I said as both of the guards looked to Syrugia to see that she indeed had my mother’s bracelet.

“How did she acquire her Majesty’s bracelet without setting off the alarms?” asked the other guard looking at me.

“She gave it to me and I snuck out for some air.” I admitted as both of the guards stared at me puzzled.

“Why would her Majesty give you her bracelet unless...” the first began when the other looked at him in concern.

“You don’t mean?” inquired the second when Syrugia spoke.

“Yes Sanoka is dying and she intends to leave Kyzudo the kingdom.” Syrugia announced as the guards’ stares intensified, waiting for me to contradict them but the truth could not be hidden forever.

“Fine she expects me to be the next leader but I am sure I can do it with all of your help.” I said as everyone looked me over disdainfully as I looked to my two guards for reassurance but they were slowly backing away.

“Kyzudo is nothing but a child and we need a leader so choose a side before time runs out.” Merula announced as everyone gathered closer to both Syrugia’s and Merula’s groups, leaving me with a wide radius of empty space. I fell back onto all fours with my ears and tail lowered feeling defeated when Dabu raced over to me. Anger seethed through his clenched teeth as his long tail whipped through the air.

“This is all your fault! I told you to stay in your room while I try to calm the others but no you ran off to gloat about inheriting the kingdom. Now everyone is in a state of panic and our people are soon going to be divided. I knew the Death Stalkers would

never leave Sanoka's side unless they believed it was for the best, that your mother was going to leave our people without a leader. Do you know what have you done?"

"I am the reason our people are on the brink of a civil war. I never stood a chance of being the next leader. I am nothing like my mother and I could never replace her."

Without Bounds

"I may not have stormed the palace to get Sanoka's prized bracelet and she may not have bestowed it upon me in her final hour but it is mine. I am a commoner yet somehow I have come to possess our leader's bracelet, which must be a sign I was meant to take her place. No, Kyzudo was not anywhere near my level of fighting ability, but that should only prove to you that she is too weak to lead us. She is nothing more than a privileged whelp not a future leader deserving of our respect." Syrugia announced as those around her began yipping in agreement. I wanted to confront her for the sake of my honor but I knew there was no hope defeating her. She was twice my age and size. Also many of the people respected her boldness and her youth.

Her blue eyes were fierce and commanding rivaling only my mother's. She stood tall on her hind legs with her dark tail constantly adjusting in order to keep her balance, towering over all who had gathered about her. She was all I needed to be as my mother's successor, all that I am not.

I turned away to see Merula standing among the Death Stalkers. Her stormy grey eyes were void of all emotion like two polished stones set within her fearless face. Her stance was steady and well-practiced and her pale ears were pressed forward. Her black Death Stalkers' uniform formed a sharp contrast with her pale fur. Those closest to her wore the same uniform and just behind them my guards stood with their backs to me, their black sashes bore proudly about their chest. Those who had gathered looked up at her in awe and respect.

I looked down ashamed for I stood alone. No one believed I had what I took to lead them and the sad part is that I was not quite sure if I disagreed with them. I was not as strong as those who fearlessly go above ground to seek supplies, facing the constant threat of death, or even as strong as that commoner who defeated me. I was simply too young and weak to lead these people. Maybe they would be better off under another's rule, maybe my mother was wrong.

"There is still hope of saving the leader! When I was above ground I heard that the humans have a cure for infections. All we have to do is send the Death Stalkers up to get it." Dabu said as I looked up to see him walking between the two developing groups.

"We cannot risk losing the Death Stalkers at such a time. We need as much experience as we can get." someone yelled as Dabu turned in the Death Stalkers direction desperate for their help.

“We have to save the leader if we can. We have to try.” Dabu said as Merula pulled back her ears, emotion leaking through her pale eyes.

“Dabu the cure you speak of could be anywhere. We are mapping the above world but our knowledge is still lacking so we cannot use it and we cannot go looking for this cure blindly. That would be too risky. The more time we spend above ground the greater the chance of being discovered. I can’t allow the Death Stalkers to look blindly for this cure even if it is for the leader. I am sorry Dabu.” Merula said as the other Death Stalkers dipped their head in agreement. Dabu pulled his large ears back then turned away without another word, saddened.

So there was a cure but I guess I might as well forget about it since the Death Stalkers were unwilling to do it. If they could not do it must be impossible. There was no hope saving my mother so another leader still needed to be chosen because I was sure I could not take her place, the people would never accept me. Merula seemed like she would be a splendid leader, unlike me. Maybe my mother never considered her. Maybe I did not have to be the leader after all. I hurried back to the palace because I needed to speak with my mother.

I rushed into the palace to my mother’s door where I paused to nod to the servant watching over her before entering. I quickly made my way to her bedside as she weakly turned in my direction.

“Mother, are you should that I need to be the one to lead these people because there are others?” I said excitedly as she blinked slowly to silently convey her understanding.

“I know there are challengers of the royal family but they must not be allowed to prevail. You must be the solo leader or our people will suffer.” she stated bleakly as I stared at her confused.

“But the people do not believe that I am old enough to lead them and I am weaker than an average commoner of adult size. I do not stand a chance.” I pointed out as she glanced at me, her long fangs peeking from under her lips.

“I never said it would be easy.” she said as I pulled back my ears frustrated.

“But, why me? Merula is a member of the Death Stalkers and she is strong and capable. If you supported her I am sure the civil war could be aborted.” I stated hopefully but my mother seemed like she was already aware of this.

“That may be true but there are other reasons that she cannot be allowed to lead.” she said as I stare at her confused.

“What?” I asked.

“She is not a member of the royal family.” she stated calmly as I bare my fangs forgetting my place temporarily.

“So we are desperate and I am sure her bloodline will not hold back her strength.” I said angrily as mother blinked again slowly in agreement.

"I am not worried about neither her strength nor the readiness others will accept her." Mother stated as I turned to her.

"Then what are you worried about?" I asked desperately.

"It would violate tradition and I cannot allow for that." she said as I flicked my tail growling to myself.

"Mother, no offense but our tradition is stupid." I yelled as she nodded slightly.

"Not all of them are and if she is crown leader then it would be easy for her to abolish all of our traditions. You on the other hand, cannot break even the smallest custom without public disapproval. She will be able to do whatever she likes." Mom pointed out as I waited for her to continue.

"Like what? Why are traditions so important?" I prompted as Mom explained.

"It is traditional for the leader to live nowhere other than the palace and not to alter the size of the territory for doing so would directly harm the people either by cutting off food supplies or their housing. It is also traditional for the royal family to get only to surplus, which mind you is more than the commoners" share, but it prevents the leader from being greedy and starving its people. The leader must also lead the Death Stalkers so they would not be tempted to send them on missions that are far too dangerous that would leave our people defenseless yet the leader can only command the Death Stalkers, which has a set number of members, to discourage dictatorships and eliminate the catastrophic threat of military control over our small population. The leader can't request things that are not needed for the public to avoid needless risks to the Death Stalkers. Even the tradition of walking on your hind legs in public is to remind the people that you are mortal and that it is their right to assassinate you if you are abandoning tradition. Traditions are rules, safeguards of the people to keep the leader in check so they know they have the right to overthrow their leader if they find it necessary but if Merula is declared the leader she will be free of tradition, she will be free to do whatever she likes with the people."

"So if anyone other than me is chosen to lead then they would have the freedom to enslave our people and the people may fail to respond speedily because they have done away with tradition."

"Yes our traditions maybe stupid as you put it but to get rid of all of them at once would put my people in danger and I will not allow for it."

"You would oppose even Merula?"

"I would and for doing so I am sure to be banished and without my servants I would surely die."

"So I have to defeat both Merula and Syrugia."

"Yes but I believe that you can do it, that you are stronger than you think."

"I need to clear my head."

"Of course." my mother said as I slipped out of her room where I saw Maya waiting by the door.

“Lady Kyzudo,” she said in greeting before entering as I decided to hang out in the hall in hopes of hearing whatever news she bore. She was the wisest among us so she must know some remedy that would cure my mother.

“Ah Maya it is good to see you.”

“Likewise, your Majesty,”

“Any ideas?”

“The salts that we use to preserve the meats maybe of some benefit but I fear it will not fully cure you.”

“That sounds like wonderful news.”

“Yes well I could not help but notice that your people’s loyalty is beginning to shift and I fear they are going to turn on you, your Majesty.”

“I am aware.”

“And your plans? I heard rumors that you intend for your daughter to take your place. I understand the reasons of such a choice but what if she fails?”

“She will not fail I believe in her completely. She is strong and she will earn the people’s respect in time.”

“I fear time is not on your side, your Majesty.”

“Then she will work faster yet.”

“Of course now are you ready for the salt your Majesty.”

“Yes fetch me that rag over yonder then begin before I loose what is left of my nerve.”

I hurried to my room, not wanting to heard my mother” muffled cries. It seemed noteworthy to mention how empty the halls were without the Death Stalkers and the royal guards marching about, only a few servants could be found conversing in the corners. I entered my room then leap onto my bed where Zabuza joined me. I ran my hand along its spine as thought about what I needed to do to prove to the people that I would make a good leader.

Well my bloodline maybe the reason that I am the only rightful leader but I needed to show more than that for the people did not understand all of the factors at hand. I need to gain their respect for that is what the other two had that I lack. And to gain their respect I most likely had to prove that I possessed the skills needed to rule them justly like my mother had.

I sighed for all of this seemed extremely hard to do though I guess everyone had to present usable skills to society in hopes of gaining respect and a place within it at some point in their lives. I guess everyone needed a place in society and would face repercussions if they failed to do so for creatures like Zabuza, are rarely allowed to exist. If I do not secure a place within society I would simply be banished along with my mother, which I could not allow to happen because she would die and I could not lose another parent.

I need to prove to the people that I am strong and fearless like my mother was so I will steal back my mother bracelet and I will go above ground to look for my mother cure alone. I will fight Syrugia with my mother's twin blades and I will venture above without the aid of the Death Stalkers to attempt a mission they deemed too dangerous even to attempt. When I return I will be a warrior who has completed the impossible and even Merula will have to me bow in respect. From this point on I will not rely on respect gained from my mother or my family name. I will instead forge respect for myself until my place as leader is secured.

The Warrior Who Fearlessly Stalks Death

I walked over to my mirror, proudly balanced on my hind legs with my tail smartly raised. My long black ear stood tall adding to my height. My eyes were serious and commanding like my mother's.

I was wearing my mother's traditional uniform. The black silk hung loosely in places though was fastened securely by the red sashes. I was pleased to discover that I looked exactly like my mother if she had been my age. I was clothed in the shadows and I wore the blood of my people in red stain bands. I was no longer simply Kyzudo but the future leader of my people, my mother's successor.

I lifted my mother's twin blades then swung one through the air until the metal sung as if eager to help me retrieve my mother's bracelet and for whatever carnage was to come. This blade was my only ally for I shall stand alone with only it at my side. It will be my faithful companion willing to cut down any who dared oppose me. Its sharpened edge will be my protection and the salvation of my people.

The blade would not fail me but the second seemed awkward in my hand for I was not use to standing upright baring objects for things were always carried for me. I set down the other blade for I feared it would limit my mobility which I would need after I leave these tunnels to meet the world above. I would only need one blade for I was not skilled enough to wield a second.

I grasped the wooden hilt of the blade with my teeth before allowing myself to fall back onto all fours I would rely on stealth for this mission. I will be as swift and as silent as the Death Stalkers. Syrugia will not even be able to defend herself before I take back what is rightfully mine. I will not allow myself to fail.

I snuck out of my door into the hall where I paused for I heard voices. I peered around the corner where I saw Maya and Dabu talking to each other beside my mother's room.

"Is she getting better?" Dabu asked as Maya dipped her head.

"Yes she seems to be doing better but the salt will only slow down the infection I fear she still needs the cure that you mentioned earlier."

"What if she does not receive the cure?"

"Then I fear that she may die."

“Maya you are the wisest among us. If our leader was to die who do you believe should take her place?”

“I am not sure. Merula is strong but I fear her might would be unrestricted but the people have rejected the idea of Kyzudo so defending her would only encourage the riot. I am not sure if anything can be done to prevent a disaster. We can only choose which disaster we believe to have the least impact and hope that we were correct.”

“I was afraid you were going to say that. I guess if our leader was to die Kyzudo must be the next leader. She is the only one who can take Sanoka’s place. We must not break tradition.”

“I don’t believe we have a choice anymore. The people believe that she is simply too young.”

“She must take Sanoka’s place and if our leader believes that Kyzudo can earn the people’s respect then I believe that somehow Kyzudo will prove herself as leader.”

“She is just a child.”

“Yeah but with support from the Death Stalkers and her mother’s wisdom she may just have what it takes.”

“The people are not going to stand by her to honor their dying leader’s wishes. She will need to prove herself.”

“She will because she must.” Dabu said confidently before both entered my mother’s chambers.

I rushed out of the palace pleased to know that Dabu believed in me and understood the value of tradition. I kept to the shadows with my luminous eyes wide. I raced past the huge dome, which had been turned off for the night, but slowed when I reached an area covered in small shacks with wooden frames and walls of thin fabric. I leaned to sniff the ground. I growled quietly to myself. She was nearby so soon my mother’s bracelet will be under my possession once more.

I sped past the shacks but stopped when I came to one that smelled strongly of her. I raised my mother’s blade then slashed through the flimsy housing structures. I advanced, standing high on my hind legs but paused when I saw Syrugia cowering at my feet. I pointed the tip of my blade at her throat then demanded the bracelet, which she quickly took off with unsteady fingers. I took it from her then without another word I left.

Many peeked out of their shacks as I passed. Their eyes followed me as if they were unable to look away and when they lost sight of me their feet hurried after me.

“Kzydo? Was that Kyzudo?” they whispered as I walked over to the central light proudly on my hind legs. The dome turned on flooding the entire area with its light. I raised my fist proudly so my mother’s bracelet was clearly visible to all as I led the chorus of our traditional song.

We are the rulers of the night

Silent shadows that prowl across the land

Forging an existence just out of sight
Our society is lost from the sun's reaching light
Instinctively feared yet unknown to man
We are the rulers of night
We are survivors preserved by our undying might
We stand having marked our place in the sand
Forging an existence just out of sight
We stand for what is right
Striving to stake our existence even though we have been banned
We are the rulers of night
We form a society that is sewn tight
Mirroring humanity technology whenever we can
Forging an existence just out of sight
We are the patrollers of the stars working for those who have fallen's delight
We are plotting in the darkness waiting to overthrow humanity's ruling hand
We are the rulers of the night
Forging an existence just out of sight

I ended along with the others who watched me completely transfixed, awaiting my words. I lowered my hand then raised my tail higher yet so it could be seen over my shoulder.

"Sanoka has chosen me to take her place as leader so there can be no other. I will not fail you but I do understand why you are unsure of my skill, for I am young. So if you think that I am weak then I will prove to you that I have inherited my mother's strength. If you believe that I am unskilled then I will acquire enough skill to put all to shame. If you believe that I am not fit to be your leader I openly challenge anyone who dare oppose me for I am Kyzudo your future leader." The crowd opened their mouth to expel a single high note that caused the air to ring.

"Sanoka is dying, which is something I will not allow, whether she will be capable of leading us or not. I am going to the world above to seek out the cure Dabu foretold of then I shall return either as your current leader or as my mother's successor. Regardless I will return with our solution, the solution others refuse to acknowledge as more than a distal possibility. I will go alone for the Death Stalkers place is here. I maybe a child but when I return I will be ready to take my place as leader." I said as everyone began yipping loudly again.

"You are leaving so who will lead the people in your absence?" demanded Merula when the crowd turned to see someone walking high on their hind legs wielding my blade's twin. It was Sanoka, my mother.

"I will lead you until my daughter returns." Sanoka said limping forward using the blade as a crutch.

"But you are not well." Syrugia challenged as Sanoka growled at her.

"I can lead, at least for a little while longer." Sanoka said as the Death Stalkers left Merula's side to stand beside Sanoka.

"What about the Death Stalkers? Who will lead them?" Syrugia asked as many turned to each other worried.

"We currently have everything we need so if Kyzudo is swift then there will be no need to lead the Death Stalkers on any particularly dangerous missions." Sanoka said as the crowd yipped reassured.

"What if she fails?" Merula challenged, rising boldly onto her feet.

"I will entertain that possibility when I must." Sanoka answered as my guards returned to my side with their heads bowed and their ears lowered, too ashamed to look me in the eye as they whispered apologies to my feet. Dabu and Maya were standing next to my mother, they both seen proud and hopeful.

"We can't wait forever."

"You are right. When a need arises and I prove to be too weak to lead the Death Stalkers then I will fear for the worst." Sanoka said as Merula nodded.

"Find we will wait until we must move on and abandon these silly traditions." Merula said as many nodded in agreement. I could not fail or my people would be trapped under Merula's unrestricted rule.

"I will return victorious." I announced as the crowd yipped and I left to join my mother's side.

"How are you? I asked glancing down at her leg.

"I am good now that I know you are doing all that you can to prove yourself as leader." she said proudly as I waved my tail in a wide arched pleased, for my mother was quite reserved so praise was a rare occurrence.

"Don't worry I won't fail." I said as she nodded then touched my shoulder lovingly.

"Be careful." she warned as I nodded.

"I should hurry to get the food for the trip." I said as she nodded.

"Of course." she said as I sank my teeth in the wooden hilt of the blade then ran off toward the palace where I told the servants to fill my bag with wrapped meats.

"Good bye Kyzo," my mother said as I paused to stare at her, for that was what she used to call me when I was just a pup. When she said that, her voice used to be saturated with maternal love which was freely given independent of expectations. It was an endearing term that I had almost forgotten. It was a nickname she used to say before I was ever entitled her successor, when I was simply her daughter.

"Good bye Mom." I said as she waved her tail in a large arch as if to encompass the world, as if it could shield me from whatever danger awaited me above ground.

I turned away with my ears flattened for I knew I was doing more than simply attempting to restore peace but I was also leaving my people, my home, and my mother behind. There was no guarantee that I would ever be able to return home ,

that I would ever see my mother again but if I chose not to go then my people will be at the mercy of their new leader's greed, which would grow after she acquires absolute power. Also if I stay my mother would die so by leaving her and my home I was attempting to save them all from a morbid future that maybe all too real. I could not fail because I refuse to lose my mother and I will not allow my people to fall under a dictator's rule. I must not fail as long as my heart continues to beat, as long as I can rationalize the existence of the impossible.

The Land of my Enemies

I ran down the long tunnel feeling that the land above could be no more than a myth for it felt as if I would never reach it. The smooth ground had a gradual slope that I convinced myself was climbing higher and higher. My powerful eyes peered into the darkness ahead of me as my pack bounced on my back. I must be nearly there.

I slowed for I saw a dull light up ahead. I pulled back my ears, fearing what laid ahead. I growled nervously as I reached a hinged door with metal bars. I pushed it upward then climbed out slowly, fearing the creatures that I knew must be near.

I continued down the hall at a crawl, shifting within the safety of the shadows. My footfalls could only be imagined as I braced myself high on my fingertips and toes, moving swiftly like a rat that goes unseen. My tail was kept low so it hovered like a snake poised for an attack. My ears twitched at the sound of every drop of water that dripped from the high ceiling, causing the walls to shutter with the single clear note. I sniffed the air as I leap into a deep ditch with an odd road of metal rods and wooden planks at its bottom.

After walking a few miles I noticed there was a dim glow ahead. I leap out of the manmade ditch then cautiously approached the flickering light. I froze for gathered around a metal cylinder were a gang of humans huddled together. They reached out toward the flames with grubby hands covered in grim. Their heads were bowed and their clothes were tattered and ill fitting. They looked like lumps of fabric that moved jerkily as if shivering from the cold. Their hands were like mine though their nails were caked with trapped dirt. Their faces were unsightly hairless blobs of flesh with a patch of greasy fur on top.

They did not seem to notice me so I crept by though my eyes never left them. I kicked an empty can with my forepaw, having failed to notice it. One of the humans turned to look at me. I was half concealed by the darkness but I knew I was visible enough. I snarled baring my teeth as another grabbed his friend's arm staring at me unconcerned.

"The shadows have eyes here but if you ignore them they will pass." the human said. I understood them thanks to my mother's lessons that I once believe would only enable me to read the scraps of paper found by the Death Stalkers.

"What is it?" asked the first one who spotted me.

"A creature of the night, a demon." the first answered as the other nodded.

“Do they pass through here often?”

“Yes but this one is alone and it’s puny compared to the others.”

“Do they attack?”

“No it is best to simply think of them as being odd illusions.”

“Am I going crazy?”

“That is the question we would all like to know but how can one judge the nature of the world when one is unsure if what one perceives is true? If the mind can lie then the truth can never be confirmed. The world is as we perceive as being whether it is a complex fabrication or inspired by sensual information is unrelated. The one who is insane is the one who believes there are multiply realities, conflicting worlds.”

I rushed away from the humans though soon I saw more of them. Some were lying on thin blankets with their heads resting on their hands or staring at the darkness watching my every move with mistrusting eyes.

After a few tense minutes I managed to find an opening at the top of the stairs. I slowly left the cover of the shadows then climbed up the stairs. I stopped to see the ground level out. I was surrounded by great walls of glass and metal that rose above to meet the dark ceiling though I did not understand how the pointed peaks could support such a ceiling for it was eminence. Lights were scattered everywhere. Everything shown with a stunning brilliance, that stabbed great holes in the darkness. Light pressed itself against the glass planes of the ever climbing walls and cast great orbs upon the paved floor. Lights zipped about affixed to odd machines that growled as they glide by.

I followed the towering wall of glass but paused for all about me there were humans. Some wore smooth fabric with deep creases and complex folds while others wore rough fabric with large stitching held by stripes of leather about their waist. A loose casing of fabric blew freely around their torsos as they sped about noiselessly, their feet encased in sturdy bright colored material and springy rubber.

I slipped into a pocket of darkness backing into a large metal box full of oddities and dark plastic bags. I watched them fearfully feeling trapped. I needed to think of a plan or I will be spotted. I noticed that there were many dark narrow hallways like the one I was currently in so all I needed to do was dash to the next one across the street. I just need to wait for the coast to clear then I need to run and I will continue this way until I find a safe place to rest for the night.

When the streets cleared I raced from my hiding place across the well-lit street on the next patch of darkness as two men rounded a corner. I dove into the shadows as one of the humans paused to stare at me.

“That was one odd looking cat.” he said as his friend grabbed his arm swaying where he stood.

“Man, you are drunk. We need to sober up for work in the morning or we are going to be fired. Come on it is getting late.” he said before leading the other away.

“I swear I saw something.” the first one said again but quickly followed his friend down the street and out of sight.

I scampered down the street pausing at the dark rancid smelling semi enclosed spaces until I got to an area with brick houses behind chain link fences. Large wheeled machines of metal were parked along the street. Dogs barked somewhere out of sight and large chunks of the road seemed to be missing.

I paused when I saw a pair of shoes hanging from a wire overhead. I was at a collection zone, a place where the Death Stalkers come to steal objects from the humans. It was far enough away from the big city to be less populated making hiding easier yet close to many factories and stores. The shoes were used as a marker because the Death Stalkers found a large box full of them yet did not know what to do with them, for my people’s feet were different so they could no longer function as shoes. They only brought them back underground because there is a rule. If they come across something in the above world that is left unattended it must be stolen to be studied for we had very little information about the humans. It was Dabu’s idea to use them as markers.

I continued on feeling safer knowing that there are less humans here than there were a few blocks back. Each pothole was encouraging for it meant that the Death Stalkers had come through here for they use the asphalt to power our generator.

I looked around wishing for sleep. The humans’ yards were bare, with only a few straggly bushes pressed against their houses. I dare not sleep there so I needed to keep looking.

I paused when I saw a patch of corn growing just beyond the fence. Their leaves brushed the edge of the roof and they hid all things within them, a thicket of trapped darkness, a refuge from the invasive light. I waved my tail in a large arch please for it reminded me of home.

I climbed over the fence that shook unsteadily then leap into the corn. I landed in a bed of tilled soil which was soft to the touch. I laid down with my tail wrapped around myself, breathing in the earthy scent dreaming of home. I was dreaming of the life I had before my mother was ever injured, before any of this ever happened.

The Harmless Offspring of Demons

The sound of a door slamming shut was like a jolt to my heart. My ears shot up as I got to my feet. I peered outside of the safety of the corn to see two young human children rush out of the house next door. They ran to the edge of the street, pressing themselves against a metallic machine, as a plane of glass slid down to remove the barrier between the interior and the children’s grasping hands.

“Be good.” someone called from inside the hollow machine as the children backed away rotating their wrist so their hands flapped about oddly.

“Bye Mommy,” the youngest cried as the machine glided away smoothly like a melting ice cube that had been pushed across a smooth surface.

“Come on we have to go to Grand Pappy’s house.” said the oldest as she led her sister into the yard I was currently hiding in. I backed away as the oldest went to front door to announce their presence as the youngest lingered in the garden. She stooped down to sniff a feathery red flower that grew narrower at the ends, like the wide base of a well fed flame with its wispy reaching tips.

“Ok Rita you stay here until I get back. Ok?” the oldest said as the youngest smiled then run over to the patch of corn plants clutching a stuffed animal to her chest. The stuffed animal had a large rump with long legs and a nub of a tail. Its forelegs were short and hung uselessly but its ears draped over it elbows. It was grey and had a rodent’s face.

The girl, I guess her name was Rita, was high yellow with her bronze hair in fat braids with long ribbons at their base and colorful clips at their ends. Her eyes were a light brown with flecks of jade. Fabric clung to her legs offering plenty of mobility and cut off above the knees.

She sat on the ground then placed her stuffed animal beside her. She grabbed the base of the toy’s neck then pressed it nose into a corn stalk as she made odd noises.

I needed to escape before she alerted the mature humans about my presence. I slipped on my pack then backed away toward the fence but the girl looked up. I froze for she was staring at me.

“You are a rabbit just like Kiki.” she said excitedly grabbing her toy rabbit to show me.

“Um I need leave now.” I said cursing my broken English but she seemed to understand.

“But I want you to stay. You can’t leave or Kiki will be lonely.” she said as I stared at her absolutely confused.

“But Kiki is toy. I not safe.” I said turning away she laughed.

“You are not a rabbit. You have a long tail like my friend’s gerbil.” she said I turned back to her unsure what to say.

“I not gerbil or rabbit,” I said as she looked down at my hands and feet.

“Then what are you?” she asked as I turned away again.

“I leave now.” I said when the front door opened.

“Then I follow.” the girl said crawling toward me as I growled.

“No follow.” I said as she stared at me heartbroken.

“But I want to come.” she said as moisture leaked from her eyes.

“Stay!” I commanded when I saw her sister walking towards us.

“But ...I don’t... wanna.” she yelled as I backed away with my tail lowered.

“Quiet!” I snarled when her sister kneeled by the edge of the corn patch.

“Rita, are you crying?” she asked as I made a run toward the fence.

“Yeah the rabbit was mean and said I could not come but it wasn’t really a rabbit at all.” Rita said as I climbed up the fence.

“Aw, what is that!” Rita’s sister yelled throwing the stuffed rabbit at me. The fence did not seem to be secure in the ground so shook so violently that I fell back into the corn patch.

“Kiki!” Rita screamed then ran over to me with her sister running after her. Her sister pulled Rita back when they saw me lying before them.

“What do you do to my sister, you monster?” she yelled holding Rita back as she attempted to kick me. I quickly got to my feet to explain myself.

“Nothing I want leave. I want no harm.” I muttered as the oldest stared at me stunned.

“It can talk?” she asked turning to Rita.

“Yeah it is a magical rabbit.” Rita replied

“I leave now, yes?” I asked as the oldest turned back on me.

“What are you?” she demanded pulling a small shovel from the ground. Its blade was caked with dry mud and it was tiny but I dare not challenge her for there was a dangerous gleam in her eyes.

“I from world below.” I answered as she lower the shove but more out of confusion than acceptance.

“What?” she asked as I raised my tail proudly.

“I Princess Kyzudo of under land,” I said as they both stared at me blankly.

“So you are a princess?” Rita’s sister began slowly.

“Yes I princess.” I answered as her mouth grew wider, dragging her cheeks higher until they bunched up under her eyes.

“Well I am a princess too.” she said excitedly.

“You upcoming ruler of your world?” I asked to confirm.

“I am Princess Erika.” she said as I looked her over. She was wearing a blue outfit that was well fitted to her torso yet hung loosely at the waist. She was wearing a necklace that had two strings of smooth uneven peddles of coral that clicked with her every move. On top of her head she wore a tiara of thin metal with rhinestones of every color. Her skin was a golden brown and her thick hair was pulled into two puffy ponytails that glowed brown were the sun leaked through. Her reflective eyes were dark brown with black rings about the iris making them appear grey in the shifting light.

“Then I wish leave kingdom, your majesty.” I asked politely.

“No as princesses we must have tea first.” Princess Erika informed me

“But danger here. I need leave.” I whined looking back at the fence.

“This is my kingdom so you must follow my rules, it is only fair.” The princess reminded me.

“I stay for tea then I leave?” I asked as she nodded.

“Ok I stay then leave. No guards.” I said as she grabbed my arm then led me out of the corn patch. I paused looking around when I saw a boy walking over to us. I backed away growling as Princess Erika and Rita turned to watch me curiously.

The boy had dark skin and a shaven head. His eyes were a deep brown that often appeared black. His knees were oddly silvery and he was tall and lean. He was oldest among the children.

“What are you doing in Grand Pappy’s corn? Wait what is that?” he yelled having spotted me.

“She is Princess Kyzudo and she is coming to join us for tea.” Princess Erika explained.

“No she is monster.” the boy said pulling her away.

“She is a cute monster.” Rita said as the boy stepped in front of them with his arms raised.

“Stay away from her. She probably has rabies.” he said growled as he backed way.

“But she is a princess from a distant land. Royally can’t get rabies.” Princess Erika said but the boy shook his head.

“It’s a wild animal.” the boy said pushing the girls to safety. He must be Princess Erika’s bodyguard.

“But she can talk.” Princess Erika said as he turned to look at her concerned.

“Have your imaginations made you that delusional?” he asked her as she turned away angrily.

“But she can.” Rita said sneaking under his raised arm.

“I will leave.” I said as he paused to stare at me.

“Wait did it just talk?” he asked looking to Princess Erika for confirmation.

“I told you.” she muttered with her back to him.

“I want not cause trouble.” I said as he turned glance at me before turning back to the girls.

“What is it?” he asked.

We told you, she is Princess Kyzudo of the underworld.” Princess Erika said as he shook his head.

“I am being serious. What is she?” he asked again.

“She part rabbit, part gerbil and part monkey.” Rita said as the boy shook his head still obviously confused.

“How can she speak? Where is the underworld? Why have I never seen an animal like her before?” he asked them as I backed away.

“I leave now, yes?” I asked but no one was listening.

“She is magical. Everyone knows that princesses are surrounded by magic and love.” Princess Erika said as I froze stunned by her words.

“What I princess I have no magic or love. My kingdom will see war and my mother will die. No love no magic.” I yelled as she turned to me confused.

“But you are a princess and princesses always live happily ever after.” she assured me as I growled.

“No magic only danger. I leave now.” I said when the boy spoke.

“Wait you need somewhere to stay. You can’t sleep in Grand Pappy’s corn or he will find you.” he said as I turned to stare at him.

“When where I stay if not in corn?” I asked.

“We can take care of you. You can be our pet.” he said as I raised my tail proudly.

“I not pet. I Kyzudo, future leader.” I said but he continued.

“You can stay in the garage and we can feed you.” he said as I thought about how long my food would last me.

“And train you and take you for walks, oh I always wanted a pet but mommy won’t let us have one after we lost Snickers.” Rita said as I growled to myself.

“I no pet.” I said venomously.

“But we can help.” the boy pointed out.

“Fine I come but no pet.” I said as the boy smiled.

“Come on Grand Pappy is still inside with Granny so we can take you to the garage to rest.” the boy said as I followed him across the yard feeling exposed and vulnerable. He opened the door to a small building that was just a few yards from the house. I hurried into the dark space when a light was turned on. The young humans gathered around me as I backed away with my ears drawn back fearfully.

“I am going to call you Fluffy.” Rita said sitting on the ground before reaching to touch my soft fur with her fingertips.

“I have name. I Kyzudo.” I said pulling away from her as she leaned over to attempt to pet me again.

“She is a princess. She needs to be treated with respect.” Princess Erika said as I nodded slightly.

“Yes, respect.” I agreed as Rita lost her balance and fell onto the ground in her attempt to rake her fingers through my fur.

“You wait here Princess Kyzudo and I will get my tea set.” Princess Erika said as Rita got up to walk over to me.

“Okay I wait.” I said as I backed away from Rita.

“I want to pet you.” she whined.

“But I no pet, I princess. No touch.” I said as she paused staring at me with teary eyes.

“But I wanna pet you.” she said falling back on her butt as she wiped her eyes with her small fist.

"Fine but quiet," I said then crawled over to her as she ran her fingers over my fur. I laid my head on the cold floor feeling trapped when the boy walked over to me.

"You need a bed and some food." he said as I watch him reach out to touch the top of my head. He smiled then hurried away before I could say anything.

"Your fur is so soft, Fluffy." Rita said rubbing her face against me as I got up.

"That enough. I need to think." I said backing away from her as she watched me sadly.

"Fluffy," she called as she reached out toward me.

"My name Kyzudo. No fluffy." I said when Princess Erika entered with a box of tiny cups and saucers. I picked one up marveling at the craftsmanship though I also realizing that there was no food or tea in sight.

"I will be right back with the rest of the stuff." she said as I nodded setting down the cup. Princess Erika returned with a plastic table and chairs but quickly left again to return with an armful of toys. She placed them on the floor then set the table.

"Come Princess Kyzudo this is your seat." she said as I sat in the seat.

"I want to play too." Rita said but Princess Erika shook her head.

"No only princesses are allowed." she said as Rita turned her back to her sister.

"No fair I want Fluffy." Rita said as I leap into a chair.

"She is Princess Kyzudo and she is having tea. You can pet her later." Princess Erika explained but I was not so sure of this idea either.

"Now would you like some tea Princess Kyzudo?" she asked after taking her seat and placing a stuffed animal into the vacant seats around the table.

"Um yes tea." I said looking around for a pitcher but there did not seem to be one in sight.

"Tell me when to stop." she said picking up a small teapot that she tipped over my small cup but nothing came out.

"Um no tea." I said as she stared at me like these were taboo words.

"Of course there is tea but you have to be careful because it is hot." she said I looked down at my cup again but sure enough it was still empty.

"What tea?" I asked flipping the cup completely over as she took it from me then set it back down.

"No you have to sip the tea like this with your pinky raised." she said as she showed me using her empty cup.

"What?" I asked again watching her raise the empty cup to her lips.

"Haven't you ever played tea party?" she finally asked annoyed as I stared at her confused.

"I go to tea parties but no tea." I said showing her my cup.

"It's pretend, you have to pretend that there is tea." she said as I stared at her utterly confused.

"Why?" I asked as she took my teacup then turned away from me obviously upset.

"I don't want to play with you anymore." she announced as I stared at her.

"So I can leave?" I asked as she waved her hands as if to shoo me away.

"Sorry?" I said when Rita ran toward me.

"Fluffy!" she exclaimed wrapping her arms around my neck.

"Release me!" I yelled as I tried to wiggle free when the boy returned. He stopped to watch his sister storm out.

"Erika what wrong."

"She won't play tea party with me." she said as the boy nodded.

"Maybe she does not know what it is. Maybe you have to teach her like you did with Rita." the boy explained as she nodded.

"Yeah, I can teach her how to play. Thanks Terry." Erika said as Terry nodded then placed a pile of stuff on the ground.

"What is that?" Erika asked.

Is an old dog bed and some bacon from breakfast." he said as opened a greasy napkin.

"Oh so you are going to feed her." Erika asked he nodded.

"Yeah and I want to teach her some tricks too." he continued as Erika stare at Terry angrily.

"That's not fair Terry because I was playing tea party." she said placing her balled hands on her hips.

"I thought you gave up because she did not get it." he pointed out as she looked away.

"You are a meanie because I was playing tea party first." Erika said as Terry nodded.

"You can play after I am done." he said then picked up the balled up napkin that smelled heavily of meat.

"Fine but you better hurry because I was playing first." Erika said as he turned away from her, looking down on me.

"Um food?" I asked as he picked out a long strip of bacon.

"Ok then show me a trick." he commanded as I stare at him confused

"What?" I asked sensing a demeaning note in his voice that I was not fond of.

"I want to see what you can do so do a trick." he said as I growled.

"I no need your meat. I will hunt." I said turning my back on him, infuriated.

"But you are my pet." he said sadly as I growled losing my patience.

"I not your pet. I no Fluffy. I no toy. I Kyzudo." I yelled then I walked to the door.

"Wait, don't leave." Terry said blocking the door.

"Why?" I demanded.

"We are sorry. Here, you can have the bacon." he said passing it to me.

"Thanks, I will stay but no pet."

"Fine I just never had a pet before and I got excited was all. I got this dog bed from Erika's house. It belonged to their last dog, Snickers. I am sorry." Terry said as I sat down, unwrapping the bacon.

"I forgive," I said then ate the bacon gratefully.

"Good because I was hoping we could be friends." Terry said as I looked up at him, for I never had a friend before.

"Friends," I whispered to myself as the young humans smiled at me. They are immature humans but they are willing to help me and I just may need their help to find my mother's cure. They maybe monsters but they have not grown into their hideous adult counterparts yet. They were still harmless. They were too naïve enough to attack and too helpless to be a threat. I was safe in their care. I was safe in the demon's nesting grounds, at least until their parents return.

The Rambling Speech of an Old Man

I sat in the plush bed that smelled strongly of musk and filthy fur that odors readily clung to. Dirt was rubbed deep into the fabric and the form molding had lost most of its shape. I looked to Terry suspiciously as he placed a plastic bowl onto the floor beside me.

"I am sorry it all that we had." he said as I picked up the bowl. I snorted causing the odd smelling water to ripple.

"Yeah that also use to belong to their dog too." he apologized as I placed the bowl back onto the floor, pushing it away from my fowl smelling bed with my foot.

"Kyzudo is a princess. She must be uses to living in luxury." said Erika as Terry nodded.

"But this is all we can spare without Granny finding out." Terry reminded her

"I just don't think it is proper for her to have to live like this." Erika commented.

"I will manage. You helped me greatly." I told her.

"I am sorry about treating you like my pet." Terry muttered sitting beside me.

"It in past," I said as he smiled bashfully.

"Princess Kyzudo may I pet you, please." Rita asked as I bowed my head.

"So you are really a princess, not just a pretend one like me?" Erika asked as I nodded as Rita picked up my tail.

"Please don't," I said as she slowly lowered my tail but continued to watch it with envious eyes.

"What is it like?" she asked as I thought about it.

"Full with stress," I said struggling to find the right words.

"So you have not met your prince or gone on a magical trip yet?" Erika asked me.

"No but you help." I said when I heard the front door open.

"Children it is time to come in for lunch." someone yelled as they all got to their feet.

"You should be safe here." Terry said as I nodded as he led the way to the door.

“Good bye Princess Kyzudo.” said Erika carrying the box containing her tea set under her arm.

“Bye bye,” Rita said before closing the door.

I stared at the door blankly when I noticed that there was a beam of light coming from an open window. I hurried to the window jumping onto a low table covered in gardening tools. I peered through the window with my ears lowered.

There was a woman with long nappy light brown hair piled in a large bun. Her clothing was patterned and she wore dull colored slippers. Her skin was lighter even than Rita’s and she was heartily built.

She waved the kids into the house standing on the porch. She turned to follow them inside when an old man slipped past her. He picked up a watering can then walked over to the large garden.

The old man wore flannel about his chest, the fabric stretched to his wrist where it was folded into a cuff with a single button. Worn blue cloth covered his legs with the knees smeared with dirt. A strap of leather encircled his waist. A billed hat covered the loose curls that formed in his thinning hair. Oversized moldings of black leather were loosely wrapped around his feet. His skin was dark and wrinkled like a sunbathed grape. He also seemed frail like the hardships of life had robbed him of his youth, like work had sucked out his livelihood leaving nothing more than a withered husk.

“The food is on the table. I will be outside if you need me,” the woman called over her shoulder before walking over to the man.

“The celosias are looking mighty fine. I always liked their odd shapes and bright colors. I think they maybe my favorite.” the woman said as the old man poured water at roots of the plants with the flaming red tops of feathery blossoms muddying the ground. He nodded slightly to the old woman then set down the watering can to unwind the hose.

“Those kids have been playing in my corn again even though told them not to.” he muttered as he added an attachment to the hose so the water shot out over the corn patch.

“They are just children.” the woman said he turned off the hose grumbling to himself as he disappeared into the house. He returned with a handful of seeds. He knelt down in a bare spot in his garden then dug shallow holes in the rich soil.

“What are you planting, now?” the woman asked slightly annoyed as the old man stood up wiping his brow with the back of his hand.

“Okra,” he answered simply before picking up a large bag of dried corn.

“Again?” the woman asked as the old man made his way to two small coops, one which housed a chicken and the other a duck. He grabbed a handful of feed then sprinkled it through the chicken wire. The chicken quickly busied itself by pecking at the ground as the duck twisted its long neck to look at the food at its feet.

"I am not sure why you insisted on getting those animals. This is not a farm. You aren't in the country anymore." the old woman continued as the man nodded then sat down in a plastic green chair placed on a small patio when the woman handed him a can. Moisture clung to the metal forming large drops that slid down the side leaving wet trails behind. He popped the top then took a sip. He leaned back then gave a guttural sigh.

"I honestly don't know how you can drink that but I am proud of you for taking in Terrance. The poor dear would be in a foster home it was not for you. I don't even know the name of his father and his mother has lost custody because of her drug addiction. I would hate to think of what would have happened to him if you did not take him in."

"It is a lot of work." he said before taking another sip.

"Yeah but it is a shame. You would have been able to retire if you did not take him in but I am glad that you did. Though I think you are too old to work at the factory. The hours are too long and your bosses are too cruel."

"If the world is truly as cruel as it seems and this is all I will ever see then I wish to blind to it."

"Don't be ridiculous, that beer is not going to change the world."

"If happiness does not come my way then it seems that I am going to have to make my own happiness for however brief a time it is preferable to an indefinite period of sorrow."

"I guess but that is not good for your health."

"I am not worry about the repercussions of tomorrow because I can only live in the confines of today."

"I suppose but I just came to tell you that I am proud of you for taking in that boy. I would hate to think of what would happen to him if he was in foster service."

"He is family, of course I had to take him in."

"Well I am proud of you all the same," the old woman said touching him on the shoulder before she went back into the house as the old man eyes drifted upward.

I looked up to see that the dark ceil that I saw last night was missing. In its place was a wide expanse of blue that seem to continue into infinity. Feathery white masses floated overhead. There was also a bright yellow orb that caused my eyes to water if I stared at it directly for too long. It was featureless. It could only be described an unbearably bright light to the likes I have never seen before. This was the world my father passionately told me about when I was little.

I finally understood the grandeur he was attempting to describe. I finally understood what inspired his splendid tales that enhanced my childhood, that sparking my imagination and allowed me to hope beyond our confined world. This was the realm of possibility where the sky has no end and the sun awakens life with its warming rays. This is the land where the stars glow, bordering the infinite sky, and

where the heavens meet the earth. This was where my father undoubtedly lay, somewhere beyond the sun playing among the clouds.

“Good bye Daddy,” I whispered to the heavens before I backed away from the window

I climbed from off the table as I looked around. I was surrounded by foreign objects as foreign scents filtered through my nose. Darkness filled most of the space and the walls stood firm and unmoving around me.

I backed into the sunlight, feeling lonesome and scared without the kids present. I peered into the shadows not knowing what hid just beyond sight when I caught a faint scent that reminded me of home. I turned around to find my pack a little ways off. I rushed over to it then sat on my pungent smelling bed as I pulling my bag closer to me. I breathed in its scent when my stomach grumbled angrily.

I opened the pack then ate some pigeon meat still hungry after the bacon earlier. I ate quickly looking at the rest of the meat I had left. I had enough cured meat for about two days then I will have to depend completely on these kids or my ability to hunt. I still do not even know where this cure was. I need to ask the kids whenever they return so I can begin looking because I was wasting time.

I laid my head down hoping to get some sleep because after I get the information I needed I was planning on leaving. My mother was the only family member that I had left and I refuse to lose her. I must find that cure no matter what it takes I thought as I closed my eyes hoping that when I woke I would be met with good news

I jumped at the sound of the door opening. I quickly dashed away from my bed then hid under a table behind some cardboard boxes. Three great shadows loomed over me as I backed away growling.

“Fluffy,” Rita called as I crawled from behind the boxes.

“Oh there you are. First I thought you ran away.” Terry said as I got back into the dog bed.

“I still here but I have question,” I said as he nodded before sitting on the ground beside me.

“What is it, because this is all that we have to give to you.” Erika said as I shook my head.

“No I need information about cure to infections.” I said as Terry became worried.

“Oh no you hurt yourself. Well Granny has bandages in the house.” Terry said quickly getting back to his feet.

“No, I am well. I only want to know where the cure is located.” I explained

“Cure you mean like medicine because my mommy has plenty. She has medicine for her headaches in her purse. If you have a headache I could ask for her to give you one.” Rita told me.

“No, tell your mother of me.” I told her fearfully.

“Yeah she would never let us have a pet. She would take you to the pound.” Erika said as I growled at her.

“No pet.” I snarled as she nodded.

“I know but Mom may think that you are one.”

“I need information about infection cure.” I reminded them to keep them on subject.

“Well when I cut my knee Mom put this clear cream on it. She said that it keeps away infections. She keeps it in her medicine cabinet but I can’t reach it.” Erika said as I looked to Terry who was a little taller.

“I am not sure if that will cure an infection, just prevent them. I think if you need to get rid of an infection that you need to go to the hospital.” Terry said as my ears perked up for I was sure this was the cure I was seeking.

“What is that?” I asked as he thought about it.

“Well it is a place where sick people go. It is a big building with medicine and doctors. You know what I mean?” he asked as I shook my head.

“No but where is it?” I asked just when I heard that old woman calling to the children.

“I am sorry we have to go but we will be back tomorrow.” Terry said then rushed outside with the others running behind him.

“No! Wait! Stop!” I yelled running toward the door but I dare not follow them into the sunlight where I was sure to be spotted.

“We will be back. We promise.” Erika said as waving as Rita grabbed the door knob.

See you tomorrow Fluffy,” she said happily then pranced away.

I hurried to the window to see Erika and Rita running into the neighboring house where a woman was standing by the door with a large plastic bag in her hand. She was wearing loose stretchy fabric around her legs with a long string that could be pulled taut and loose clothing about her torso with a faded print. She had dark saggy pockets of skin around her eyes and her hair was messily held back by a rubber band.

Erika and Rita rushed inside the house beyond my reach when I looked around for Terry. The old lady was leading him into the house as the old man got into one of those gliding metal machines with a grim expression.

“Have a good day at work.” the woman called from the doorway as the machine glided away on its silent wheels

I backed away from the window cursing my luck. The kids were gone and would not return until tomorrow. I had no choice. I had to wait for them because I needed more information about this hospital if that is the place where the humans keep their cure for infections. I need to sleep here for the night but in the morning I need answers. I must continue searching for my mother’s cure even though I feel as if I have formed an odd attachment to those young humans. I must not grow complacent

or I will lose everything. I must continue for the sake of my mother, for the sake of my people.

A Matter of Life and Death

I rolled about restlessly in the bed that was formerly owned by a dog. Its offensive scent clogged my sensitive nose as invasive thoughts of doom racked my mind. Images of my mother lying completely motionless with clouded eyes tormented my subconscious. Great scenes where my people tore at each other with bloodied fangs as others fended them off with gapping wounds that spilled pools of dark blood upon the floor. All I could see was death and when I woke all I could think of was how close my nightmares were to coming true.

I jumped out of bed pacing across the cold floor refusing to return to the place ruled by my nightmares. I needed to stop this. I needed to find my mother's cure to save her and to gain the respect of my people. I could not fail. I can't allow my nightmares to become a reality.

When those kids return I have to find out the location of this hospital. I need to find the location of my mother's cure. I was wasting too much time for every minute brought me closer to the death of my people; every unproductive moment tugged me closer to my nightmares. If I did not act soon waking up would no longer be a form of escape and world will simply be a more vivid depiction of what I wish to forget. I must not fail, despite the danger I must be like my mother, unafraid to do what I must.

I paused as I looked to the window as light leaked into the room. The golden orb of light had returned dispelling the darkness that seemed to form a barrier to the heavens. The sky stretched on as far as the mind could imagine and suddenly the world felt infinite, full of possibilities.

I raised my tail, growling proudly for I could not fail in such a world. I would not allow myself to give up I thought as memory of my nightmares faded like the retreating shadows. All fear dissipated as the world revealed itself as being full of mysterious charm simply waiting to be discovered.

I looked toward the neighboring house where Rita and Erika lived. Their mother had opened the door and was now leading both of the girls into the yard. She paused by the fence when I noticed that the old woman was sitting on the patio. The corners of her lips pulled upward as she flexed her fingers in a unified fashion.

"Good morning," the girls' mother said as she sat down next to the older woman.

"Good morning," the older woman repeated when the old man began watering the plants in his garden as Terry snuck off to meet me in the small storage building I was in. The door opened as I rushed forward, barely able to contain myself.

"Aw I missed you too Fluffy." Rita said stooping down to wrap her arms around my neck. She was attempting to choke the life out of me, to kill me.

"Let go!" I yelled kicking her to ground as she stared at me with water gathered in her eyes.

“Why did you do that?” Erika asked as I turned to her confused.

“She wanted to kill me.” I said as Terry smiled.

“It a sign of affection. She likes you.” Terry said as I pulled back my ears ashamed of my actions.

“Sorry but I need to find hospital.” I said as Terry hurried to my side, as I backed away.

“Oh no she did not hurt you did she?” he asked.

“No I just need information. Important.” I said as Terry looked to the ceiling think to himself.

“So do you know?” I asked getting impatient when Erika walked over to me.

You seem tense. I should give you a message. My old dog use to like it.” Erika said with her fingers raised as I backed away.

“No I need to know where hospital located.” I said as Erika dropped her hands at her side disappointed.

“Why do you need to know so badly?” she asked I looked to Terry who still had not answered my question.

“My mother dying, I need cure.” I said as Erika nodded sadly.

“I don’t know where the hospital is but I have been there before.” Terry finally admitted as I began pacing again.

“Find out. I need to save my mother.”

“Ok I will ask my mother. She knows because she took Rita and me there before.” Erika said as I waved my tail slowly in the air pleased.

“I don’t like the hospital because I had to get a shot and it hurt.” Rita said rubbing her arm as Erika led the way outside to her mother. I rushed to the window to watch them eager to start searching for my mother’s cure as soon as possible.

“Mom where is the hospital?” Erika asked as her mother got to her feet looking her over.

“I am ok I just want to know.” Erika quickly added

“It is across the street from that bank I always go to.” Her mother finally answered.

“You mean that building with the long line and the ropes that we are not supposed to swing on?” Rita asked as her mother nodded.

“Yes that is the bank.” she answered as Erika smiled then left.

“Oh yeah, thanks.” Erika thanked her before she hurried back to tell me what she learned.

“Where is it?” I asked Erika who smiled broadly pleased that she got the information but Rita spoke before her.

“It is across from the bank where Mommy takes us. There is a really high counter and a wall of glass with a hole in it where nice people give Mommy money.” Rita said as I stared at her utterly confused.

“What? Where is that?” I asked Rita who smiled twirling Kiki.

“In the bank?” she answered as I flicked my tail in a sign of annoyance.

“Where is bank?” I asked.

“In the city there are huge buildings and noisy cars that are so slow you can walk pass them.” Rita continued as I growled.

“City but where in city?” I asked.

“Across the street from the hospital,” Rita answered as I snarled becoming frustrated.

“I look for hospital.” I reminded her.

“It is across the street from the bank.” Rita answered as I turned to her with my teeth bared.

“I not know where bank is.” I yelled as Rita stared at me with wide eyes.

“It is in the city.” Erika stated as Terry pulled Rita away from me as I turned away realizing that I had frightened them.

“I need find hospital or mother die. Everyone will die and it my fault. I failed.” I muttered as my tail dragged across the ground.

“Don’t worry I am sure you can find it. The hospital is very large.” Terry said leaving Rita to comfort me.

“I not ever find it in city. Too large, too much danger,”

“We can help. We have been there before.” Terry told me as I shook my head disappointedly.

“No help too much danger just death,”

“We can help. I know we will find it eventually.”

“No time just fail.”

“Please Kyzudo.”

“No, will not find it. You not know way.” I yelled when he finally fell silent

“Mommy could take you. She knows the way.” Rita whispered as I turned to her.

“She is...” I began but I cut myself knowing she would not understand.

“What?” Rita asked as I looked away.

“Dangerous. No trust.” I said as Rita shook her head.

“Mommy is nice and she will take you there then you can cure your mommy.” she continued as I looked away. It all sounded tempting but it would be far too dangerous.

“I not... she no trust,” I muttered as Rita touched my back.

“But she would take you” Rita said as I walked away from her.

“I think now. Too confused,” I said as Terry nodded then guided the others outside to give me my space. I began pacing again as I thought about my options.

I could not return without my mother’s cure or my mother would die and the others would never respect me as their leader. I need to get my mother’s cure at all cost. I can’t fail or my nightmare will rule over my life. I can’t allow a civil war to ensue because of me. I can’t lose my mother so I must continue. I must go to the city

to look for this hospital but the city is so large that I don't have a chance of finding it in time to prevent the people from rebelling against the royal family. I need someone to guide me. The children were willing but I doubt if they would be any help, all they would do is slow me down and attract unwanted attention. I need to go straight to the hospital but with the kids as my guide this was sure not to be the case. I need to be led by someone who knows where the hospital is and can take me there in a timely fashion. I need Rita's mother to take me but that is far too dangerous. I could not reveal myself to a full grown human or I would be killed. There must be another way.

I growled to myself for I could not see another way to get my mother's cure and prevent the war. I need their mother's help but could I trust her? Well so far, none of the humans that I have encountered have attacked me, so maybe they do not see me as being a threat. Those gathered in the land between the above ground and my world seemed uncomfortable but they did not attack though they had enough able-bodied fighters to easily overpower me. Maybe they were afraid of me or simply curious about what I am. Also those two young men I saw above ground only stared when they should have chased me. The kids were a little apprehensive when they first saw me but after they learned that I was not a threat they were no longer hostile.

I know I don't know much about humans but I needed to make a decision that would determine the wellbeing of my people and there is no time to lose. If the humans are not a threat then I must not hesitate for I can't bear to face the repercussions. I need to find a way to save my mother I need to find a way to stop this. I must act for inaction was just as unthinkable as failure.

If the humans truly are monstrous beings desiring nothing more than our destruction, then I fear there is no hope to be had but there is a chance that the Night Stalkers were wrong about the humans. There is a chance that the humans were only aggressive because all they know of my people is that we steal valuable resources and boldly venture into their land. Maybe the humans were just trying to defend themselves and their belongings. Maybe the humans are not the monsters I was told of. Maybe the Night Stalkers' approach is what set them off. Maybe the humans' behavior toward them is atypical, arising simply out of fear.

If this is true then maybe after I explain that I mean no harm Rita's mother would help me get my mother's cure. Maybe I can trust the humans and save my people. Maybe all hope was not lost.

I turned to watch Rita peek her head around the door. She was clutching her stuffed rabbit Kiki and was staring at me timidly. I lay in my bed as she walked over to me less afraid.

"I sorry," I whispered as her small fingers burrowed into my fur. She smiled then sat beside me.

"It's alright Fluffy I forgive you." Rita said when the others entered.

"Oh good you have calmed down." Erika said as I bobbed my head.

"I afraid my mother die,"

"Why aren't you afraid now?" Terry asked as I sat up.

"I know answer."

"What is that?" Terry asked

"Rita's mother take me to hospital." I announced proudly

"I am sure Mommy will like to meet you, Fluffy" Rita assured me.

"I am not sure. Mom likes to keep the house clean and she may not be happy to find clumps of hair on her sofa but I guess she let us have a dog once so maybe she may allow you to stay." Erika told me.

"Kyzudo are you sure this is the best plan? Their mother may not listen to what you have to say. I think you would scare her into attacking you and I don't want you to get hurt." Terry said.

"I won't let her hurt Fluffy". Rita said as Erika nodded.

"I don't think this is a good idea," Terry continued as I growled.

"I need plan." I said but he still did not understand how desperate I was. He could not possibly understand how much pressure I was under.

"Maybe you should think of another plan." he said as I raised my tail.

"No time mother need cure." I said as he finally nodded.

"Fine then, I wish you luck," he said as the girls smiled at him pleased.

"So when are you going to meet Mom?" Erika asked as I thought about that.

"In evening great light orb will fall and dark ceiling return. It safe. I follow you. No see by others." I said as Erika nodded.

"Ok you can follow us home." Erika told me as I dipped my head.

"Yes I follow." I agreed

"Fluffy is coming home with us!" Rita exclaimed leaping to her feet before spinning around with Kiki swinging wildly in her arms.

"Please Kyzudo tell me if something goes wrong." Terry pleaded kneeling beside me.

"How?" I asked smelling the scent of fear that clung to his skin and hid within his eyes.

"I don't know send Erika to get me." Terry said as I nodded slowly.

"Ok." I agreed as he tenderly touched my shoulder smiling weakly.

"Then we will see Mom in a few hours." Erika said as I looked at Terry who stared at me with this blank dead expressionless face and eyes that seemed to be made of glass. I looked away my eyes falling on my pack. Inside I knew my mother's blade rested amount whatever remained of the meat. I could not bring it with me or I would frighten the girls' mother yet I needed to make sure it was in good hands, it was my only connection to home.

“Um Terry you watch pack.” I asked as Terry walked over to the pack to pick it when my mother’s blade clattered onto the ground. He bent down to retrieve it then raised it to the light marveling at its sharpened edge.

“It my mother’s means much.” I said as he nodded then stuffed it back into the pack.

“You are a warrior princess?” Erika asked staring at the blade’s kneel edge

“They same thing, need be warrior to be princess, need lead people.” I said as Erika watched Terry hide the bag inside a box under the table where it would be safe.

“I am not so sure I what to be a princess anymore.” Erika said as I nodded.

“Me neither,” I said I laid my head onto my forepaws closing my eyes still tired since I could not sleep last night. I never wanted to be a princess. I wish I could be like everyone else but it seems that everyone else wanted to be like me. It seems no one will be able to find satisfaction for it is merely an illusion. It is just a dream just beyond our reach, an unspoken hope of what will never be.

[A Dangerous Assumption](#)

Rita ran her warm hand down my spine as I watched Erika through my eyelashes. She was standing by the door but her eyes often drifted to the darkened window. Terry was leaning against the table where my pack was hidden under as he stared at me with eerie eyes that were devoid of all emotion.

“It is time to go. It is dark and everyone is in the house.” Erika said as I raised my head.

“Kyzudo you know there is still time to back out.” Terry reminded me as I grunted then got to my feet.

“I need do this. No choice.”

“You must know how this is going to end.” Terry told me but I did not even look in his direction.

“I need cure. No choice.”

“Ok I will be standing by.” Terry said as I glanced at my pack. I was almost tempted to bring my blade but I knew that would only make matters worst. Even if I chose to hide it in my pack to defend myself if their mother did attack me I doubted that I could defeat her since I was a poor swordsman, due to the fact that I have never been trained and the pack would drastically slow me down and agility was my only aptitude. I must go only armed with my superior speed and my pleading eyes brimming with the sorrow of my people.

“I will lead the way!” Rita exclaimed leaping onto her feet then racing over to the door. She opened it as the rest of us gathered around. Erika boldly stepped out into the yard.

The luminous light of the great orb was lost but the sky did not appear solid. It was a deep blue shrouded in thin masses that reminded me of clumps of fine fiber that was used to stuff cushions. Small points of yellow light drifted from the grass

blinking in and out of existence. It was as if the great orb of light had become a shifting mass of sparkling airborne particles.

"Come on our house is this way." Rita said as I stepped out into the opened as I watched one of the small yellow lights glide in front of me. It was a bug that glowed as if by magic.

"Good luck," Terry whispered as I nodded then followed the girls to the other yard. They led me to the back door as Terry watched us, standing by the storage structure that I almost thought of as my second home.

Erika opened the door as light fell upon me and the others. I backed away into the shadows suddenly unsure when Rita ran inside then turned to smile at me. She extended her hand then flexed a single finger to herself as I forced myself to step over the threshold. I kept to the walls as Erika closed the door then left in search of her mother.

I looked down a line of wooden storage compartment built into the wall to a table that felt safe for it cast a protective shadow under its broad work surface. I cowered underneath it as Rita sat on the tiled floor beside me.

"Come on Mom I have someone I would like you to meet." Erika said leading her mother into the room by her arm.

"I hope you did not invite anyone into my house without my permission. I don't want you to bring strangers into my house because I have told you about strangers." She said as Erika nodded then began looking around the room.

"Yeah I know not to talk to them." Erika answered when she saw Rita kneeling beside the table and me partly concealed within the shadows.

"See that is Kyzudo and she is not a stranger. She is our friend." Erika said stooping down beside her sister as her mother looked down at me.

"What is that animal doing in my house!" she yelled grabbing Erika and Rita, dragging them away.

"She is Kyzudo and she needs our help." Erika explained as Rita struggled to free herself, whining about how her mother was hurting her arm.

"She is a wild animal and she could be dangerous."

"Fluffy is nice." Rita yelled when I decided that I needed to explain myself before their mother alerted someone else.

"I cause no harm. I need help. Please help me." I said as she stared at me vacantly as her children slipped from her slacken grasp.

"Please listen Mommy, we have to bring her to the hospital." Rita said tugging at her mother's sleeve.

"What is that thing?" she asked as I raised my tail.

"I Kyzudo, from under land." I said as she picked up a broom.

"You are a demon. Well I won't let you have my children, you monster" she screamed as she slammed the bristled end against the ground, as I backed away.

“Mommy stop or you will hurt Fluffy.” Rita said grabbing her mother’s arm but she simply flung her off.

“How dare you mess with my children.” she yelled as I ran toward the closed door. I reached for the handle when she jabbed the broom at my back, the stiff bristles snapping as I fell to the ground.

“Mom stop,” Erika yelled grabbing the broom but her mother pushed her out of the way but it left just enough time for me to get to my feet and hurry downstairs where I was planning on hiding in the comforting shadows but I turned when the door slammed. All was darkness, all hope was lost.

“Help!” I yelled pressing my weight against the door but it would not budge and the knob would not turn.

“No Mommy, don’t trap Fluffy!” Rita screamed.

“That is a monster and I going to make sure that it is taken far away from here.”

“Please Mommy don’t call the pound. She will be good I promise.” Rita said when I heard a series of beeps then a purring buzz.

“I need an animal control officer. I have a wild animal in my basement.” their mother began as I backed away fearfully.

“I don’t know what kind of animal it is but it is dangerous.... Stop that Rita”

“Mommy please don’t hurt Fluffy,”

“Erika where do you think you are going? Erika, get back here!” she yelled as I peered out of one of the windows of glass bricks to see Erika running to the neighboring house to tell Terry. Her mother screamed but did not follow her not wanting me to get away.

My jaw parted as a mournful note filled the cavernous space bouncing off the walls taking over my every thought until my mind screamed with grief. The sky became darker until it formed a roof over the world.

I was trapped and soon the humans would take me as their prisoner. I was never going to escape. I was never going to see my mother again. I was never going to be allowed to return home.

I failed. My mother was going to die and my people are going to kill each other. My nightmares have become a reflection of the near future, a future that I had no hope of preventing.

I could never save me people from their fate. I was just an inexperienced whelp. I would never be like my mother and I was foolish for believing otherwise. I was a fool to believe that I understood enough about the humans to reveal myself. I was a fool for no recognizing how I was making grand generalizing about a people I know nothing about. I was foolish for not seeing how my desperate need was affecting my reasoning. I was a fool for believing that I ever stood a chance of saving my people. Maya was right only the wise know when enough information is gathered and I was not wise enough to save my people. I did not deserve to be Sanoka’s daughter.

I should have went home after I learned the kids did not know the location of the hospital. I should have returned home and hoped that my attempt would be proof enough of my bravery. I should have found a way to trick their mother into getting my mother's cure without revealing myself. I should have thought this through. I should have listened to Terry.

I backed away from the window knowing there was no escape. All I could do was wait for the humans to come and take me away. All I could do is wait, for my freedom to be stolen from me. All I could do is wait, for my nightmares to take over reality. All I can do is wait, until all hope is lost.

Abducted

I raised my head from the cold floor when I heard a deep vibration that grew louder as it approached my prison. I looked to the window of glass bricks to see flash of light defuse through the thick glass before vanishing. I got up then ran to the window trying to make sense out of the blurred shapes that rushed about.

There was a large white mass that must have been one of the human's large transportation vehicles. Tall humanoid figures emerged dressed in similar colors like the uniforms of the Death Stalkers. Two figures half the size of those that arrived rushed forward with their spindly distorted appendages raised. They stopped but a full sized figure ran toward the children, who I knew to be Terry and Erika. The single figure out of uniform led them pass the kids as a short blob of color pulled at her sleeve. It must have been Rita attempting to save me but there was no hope.

I glanced at the door when I realized that the girls' mother was no longer leaning against it. I was free. I just need to hurry I thought as I rushed up the stairs. I turned the knob then push the door wide open.

I was free I thought as I hurried to the door that I used to enter this death trap. I grasped the knob but it began to turn on its own accord. I released the knob then backed away when the door was flung open. Standing in the doorway was Rita cowering in the shadow of her massive mother.

I turned away, looking for the other door that I knew led to the front of the house. I raced through the house then I stopped at the door. I rose onto my hind legs to reach the knob. It turned but the door would not budge. I looked up to see a brass laver that must work like a dead bolt. I leaned against the door stretching toward the laver when I saw a group of men entered the room. They carried a net which was spread between them like a banner. I only had a few seconds to leap away from the door before the net rushed toward me.

I looked back at them after I landed on a cushion raised by a stiff fabric covered frame. I growled raising my tail when they pulled out an object of dark metal. A long hollow chamber was pointed at me as they grasped its thick handle with a finger looped around a thin curved protrusion. I knew if that thin crescent piece of metal was ever yanked back that the air would scream and blood would leak through

circular holes that bore through flesh and snapped bones. Those pieces of metal were death to all who could see the circular passageway in its center. It was the device that was used to kill my father.

"Please not kill me." I whimpered as I lowered my tail and bowed my head in defeat.

"It can talk." said one as he slowly lowered his weapon.

"What are you?" asked another approaching me with his weapon pointing at me.

"I Kyzudo."

"What are you? Where are you from? How can you talk?" he asked as I thought about telling him that I was the leader of my people, which would reveal that there are more of us. Also if I told him that I was from the land under this one, the humans would know where my people hid. I dare not tell him anything even if I must die like my father.

"I no tell." I said proudly when he thrust the weapon into my face but I ducked out of the way then raced across the room. The other fired as I leap onto a table of glass and wood then dove behind a long cushion with a wooden frame. A long dart hung from the cushion, fired from one of their weapons of war. They stopped firing but their leader slowly walked over to me with a metal loop attached to a long rod.

"I don't know what you are but you are not going to escape from us." he said as I backed into a corner. The metal loop found my neck then tightened as I thrashed about in an effort to free myself when the man dragged me away. I grasped the metal rod with my hands trying to pull it free but I was too weak. Maybe I would have been successful if I was just a little older.

"No...Please Help." I screamed as I was dragged out the front door and across the front yard. Terry and the others were crying by the storage unit I stayed in but ran toward me when they saw me.

"No you can't take Fluffy." Rita yelled as the back doors of the transportation machine were opened revealing a wall of wire cages.

"Terry stop them," I yelled before the man lifted me up by the metal loop so my feet dangled uselessly.

"In you go," the man said trying to force me into the cage but I grabbed the edges of the cage with my feet and tail.

"Help," I yelled again when some pushed me hard in the chest.

"Kyzudo!" Terry yelled trying to push through the men but he was just too young and weak to reach me.

The door to my cage was closed along with the doors to the transportation machine as Terry watched me sadly with watery eyes.

The men began to pile in then the machine started to glide forward.

I hung my head as Terry slide back as if the road were pulling him away from me. All is lost. Soon my people will decimate themselves by waging a pointless civil war

and my mother will die. There was nothing that I could do to prevent this because I lacked the skill and the strength to do any better. I was the only one who could save them but I had failed. I will never be able to return home and with the future even being as it is I am not sure if I want to. I will be the last of my proud species. A potential leader who never rose to take her place, a source of hope that has expired.

Wisdom Earned by Attempting to Prevent a Cataclysm

I grasped the bars of my cage as I hung my head with my ears lowered in shame. There was no fight left within me, no hope of preventing what is to come. I simply had to accept the facts. My mother was going to die and the people were going to revolt. Merula and Syrugia will split my people and there will be war. The only positive thing seemed to be the prospect that the war could not last forever. There will be an end and when it arrives a new leader will be crowned.

I believe Merula will become the next leader because she is backed by the Death Stalkers and the royal guards who have been trained to fight and not to mention her strength and her fearless nature. She would surely win but will my people benefit from her leadership. I did not know her well but I knew that she held a great respect for my mother, a respect I believe that she one day wished to command. She wanted to take my mother's place as leader but she had always dismissed it as being impossible. When my mother showed weakness and the idea of me taking her place emerged her ambition was allowed to flourish, that is why she wasted no time rallying the guards and the Death Stalkers. She did not want to miss her chance. Syrugia may have the majority of the people's support but when Merula's strength becomes apparent and the war claims its first victims they will reject her and embrace Merula as their leader.

The people will surely live through the war but I fear Merula's desire for respect and power may be magnified by becoming the leader. The people will suffer from her dictatorship. She will abandon the traditions that once protected the people and she will recreate our society in a manner that pleases her.

I can't let this happen but I was just a pup, a child faced with an impossible task. To prevent this war I would need to be able to return to my people as a respected warrior. I needed to find my mother's cure but I was trapped and I had no way to reach this hospital.

I growled for there must be a way. There must be a way to stop all of this from happening and as long as there is a way I must seek it out no matter how unlikely. I needed to gain wisdom so I would know when to act in an effort to prevent stupid decisions and inactivity. I need to save my people but first I need to free myself from this prison. I closed my eyes as I tried to think what would Maya do in my situation.

I was thrown into this cage so there must be a way to open it I thought when I looked over the bars to find a lock off to the side. I stuck my hand through the bars to touch its surface but there were no moving parts that I had access to. I could not free

myself but the humans' intention may not be to keep me in here forever, at the very least they may open the door to feed me. When the door is open I may be allowed to escape but the humans will be present and I only had one shot so maybe I should form a more detailed plan before I think about executing it. I have already rushed into things and I do not want to do so again when my people are counting on me.

I was thrown forward as the metal vehicle came to a stop. I was here wherever that was. I got to my feet with my tail raised when the back door opened revealing the humans who captured me. They gathered around as the one with a loop attached to a rod edged close. This was my chance I thought when the cage door was opened slightly. I leapt forward but the door closed on me, the metal pressed into my sides. The loop was rung around my neck then tightened as I was pulled forward and the pressure ebbed away. I leapt onto the floor snarling at the humans as they led me to a building across a paved ground covered in decorative yellow lines. The door was held open as I was pulled inside.

The tiled floor was mostly covered in a long rug of rough fabric and molded rubber. The ceiling shown with long fixtures of mysterious glowing tubes covered in textured plastic. The air reeked with the smell of foreign animals and the hall seemed to have no end.

Finally I was pulled into a large room full of cages. Large grey cats with ringed tails and articulated fingers hissed as rodents with wings of taut skin watched me as they climbed about their cages on odd hook like claws. One of the humans opened a cage as the other lifted me with the rod connected to my neck as I yelled and I tried to remain outside of the cage but I was shoved inside. The loop released its grip as I turned quickly to stop the cage door from closing by pushing on it with all of my might but the human easily overpowered me as the door clicked shut. I grabbed the bars then began shaking them desperately but the lock prevented the door from reopening.

"I will inform our superiors that we found an unknown species." one of the humans said as the others nodded then followed him out of the room but one remained. He walked over to me as I backed away growling.

"What are you? Tell me." he demanded loudly hitting the metal cage with the metal rod that he used to drag me here. I bared my teeth as my tail lashed behind me.

"We are going to have to tell us eventually so tell me," he said as many of the animals around me began to hiss with displeasure.

"Where did you come from? How can you speak our language?" he went on when one of the humans returned.

"She is not going to tell you so stop terrorizing her. We will all find out what she is soon enough when our superiors come and deal with this. Now come help me prepare the food." he said as the human by my cage then put down the rod.

“Fine I will be there is a second.” he said when the other human nodded then left when the one standing by my cage turned. “We are going to find out very soon so keep your secrets while you can.” he said then left as I backed as far away as possible from the cage door.

I had to get out of here or everything will be destroyed. I need to get out of this cage but surely I could not undo the lock. I needed to escape when the humans open the door but if I do so when they are still present I will be recaptured assuming I make that far. I need for them to open the door then to escape when they are gone. I need to keep the door unlocked but they will not leave unless they believed that it was locked. I need to trick them into leaving the door open, believing that it is closed. I could stop it from closing with my foot but they would probably notice that so I needed something much thinner. I looked around when I saw thin sheets of paper bearing the new. I picked it up then began folding it to make it thicker. I stuck it through the cage door and the metal frame of the cage but it was still too thin to stop the door from closing.

I backed away discouraged when I looked toward the lock. Maybe I did not need to be able to stop it from closing. Maybe all I had to was stop it from locking but how was I to do that? I walked over to the lock thinking about the complex mechanics within. I could not jam the inter working of the lock but there must be something I was missing. There must be a point where the lock holds the door in place. There must be a hook or a latch that can be detached and connected. If this is true then maybe all I had to do is disrupt this connection so the lock will be unable to hold the door in place. I may be able to use my folded paper to jam the lock and I can hold the door closed until the humans leave so I have a chance to escape. This could work but I think I should fold the paper into a thick rod to jam the hook instead of a folded square. I quickly got to work on the paper pleased that all hope did not seem to be gone like I feared.

The kind human that saved me earlier entered with a cart loaded with bowls and trays. He stopped by each cage then placed a bowl into the cage. The animals backed away fearfully, only approaching after he deposited the food and retracted his hand.

He opened my cage as I backed away giving him no reason to prepare for my escape. He placed the food bowl beside me then closed the door looking away briefly when the misshapen grey cat hissed as I stuck my tail through the bars, into his cage, which worked as a distraction as planned. The human turned back to me after the creature settled to find me standing by the closed door with my hand grasping the bars with my other secretly holding the paper rod in place. He continued his rounds then left as I jiggled the paper rod as the door popped open.

“Yes,” I whispered then I leap down to the floor, “Now, to save my people,”

I ran to the door but I paused with my large ears raised as I listened for the sounds of the humans. All was silent so I rushed out the door then down the long hall

staying low. I stopped by a door made of glass. I pushed against it but it would not budge. I did not come this far to be outsmarted by a door I thought as I located the hinges that connected the door with the wall then pushed on the corner farthest from them with all of my might. The door gave away as I rushed through before it could close.

“I am free,” I said as I raced across the paved ground. There was still a chance I could save my people and that was all I needed to continue. All I needed was hope to fuel my body for I know as long as it exist I shall not accept failure, as long as it was possible I would do all that I could. I shall not fail until hope betrays me, until my body ceases to function.

The Formation of a Warrior

I sat up as my feet slid across the sleet of cardboard I was sleeping on. I looked up to the sky that seemed to form a dark barrier beyond the peaks of the buildings around me. It was in the middle of the night, it was time to move. I left the cover of the dumpster then walked farther down the alley to a lone cylinder of rubbish with its lid cast upon the ground. I walked over to the lid for rainwater had collected within it. It seemed the rain had its benefits I thought attempting to shake the dampness from my fur.

I scooped up the water with my hands then raised it to my parched lips. The water rushed down my throat that seemed to have already forgotten the bounty of yesterday's storm. Water leaked from my hands as I watched it fall back into the puddle that formed within the lid. All dignity lost and regality dismissed I greedily lapped up the water. I raised my head with my thirst quenched as water rolled down my chin.

I was ready to continue my search for the kids knowing that they had access to the information that I need and that I was clever enough to form a plan to retrieve the cure. It was only a matter of time before all is well. I just need to press on and keep my hope live.

I paused at the mouth of the alley then looked down the street at the puddles of light that collected under the lit poles and the stream of light that rushed in the street. Darkness occupied all the area the light could not repel. I must stick to the shadows, passing through the light only where I must. I dashed down the street as my feet nimbly carrying me forward. My large ears were pricked as they collected sounds and deep vibrations. My long tail was raised allowing me to change direction suddenly as I veered around the streams of light that stained the sidewalk. My reflective eyes glowed in the darkness taking in the world in full detail.

I knew I must be heading in the right direction because after running in circles for days I realized that the orb of morning light follows a pattern. It rises on one side of the street and sets in the other. I have only watched it follow this rout a few times while I have been on this street but I doubt it's going to change anytime soon. It was

my only sense of direction in this world, my only lead for I knew the kids' live somewhere close to where the great orb falls relative to this huge city. They are on the side that is closest to the site where the orb rests for the night. I just need to get close then my nose will guide me the rest of the way there.

I followed the rout of the restless shadows that shied away from the streams of light that gathered on the sidewalk and flowed along the street. I was stealthy and cunning like a rat that skillfully evades detection. The moon pursued me as I dashed within the patches of darkness, racing the nearing dawn.

Eventually my feet began to tire as my breath left me in shallow gasps. The deep shadows began to fade as the sky grow lighter. My eyes leap about as the streetlights finally died away. I pressed myself against a building, feeling exposed in the dim glow as a golden band of light appeared on the horizon.

I hid in an alley to rest for that day as the sun began to rise from the earth, knowing it is better to travel at night because the humans seemed practical blind outside of the light's reach. It also seemed practical to rest in the day when I was incapable of traveling.

I watched the great light fall onto the streets when my stomach growled. I needed to find food but where should I look, I thought when a fat pigeon landed a few yards away from me, on the brightly lit streets. I crouched watching it hungrily but I dare not chase it down the street when the day's light grows stronger. I need to lure it toward me but how I thought when I turned toward the dumpster that smelled of rancid food and filth. Maybe the answer laid inside there.

I leap onto the rim of the trash heap then clawed through a bag of thin plastic to reveal a random assortment of items ranging from mysterious contraptions to moldy food. I wrinkled my nose as I picked up a rounded slice of bread speckled with odd white seeds. I ripped it into small pieces then cast them at the mouth of the alley.

A few of the pigeons nibbled on the bread when I pounced from the dumpster. The birds scatted waddling away on their plump pink legs as I swiftly grabbed one that raised its wings in an effort to escape but my fingers were soon constricting around its chest. In one simple movement I snapped its neck. The bird went limp as I licked my lips.

I began plucking the bird's feathers but soon I became frustrated when I saw a pile of rusty poles leaning against the dumpster. I picked up one with a jagged end then stabbed a fold of the birds flesh until its skin ripped. I easily pulled the skin away from the body. The skin fitted like tight clothing, which I tore away before I pulled out the entrails. Lastly I cut off its head with the sharp end of the rod then I lifted the body pleased with myself for I never skinned and gutted my own food before.

My long fangs tore into the meat that was laced with strings of fat. Hidden bones crunched between my molars as I spit the pieces out. Blood leaked onto my fingers

staining my nails a deep red. I licked around its small vertebra wishing for more when I heard something behind me.

I turned to see a monstrously large dog with a square head and powerful jaws. It stood just taller than me on all fours and its body was swollen with toned muscle. Its black fur invited the shadows to wash over him. He was a horrifying beast but I dare not leave this alley in broad daylight. I need to hold my ground I thought picking up the rusty pole I discarded then raised it to the dog's broad chest.

The dog growled then crept forward when I slammed my metal staff into its head. The beast staggered shaking its head, flinging gobs of saliva from its fleshy mouth before lunging at me, enraged. Its powerful jaws snapped shut as great jagged molars interlocked, ensnaring the unlucky air as I stepped to the side smartly hitting one of the dog's front legs with the rod. There was the sound of bone giving way as the dog yelped, pulling its leg close to its massive body as if to protect it from farther harm.

The dog growled angrily then began to circle me but I quickly jabbed it in the abdomen. The dog whimpered as blood rushed from the wound staining the surrounding fur. A growl hissed through my teeth as I raise my tail high over my shoulders when the dog finally backed away whining. I lowered the rusty pole for victory was mine.

I allowed the metal pole to clatter onto the ground as I ate whatever remained of my kill before I searched for a place to sleep for the day but my eyes drifted back to the blood tipped pole that I used to chase off that dog. That dog was vicious and I would not have been able to defeat him a few weeks ago. It seems that I am no longer the same naïve pup I once was. Somewhere during this trek a warrior was formed. A warrior born from need and shaped by danger I fearlessly march forth into the unknown challenging anything that dares stand in my way. Now I know I am Sanoka's daughter, now I know a warrior's blood rushes through my veins and passes through my heart. Now I know within me resides the mentality of a warrior that is needed to lead my people. Now I know I shall not fail.

Daily Tragedies

I ran down the pothole ridden street trying to escape the great light that bloomed behind me, spreading across the land. A pair of human footwear hung quaintly from a high wire as I tried to make use of the diminishing shadows. The great moving metal machines stood silently watching over the vacant street as I followed the scent that I knew would lead me to them, to my friends.

I breathed the air deeply allowing it to circulate through my open mouth as the scent filled my nose and danced faintly across my tongue. It was stronger than ever. I was nearly there and I will not stop until I am in the safety of the corn patch.

I rounded a corner but slowed when I saw a dark patch of tall plants just beyond a shaky fence of twisted metal. I sped up then grasped the fence with eager hands then climbed to the top where I leap into the thick bed of corn. My forepaws landed into

the softened dirt as my body fell through the mesh of leaves. I laid my head on my paws as I yawned widely pleased that I made it before the light awaken the humans and forced me to wait impatiently in the shadows.

The great forest of corn swayed as the breeze pass through their tall stalks tugging gently at their leaves. I exhaled as the loose dirt formed a hazy cloud that rose into the air. Small particles drifted about in the streams of light as the great orb shifted closer to the top of the sky.

I leaped onto my feet when I heard a door being thrust open, hitting the side of the house. I crept forward then peered through the corn to see an old woman emerge from the house with a watering can. A young boy around ten years old followed her out then sat on the porch with his head glumly lowered as he watched the ants skitter about at his feet. The old woman who he called Granny stooped down by the red flowers that reminded me of wild brushstrokes of vivid color. She sprinkled water on them then placed the watering can beside it.

"Those truly are my favorite." she said then turned back toward the house. Terry looked up as she neared with great dewy drops of moisture clinging to his eyelashes.

"Don't worry everything is going to be alright." his granny said patting him lightly on the back as he nodded before she went back into the house.

"Terry," I called boldly after I realized that the coast was clear. Terry looked up as his eyes found me hiding among the corn plants.

"Kyzudo?" he asked as he stumbled over to me.

"Yes I Kyzudo." I confirmed.

"But how did you escape?" he asked

"I clever. I more smart than cage. I free self." I explained.

"That is great." He smiled weakly.

"But you sad?" I pointed out.

"Grand Pappy just died." He told me looking away.

"Sorry,"

"He promised to take care of me. He was working through his retirement to care for me when no one else would. I know he did not seem very compassionate but he cared."

"I sorry,"

"He worked so hard. He was not very affectionate but he must have cared a great deal about me. He was always tired but he never showed it. He just kept working. That's why he drank because he needed to cope with all the stress. If he did not have to work so hard he would still be alive. It is my fault he is dead."

"He like my mother."

"Your mother?"

"She had to lead people. She show no pain but she get hurt. She do it for the people and for me. She like your Grand Pappy, she work for greater good even with suffering."

"She sounds like Grand Pappy, self-sacrificing and hard working."

"Yeah he show love with work."

"Then his love will truly be missed. He was probable the only one that loved me because he cared for me when no one else would. Now I am alone."

"Terry there you are. Wait is that Kyzudo?" Erika said as I peeked out of the corn.

"Come on I should take you to the garage before someone sees you." Terry said as I followed him across the lawn as Erika rushed back to her house.

"I need to tellt Rita." she called before she vanished inside the house. Terry opened the door as I rushed inside. I sat in the dog bed as Terry pulled out a box.

"Here this is yours." Terry said handing me my pack.

"Thanks," I said as he sat on the floor a few yards away. "Where you stay now?"

"Erika and Rita's mom is really close to Granny so she decided to take me in since she has an extra room in the basement."

"So not alone,"

"I guess not. I mean I grew up with Erika and Rita so I almost think of them as being my sisters. They are almost like family to me."

"Good you have family."

"Yeah you are right."

"Fluffy!" Rita screamed as Erika stood by the open door.

"How did you escape?" Erika asked as I unzipped my pack then took out my last piece of cured pigeon meat.

"I jam lock." I answered as I raised the meat to my mouth.

"Smart," Erika said as Rita stared at the unwrapped meat.

"Ew, that looks nasty." Rita announced.

"It not." I said after taking a large bite sending small chunks of meat flying.

"Well anyway I am glad that you are ok Kyzudo because we were worried about you." Erika said as I ravenously licked my greasy fingers wishing for more.

"I safe here and you my friends." I said as Terry smiled then reached out to touch one of my forepaws.

"You are our best friend." he said

"You my only friends. You extension of my family."

"Well you can stay as long as you like." Terry said as I bobbed my head as my heart gushed with emotion.

"Thank you for everything," I said feeling truly cared for. I never had a friend in my entire life. I was always just a less impressive version of my mother, a regal name, a child expected to fail but to them I was none of than that. I was just myself in their eyes. Within their eyes I was free of all expectations and responsibilities. Danger had

been exiled from their eyes and all that remained was blind acceptance. It was the same blind acceptance that once lived within my mother's eyes long before I was named as her successor, back when I was just her daughter. Their eyes harbored love long forgotten to me, the love my mother withheld within the depths of her stony heart.

The Need to Continue Onward

Rita leaned on me as her arms constricted around my neck as if threatening to crush my windpipe but her dotting eyes were brimming with boundless joy. Erika had placed her tiara of rhinestones on top of my head and her arm was resting on my back. Terry was facing me, behind his eyes love hid just beyond sight, leaking through his facial expression with such intensity there was no need to decipher his emotions.

"Grand Pappy maybe gone but I still have all of you."

"Grand Pappy is not gone. He is in the clouds, that is what my Mommy said." Rita said as Erika touched Terry's shoulder.

"We will always be here for you like a family. You will be our brother." She said as the end of Terry's lips pulled upward revealing his teeth as he hugged his new sister.

I looked away as my thoughts drifted to the idea of my people, who desperately needed me. I needed to end this. I needed to find my mother's cure because time was running out. I can't allow anyone to die when life was so precious. I can't delay when I value my mother's life above all. I can't allow myself to forget my mission when I have seen the effect of one death. I dare not allow another to be lost.

"I need help to save my people," I said as everyone turned to me.

"So how can we help?" Terry asked releasing Erika.

"I need find cure of infections." I stated as Terry nodded thinking to himself.

"It is in the hospital, maybe we can take you there somehow." Terry said as Erika nodded.

"Yeah, it is just across the street from the bank." Rita added but I rose to my feet wishing to take action.

"No, your mother take me." I said as all of them stared at me fearfully.

"But she won't take you. You know that now." Terry pointed out.

"I hide in moving machine and she go." I said

"Why would she go to the hospital?" asked Erika.

"Why humans go to hospital?" I inquired.

"They take sick people there to be healed by doctors." Rita stated.

"Then you sick," I announced as Rita folded her arms looking angry.

"I am not sick. I had my shots. He also gave me a red lollipop and a pink bandage. See he pricked me right here and it hurt." Rita reported showing me her arm as she pointed to the place where the needle pierced her skin.

"No act sick then I come." I said as Terry nodded but he did not seem wholly convinced.

"I see but you can't just walk into the hospital like that." Terry pointed out.

"I wear human disguise."

"Like what?"

"Clothes,"

"And what about your face?"

"No face covering?"

"You can wear a ski mask. I have one because I want to ski but Mommy said the mountains are too far away and that I am too little. I use it for Halloween and playing bank robbers because I am always the robber." Rita added randomly.

"Then I wear face covering."

"No one wears ski masks." Terry told me as I growled with frustration.

"Then why made?" I asked

"Ok no one around here wears ski masks." Terry corrected himself

"I cover face?" I asked him confused.

"Well you are going into a hospital so maybe we can say you were badly burned and felt ashamed of your face." Terry thought aloud.

"So ski mask good disguise, yes?"

"Maybe, from afar" he agreed reluctantly.

"Then plan?" I asked for confirmation.

"I guess if you try to avoid as many people as possible that you could get in but how are you going to get your mother's cure, I mean her medicine?" Terry said as I nodded pleased.

"I find cure,"

"It's a large building so you may run out of time." Terry pointed out

"When I had a rash Mommy took me to this counter and this nice lady handed her the medicine." Rita told me.

"Yeah all you have to do is find the pharmacy." Terry remembered.

"Then find cure?" I asked.

"Yeah but there will be someone there." Terry continued.

"Then I fight,"

"No, that is not a good idea,"

"Then what?" I asked desperately

"You can tell the nice lady that your Mommy is sick." Rita stated but Terry was unconvinced.

"They would never listen. You will definitely be found out." he pointed out.

"No, if I find room with cure, I take it." I stated determinedly

"How, you don't even know where it is in the pharmacy?" Terry question but I would not allow myself to give up.

"I not know but I no leave. I must get cure. I not give up. I not know everything but I know enough" I told him.

"I guess you must or you would have given up by now. I suppose at least with this plan that you will have a chance." He admitted as I rose onto my feet.

"Yes, I must. I am next leader. I not fail," I declared as Terry nodded.

"Well I guess we have to help you in any way we can because you are going to need it if you insist on going." He finally agreed when I waved my tail in a wide arch.

"Thank you, friends," I said as Rita hugged me.

"I love you Fluffy," she said digging her small fingers into my dense fur.

"I love you also and I promise I will return to visit soon as possible." I said as both Terry and Erika crowded together to embrace me, their warm bodies pressing on all sides. Love enveloped me as fear of the approaching future drifted away. I did not feel like I was doing this mission alone anymore. Things did not feel as hopeless as they once did. I was no longer afraid of failing my people, for success was all that I could envision. Success was all that existed within my mind.

The Sharp Wit of a Warrior

My feet slid about within the heavy shoes that tugged at my ankles every time I attempted to lift them. I tried to free my tail in an effort to retain my balance but it was stuffed into one the casing of loose fabric that covered my legs. It was tied to my lower leg for good measure because the movement of my tail was visible through the thin cotton covering. I raised my forelegs then rotated them in wide circles to steady myself which seemed to work to some extent. I was lucky I was a princess and was practiced in the art of standing upright or this feat would be far too off balancing to work otherwise.

My torso was covered in a baggy garment that held heat close to my furred body with a flap of cloth that rested on top of my head. Beneath this was a tight piece of fabric with wide stitches that hid all but my eyes. I lifted my forepaw to scratch my face but the well-knit fabric, which encased my every finger, formed a shifting barrier of wool and thread.

"Aw you are like a doll that my Mommy gave to me for Christmas. I called her Emily and she had a lot of different clothes." Rita said after looking me over.

"You are clumsy. You are like a big baby taking its first steps and your eyes are weird looking." Erika said as I tried to make my movements seem more natural, like theirs.

"Don't worry if you try to avoid as many people as possible and keep your head down, you can pass for human but just barely so don't push your luck." Terry warned me.

"I stay in shadows," I agreed.

"Good then we will take you to the car but first, Erika, you need to get your Mother's keys from her dresser." Terry told Erika.

Ok I will be back.” Erika agreed before she left.

“So when Erika gets back with the keys I will lead you to the car then I will show you how to get into the trunk through the backseat.” Terry continued

“Yeah Erika found it by accident when I was a little younger. It was our secret clubhouse but now Mom locks the doors and said that we can’t use it anymore.” Rita said as I stared at her blankly when Terry continued.

“After you are in the trunk Rita is going to act like she broke her leg.” Terry announced as I turned to glance at Rita.

“I am a great actor. I fool Mommy all the time. Erika says it is because I still have my natal acting abilities though I am not sure what that means but I know I can do it.” Rita said as Terry nodded when Erika returned.

“I got them so let’s go,” Erika said as Terry nodded then followed her outside of the garage as I hurried after them with Rita holding my hand, which she swung wildly as she hummed to herself.

“Rita stop that before you make Kyzudo fall,” Terry command as Rita released my hand as she folded her arms across her chest with her bottom lip poking out abnormally. Her eyes were watery and she seemed upset.

“I got the door,” Erika announced as she inserted the key then opened the door. She crawled into the front seat then leaned over to unlock the back door from the inside.

“Ok now hurry inside Kyzudo,” Terry instructed leading the way as I leaped in after him.

“This trunk?” I asked wondering how their mother would be unable to spot me and why it was unlike Terry described.

“No this leads to the trunk.” he said folding down the middle seat to reveal a large gaping hole.

“Oh ok,” I said crawling into the darkness as Terry leaned close to explain everything to me.

“We are going to leave the car to return their mother’s keys and prepare for Rita’s performance. After that we will come back to the car and we will leave. When we get to the hospital the car will stop for a long period and you will be able to hear us getting out. Wait a while to make sure we are far away then push against this seat and get out. You will be in front of the hospital. Look for the pharmacy and avoid as many people as possible. You have to find a way to get your mother cure then return to the car before we get back. We will try to stall as long as we can so good luck. I hope you save your mother and your people.” Terry said then lifted the seat back into place blocking my view of the rest of the car.

“I will put Mom’s keys back,” Erika announced as the kids shuffled out of the car.

"I will lead Rita to the fence and let her practice being in pain." Terry said just before the doors were shut. I shifted around in the cramped space listening through the metal.

"Here, I want to pretend I fell here," Rita's voice rang through the car's metal shell.

"Ok I could say that I dared you to climb to the top but you fell," came Terry's voice from somewhere beyond the confines of the trunk.

"Yeah then I broke my leg," Rita added.

"Yeah so act like you broke your leg and I will act like I am trying to help you." Terry said when I heard a horrifying wailing coming from somewhere beyond the car.

"Ah, my leg! It hurts really bad!" Rita yelled when I heard the faint sound of the house door opening.

"Can you get up?" Terry inquired.

"I will try...ah Mommy help. My leg hurts." Rita screamed when I heard a new voice, it was the voice of her mother.

"Rita what happened?" Rita's mother asked.

"Terry dared me to climb to the top of the fence but I lost my balance and I fell now my leg hurts really bad."

"Oh I hope it is not broken. Does this hurt?"

"Ah it hurts. Mommy, make it stop!" Rita pleaded.

"Oh honey, I am sorry I think you may need to go to the hospital to get that leg checked out by a doctor."

"I don't want to go to the hospital."

"I thought you liked your pediatrician. He gave you a lollipop and let you pick out your bandage."

"He hurt my arm with a needle."

"Well if you are good maybe I will buy you a cake from the grocery store for being such a brave little girl."

"Ok but I want it to have light blue frosting and sprinkles on top."

"Of course now let's get you to the hospital."

"Ok,"

"The rest of you get in the car while I tend to your sister. Here Erika unlock the doors and get settled."

"Yes Mom," Erika said when soon after I heard the others entering the car.

"There, now are you comfortable Rita?"

"I guess,"

"Well I will try to drive smoothly as possible," their mother said when there was the sound of doors being shut and an engine coming to life.

"The rest of you put on your seatbelts." she commanded as the car pulled off, throwing me against the back.

I pushed myself up but the force of car soon flung me forward onto my face. I looked up for I believed that we stopped but as soon as the thought entered my mind the car jumped forward sweeping me off my feet again. The floor rushed to meet me as I got back to my feet and tried my best to steady myself. I learned that if I leaned with the turns and braced myself for the stops and accelerations that I could remain balanced on all fours if I kept a wide stance.

Finally the car stopped as I waited for a sudden force to pull against me but all was still. Were we there I wondered when the car quieted followed by the sound of doors being opened. I think we finally made it.

"We have to head toward the emergency wing because I did not set up an appointment." their mother told them.

"Alright then let's go," Terry said before the door closed and all was silent.

I waited a few minutes then pushed against the panel that backed the middle seat until it fell away revealing the rest of the car. I crept forward then opened the door. I slid out of the car onto the paved ground which was covered in widely spaced lines of yellow where other cars rested. The line must be the humans' way of maintaining order for the sleeping cars were neatly resting between the painted lines.

I slowed when I approached the hospital as towered over me. Its great doors of glass sparkled in the great orb's light. I awkwardly stepped forward when the great doors slid aside. I passed a row of blue-grayish chairs with wheels before another wall of glass glided aside to allow me to enter a great room full of plastic chairs and humans, who clutched their pained sides or stared with dulled eyes.

I avoided the center of the room with one hand on the wall, which steadied me and allowed me to move more fluently. No one in the room paid much attention to me as I slipped down the hall searching for the pharmacy, preoccupied by their painful ailments or simply reading magazines to pass the time. A man dressed in a long garment with an odd necklace of grey plastic with a long extension ending in a silver disc, turned to me.

"What are you doing here? Where are your parents? You can't be here alone." the man said as I backed away from him when a woman wearing an outfit of a pastel color came to my aid.

"Oh the child is probable just lost. I will take care of him." the woman said as the doctor nodded then left without farther delay.

"Now if you don't know where you are going you can look at these directories. There is one on every floor so people won't get lost." the woman said as she led me to a board with a list of floors and room numbers.

"So where are your parents?" the woman asked.

"I find them." I muttered confidently.

"Are you sure?" she asked looking down at me as I kept my head lowered.

"Yes, I come before," I said hoping my expertise would earn her confidence.

“By yourself?” the woman asked incredulously.

“Yes, my mother ill,” I explained hoping that it would seem acceptable for me to be here if my caregiver could not make it.

“Oh so you came here to visit your mother?” the woman asked.

“Um yes,” I agreed pleased that I had an alibi.

“Well she is probable just around that corner but if you can’t find her I could show you which room she is in.” the woman said as I nodded then stared up at the directory.

I found the word Pharmacy, though this was not due to my knowledge of the human language, for my reading ability was somewhat poor. I only knew what the word looked like because Terry showed me what it looked like by looking it up in the great book of words, I think he called it a dictionary. Anyway the directory said that the pharmacy was on the second floor so all I needed to do is find the stairs.

“Thanks,” I added in a dismissing tone when the woman stooped down to my level forcing me to look away.

“Where is your father, you surely didn’t come here alone?” she asked as I stared at the tile floor.

“He dead,” I muttered.

“Then someone must be looking for you. You must be lost then I will help you find your family.” She said taking my hand as I pulled away.

“No,” I said forcefully

“Why are you wearing gloves? It is much too hot for that. You will have a heat stroke in this weather.” she explained reaching for me as I backed away.

“I no need your help,” I yelled temporarily forgetting myself, looking up to meet her eyes. My large hood failed to cover the lower portion of my masked face.

“What are you wearing? Where are your parents and why are you speaking in broken English?” she asked confused.

“Go away!” I yelled then sprinted down the hall as the woman chased me.

“There is a policy against wayward children. You are not allowed to wander down the halls without an adult or an authorized personal. Stop!” she yelled as I slipped around a corner then continued running down an empty hall. I did not slow until the woman’s voice faded as she raced pass the smaller hallway where I was currently hiding in.

I pressed myself against a wall as a cart rushed out of a room with a mature human resting on top with a linen blanket draped over him. Those pushing the cart zipped by as the cart rattled along. The man aboard the wheeled bed glanced at me before a clear mask was pressed onto his face and his eyes slid shut.

After they were gone I hurried down the hall then rounded a corner where I saw a woman pushing a smaller cart with flowers and bright cards toward a section of metal

within the wall. She pushed a button with a triangle that glowed when the wall dinged and the metal parted to reveal a small room.

“Wait I am going up too.” said a man stopping the doors with his hand as the doors rebounded then reopened all the way as he stepped inside. I raced toward the room then leaped into the woman’s cart as the two humans talked conversationally, unaware of my presence.

“What floor?” the woman asked with her hand raised to a panel of buttons.

“The second floor please,” the man responded

“Oh that is the floor I am getting off on too.” the woman said when the door closed then something seemed to tug at my heart, as if an invisible force had invaded my chest cavity and was pulling at my organs.

The doors opened as I rushed out of the cart after the woman and the man exited the horrible room of nausea. They must have been good friends because they continued their conversation, quickly leaving the subject of magical rooms far behind. They did not seem to notice me as I slipped around the corner where I leaned against the wall trying to master my stomach.

Feeling somewhat better I looked up seeing a small plaque that read “Pharmacy”. I was nearly there I thought as I walked over to the high counter. I needed to get behind there but if I leap over it someone was sure to notice. I have to be sneakier than that I thought when I noticed there was a door that read “employees only” That door may lead behind the counter I thought when I hurried to the door just as someone exited. I caught the door then slipped inside.

I stopped as I looked up at the walls of clear containers filled with colorful pills and orange bottles with white caps neatly stacked in organized boxes. My mother’s cure could be anywhere. I hid when I saw a man and a woman enter the room. The woman squinted at a small slip of paper then turned to the man.

“I can barely read this. Doctors truly do have the worst handwriting.” the woman finally stated.

“Let me see,” the man asked as the woman handed him the slip.

“I think it says his patient needs steroids to overcome his illness.” the man said slowly.

“Oh well I guess he means these right?” the woman asked raising a pill as the man nodded then placed the slip onto the counter.

“I suppose but he should be much more specific about his request. Our jobs are hard enough as it is.” The man said as the woman bottled a few of the pills then placed them on top of the slip.

“I would just settle for legible.” the woman grumbled as the man smirked when a bell chimed.

“I will get it,” the woman announced then headed toward the sound.

“Sure I will give this to Doctor Harris,” the man said taking both the bottle of pills and the slip. I watched him go when I spotted a crumpled slip lying beside me as if by fate. The workers were simply filling orders that they receive from these slips so if I wrote what I needed on this slip then maybe they will simply give me my mother’s medication.

I picked up the slip then began filling it out then placed it onto the counter. The man returned then picked it up. He scrunched up his eyes as he tried to make sense of my poor handwriting, which has never been scrutinized by human eyes.

“Infection on hind leg? It looks like Doctor Harris handwriting but he failed to sign it. What could he mean by hind leg?” the man asked himself then opened a drawer.

“Well I guess these antibiotics should treat a serious infection but I should talk to him about his patient. I swear doctors are becoming less and less coherent.” The man said bottling a few pills then set them beside the crumpled slip.

“I should consult with Ann before I send this one out.” He said then hurried to search for her. I crept from my hiding place then snatched the bottle off the counter and snuck out of the pharmacy. I paused when I was safely in hall but soon I spotted a flight of stairs. I hurried down the stairs awkwardly stepping down each step with the bottle raised high over my head. All of my thoughts were on my feet which slid about inside the slippery cloth-lined shoes. I just need to focus of getting down these stairs then back to the safety of the car.

When I got to the bottom of the stairs I released a sigh of relief then stuffed my mother’s cure into a flap of cloth that doubled onto itself to form a pocket in the front of my thick clothing. I stuck both of my forepaws into the pocket to assure that my mother cure did not fall out.

My fingers curled around the bottle that I pulled close to my abdomen that I could feel through the fabric encasing the pocket. I can’t lose my mother’s cure after it has come into my possession. I must not let it out of my sight until I know it is under my people’s care. I must not fail after getting this close.

I walked down the hall to the place where I entered. I passed the people seated on chairs of molded plastic. Many looked up as I past but none spoke as I walked out of the hospital to search for the car. I walked down the rows of stationary metallic machines just when I realized that all of them seemed similar to me. I stopped then tried to remember any defining details about the car I was searching for.

Well I knew it was made of painted metal that gleamed in the light. It also had large sheets of glass on all sides that offered a view of the outside world. It sat on great wheels of rubber and had bulbous plastic domes that were backed with large light bulbs concealed in plastic casing of various colors positioned in the front and back. It had a metal plate in the back with random letters and numbers that formed what I believe to be gibberish.

Their car defiantly looked something like that but almost all of the cars meant this description so I needed to think harder. Well the cars are not all the same color and I remember the car that I looking for is black. Also on the car I was looking for the protective layer of paint seemed to have worn off leaving the discolored iron exposed along the bottom. I think I also remember a plastic sticker which was adhered to the back that read "Wisdom is knowing when to act," I remember I thought that sounded like something Maya would say.

I stopped for I saw a car that met my description. I hurried over to it then looked it over carefully. The kids' scent seemed to be saturated around it and I knew the car was somewhere in this row. It had to be the car I thought then hurried inside after discovering that the door was unlocked. I slipped into the trunk then pulled the middle seat up to hide myself as I waited in the darkness.

In a half hour I could hear the kids approaching the car with their mother. I think they were still quite some distance away but I could hear them very clearly, for they were very loud. Their mother seemed to be yelling and the kids sounded as if they were trying to explain themselves.

"You have to understand Rita that the emergency room is for emergencies only. You can't just lie about breaking your leg. It is very expensive to go to the hospital without an appointment." their mother began loudly.

"Well we never saw the doctor so maybe you won't have the pay." Terry interjected.

"This is about more than just money. I thought Rita was hurt." their mother continued.

"Well, all you do is sleep, when you get home, and most of the time you are not even there." Erika pointed out.

"I am tired," their mother answered simply.

"Well maybe Rita just wanted some attention. I mean she is only three." Terry explained.

"Don't you think I want to spend time with you?" their mother asked.

"We know you love us but Rita does not understand why you have to go yet." Terry said quickly before her angry added to the argument.

"I have to go to work Rita and you are just going to have to accept that." their mother said in a gentler tone.

"I am sorry. I just wanted another lollipop." Rita stated when I heard the doors being opened.

"I love you honey but don't you ever lie to me again. Do you hear me?" their mother said as the doors slammed shut.

"Yes Mommy, I won't do it again" Rita muttered.

"Now put on your seatbelts so we can leave," their mother said as multiple clicks sounded just before the car pulled off.

I was going back to the kids' house then I could return home with my mother's cure. I did it. I succeeded with my mission. In a day or two I would be back home and everything would be like it should be. My mother's health would be restored and there would be peace among my people. Soon all of this would simply be a faint memory, a nightmare that will quickly be forgotten as soon as consciousness returns and the true nature of reality is realized.

The Aftermath of Spring Showers

I held the plastic bottle tightly in my forepaws as the car came to a stop. The doors were opened as the humans rushed out. I waited a few minutes until all was silent then I freed myself from the trunk. I crept out of the car then hurried to the garage across the yard. I quickly opened the door then rushed inside. I closed the door behind me then sat on my bed to looking over my precious bottle as the light entered through the window causing it to glow a molten orange.

I did it my people were saved I thought when the door opened. He kids entered as I raised my bottle holding my people's salvation high over my head.

"You got it. I was afraid after Rita stopped limping and blew our cover that you would have run out of time." Terry began as excitement urged my feet into motion.

"No, I did it. Everything good now," I said happily when I began to fall forward without my tail to steady myself.

"That is great," Terry agreed when Rita came to my aid holding my forepaws.

"My mother live and no war." I continued when Rita laughed stomping her feet as she spun me in a circle. Usually spinning on my hind legs without the aid of my tail would worry me but to my own surprise I created an odd sound that seemed to summarize my joy. My long canines left each other's company as my vocal cords sang with a meaningless vibration that transcended words.

Erika's lips pulled up denting her round cheeks as she watched Rita and me dance about the garage. Terry's eyes shown with boundless joy, as they traced our movements across the floor.

We slowed when our joyous calamity left us gasping. Rita released my forepaws as I allowed myself to fall onto my dog bed. The soft form molding enveloped me in the familiar scent of a beloved dog who I believed was named Snickers, which suddenly seemed appropriate for I could not stop laughing. I sat up after the feeling of breathlessness passed.

"Thank you, you help greatly." I said as I pulled off my shoes then wiggled my long toes pleased.

"You are our friend and we want to help you in any way we can." Terry explained as I pulled down my loose fitting pants, I believe they were called, to reveal my fur covered legs then I quickly untied my tail from my ankle.

"Yeah, that is what friends do." Erika agreed as I pulled the thick hooded shirt over my head then peeled off the fabric clinging to my fingers.

"You accepted me as friend, thank you" I said then yanked the tight fitting covering off my head as the irritating wool dragged across my relatively hairless black skinned face.

"You are welcome Fluffy," Rita said handing me the bottle containing my mother's cure.

"Thank you I leave now," I said stuffing my mother's cure into my pack then walked to the door. Erika watched me with dewy eyes as I opened the door.

"No, but I don't want you to go." Rita yelled as she stomped the ground with her foot.

"I need return to my people," I explained as Rita shook her head wildly.

"No, you can't leave," Rita stated firmly with her little fists balled at her side

"I leave, I must," I said when Rita's face scrunched up forming deep folds of smooth skin as she began to yell. She sat on the floor as she thrashed her limbs about in a frenzy of futile movements as if to punish the garage floor.

"Don't worry Rita Kyzudo is going to come and visit." Erika said in a soothing voice as Rita looked to her with damp cheeks and glossy eyes.

"But I want Fluffy to stay." Rita said firmly as Erika patted her on the back.

"But she has to leave," Erika said as I looked to Rita.

"Yes but I visit." I said when Terry walked over to me.

"So what we just take your word that you will return." Terry inquired his voice filled with emotion.

"What?" I asked confused by his tone for Terry is usually the reasonable one.

"How do we know if we will ever see you again? How do we know you won't forget about us?" Terry questioned as I searched his pained expression.

"I return," I stated simply.

"How do we know you will even live long enough to visit us? You can't promise to us that you will return because you don't know the future. You may die tomorrow then we will never see you again." Terry continued when I realized that he was afraid of losing me like he lost his Grand Pappy.

"I must leave, my people need cure." I explained as water gather in the corners of his eyes.

"Don't you think we need you, someone to love us and care for us when everyone else is gone?" Terry said as I turned away unable to look into his saddened eyes.

"War come and my mother die. Must go," I said walking out the door knowing time was ticking. The great heavens were overcast with dark masses that drenched the ground.

"People live and they die. What is the point of forming relationships if all of them must come to an end? Why do we live when our lives serve no purpose?" Terry asked as I growled angrily.

"Many killed in war must stop." I yelled as I made my way to the corn.

“They are going to die anyway. Everyone does eventually.” Terry yelled as I walked across the soggy grass as the heavens leaked drops of moisture like Terry’s eyes.

“I not allow to die. I leave,” I said firmly.

“You can’t save them because they are beyond saving. All of them will eventually die. You can’t change their ultimate fate.”

“I will try.” I said when the dripping masses held back the torrent of water as if stunned into inactivity.

“There is no point it won’t change anything,” Terry said when I noticed a sprout that his Grand Pappy once planted in the fertile soil that he use to restlessly tend to. He was the cause of its existence. He was the reason that seed flourished when conditions were unfavorable. We affect our surrounding and those around us with our lives and when we die our changes continue to alter the world in which we once lived. We affect the world with the small changes of our lives to satisfy the needs of our love ones. We live in hopes of creating a better world.

“Our lives our way to recreate world for others.” I stated as Terry stared at me blankly.

“Grand Pappy changed the world?” he asked wondrously.

“He in your memories and in his garden so effect still there. Affect always be there to shape future because he lived.” I explained as he nodded.

“Thank you Kyzudo,” he said then rushed over to kneel beside me.

“I will return if not still alive in minds,” I said as Terry wrapped his arms around my neck.

“We will be waiting for you to return,” Terry muttered as I nodded. He released me when Rita grabbed my med section then began shaking me lightly.

“I love you Fluffy,” Rita exclaimed when Erika held me with closed eyes as wet tracks flowed down her cheeks.

“I miss you all and I return soon.” I said when they released me.

“Farewell Princess Kyzudo,” Erika said as I slipped into the corn patch.

“Bye bye Fluffy,” Rita called as I headed to the fence.

“Thank you Kyzudo thank you,” Terry softly uttered as I climbed up the shaky fence. I looked back when I reached the top. I could just see them over the corn.

“Good bye friends,” I whispered before I leaped down to the sidewalk then followed it home. I ran swiftly knowing that as long as I lived I have the power to change my world for the better, that I have the power recreate my fragile society. As long as I live, the hope of creating a better world would guide my actions that would in turn shape the world around me. As long as I live, I would have the power to change the nature of the world to my liking. As long as I live, the impossible can only be defined as what the current world will not allow, a description of the limitations that we form to excuse our inactivity.

The Arrival of Change

I ran down the tunnel knowing each step brought me closer to saving my people and my mother. My feet lightly pushed me forward as my long tail waved behind me like a ribbon excited by the moving air about ground. My ears were flattened as if to add to my speed and my mouth was partly opened as I took in as much air as I could. My pack pulled at my shoulders but I would not slow, I was too close for that.

My mind raced ahead to my people. Our society maybe stable enough to endure for countless generations but that did not make it any less flawed. I was my duty to change the ways of my people to prevent this from ever happening again. I need to devise a way for my people to choose a leader if the appointed one falls ill without waging war. I need to make sure no leader is excluded from following the safeguards that protect my people, even when certain traditions must be violated. I need to make sure that one who is under qualified is not forced to lead when more experienced individuals are willing. There must be order even when the leader is lost. I must change our society for the better or something of this nature is bound to occur in the future. I must fight to create a better world while I am still alive, while I still have a chance.

I slowed when I saw a bright light down the tunnel. I was home I thought when I saw two of my people facing one another with bared fangs. One wore a black rag tied around her upper arm and the other wore a rag dyed red around her waist.

“You should be ashamed of yourself for supporting Merula. She does not represent the people. She represents the old ways, which must be done away with.” The one with red sash stated.

“She is strong and she will lead us well. The Death Stalkers have a great respect for her skills and trust her leadership. She will be as good as a leader as any of us can hope for.”

“She is practically royalty but Syrugia is one of us. See this red band represents the sashes the leader wears. Everyone who supports Syrugia bears them because it reminds us that anyone of us can lead. Under Syrugia we all have a voice.”

“There will be a war and the Death Stalkers and the royal guards have already chosen their sides. Merula will win because she is backed by the strongest fighters. I will not be killed in this war defending the losing side. I have a family plus Sanoka was close to Merula so maybe she will be as good a leader as her. This band represents the strength of the Death Stalkers and the bracelet Sanoka use to wear.”

“So it represents the bracelet that Syrugia stole from her, the one now with Sanoka’s lost daughter,”

“This bracelet represents Sanoka’s strong leadership and we need strength in times like these.”

“The people need change and when faced with all of us even the mighty Death Stalkers and royal guards will fall.”

“The people are divided.”

“The people are afraid of change but Sanoka is getting weaker and her daughter must be dead by now. They side with Merula only because she reminds them of Sanoka but I want things to change.”

“But they won’t,”

“Then I will fight until knowledge of the future is lost to me and all that exists is the infinite hopeful ignorance of oblivion.”

“I guess that is your choice but I say it is a foolish one,”

“At least I have the strength to move on. I would not be surprised if you were still waiting for Kyzudo to return,”

“Well if she was then she shall not be disappointed.” I said stepping out of the shadows as they both turned to me.

“Wait, are you Kyzudo?” one of them asked as I nodded.

“I am and I came here to change everything for the better.” I announced then hurried off toward the palace. “But I haven’t much time,”

I ran to the palace where a group of royal servants had gathered. They were all looking toward the central light. I could see that many had gathered there to hear Syrugia and Merula speak I assume.

“I tried to stop her but she ignored my advice and rushed off to make a mess of things. The Death Stalkers maybe protecting her but she is going too far. If the infection does not kill her then one of her challengers surely will.”

“I have already started planning her funeral but when she dies the war will surely commence. We have to choose sides soon because many of Sanoka’s most loyal subjects are beginning given up on her health.”

She won’t last long if she insists on constantly challenging Merula and Syrugia because soon we may have to stop treating her in fear of being marked as their enemies.”

I looked at the central light. My mother was going to fight for her people but she would only anger Syrugia and Merula. If I did not hurry she was going to die with or without the cure and I could not let that happen.

I left my pack in front of the palace then I ran to the central light with my mother’s blade gripped firmly in my jaws. My teeth dug into the wooden handle as my legs flashed in a blur of motion. My blue eyes seemed to be set ablaze.

I ran down the middle of the neatly separated crowd when I saw my mother standing before the lit dome by Syrugia and Merula.

“Neither of you can rule in my place. My only successor is my daughter Kyzudo. There can be no other. The ruler must be of royal blood.” my mother said proudly. She was leaning heavily on her remaining blade. Her robes were wrinkled and her eyes had lost their fire.

"Kyzudo is dead but we can't wait for you to realize that." Syrugia yelled as her followers yipped in agreement.

"She will return," my mother said confidently.

"You are weakening Sanoka and someone must take your place. Your daughter is not an option." Merula said boldly as my mother turned to her.

"I respect you Merula as a warrior but I will never support you as a leader." she said fearlessly when Merula rushed over to her snarling, raised on her hind legs. She stood over my mother with her tail raised high so it peeked over her shoulder. Her cream and white fur stood on end as she looked down at my mother with her steely grey eyes.

"Kyzudo is dead. Someone must lead the people." Merula stated firmly as my mother looked up at her with cold defiant eyes.

"But I rather it not be you," she said when Merula whipped her tail behind her as she bared her teeth.

"You fool!" Merula yelled when the Death Stalkers rushed in front of my mother.

"Sanoka is ill. She is no threat to you." Dabu explained.

"Fine but she better learn her place." Merula snarled as she turned away.

"Ha look at the royals squabbling for power. It is barbaric but we are more advanced than that. We should abandon tradition and allow anyone to rule." Syrugia said as her followers formed an uproar of yipping

"No, I will not allow it." my mother growled as Syrugia turned to her.

"Allow? I don't need your permission." Syrugia continued as my mother raised her blade then pointed it at Syrugia's throat. The toes of her injured leg were hovering an inch or so off the ground as she balanced herself on one leg.

"I will not allow for you to do away with tradition because that is all the people have." she said as Syrugia flicked her dark brown tail.

"There will be no more classes. Anyone can be the next leader. I offer freedom"

"No one can be allowed to have complete power or the others will suffer. Our traditions protect the people's rights." Mom stated as Syrugia began to circle her with her blue eyes following her every move.

"We should set our own rules. We don't have to listen to you anymore." Syrugia yelled as she pounced toward my mother, causing her to lose her balance. The blade fell from her hand as the Death Stalkers fought to defend her which caused Syrugia's followers to rush forward. The followers of Merula quickly joined in the fray to fend to off Syrugia's supporters. This was just the beginning of a bloody war.

"I am coming Mom!" I yelled as I ran pass the crowd on my hind legs with my blade raised. Many people stopped to watch me in a state of wonderment and confusion.

I pushed my way through the mass of people wrestling each other with exposed fangs inching toward the other's throat. The Death Stalkers were now widely spread

as they tried to restore peace. Syrugia was battling my mother who was faring well even though she was unarmed and was forced to limp about. Her movements were fast and left Syrugia dazed but the tables were turned when she found my mother's blade. She swung it wildly as my mother backed away.

"Leave my mother alone!" I yelled catching her blade mid sweep with my own. The metal blades met with a clang that echoed through the hollow chamber. With both hands I pushed her blade aside then I raised my blade to her chest but she backed away circling then swung her blade at my head. I sidestepped then cut her side with a clean well executed swipe. Blood oozed from the wound as her blade toppled from her hand. She fell to the ground as I turned to my mother.

"Mom, are you okay?" I asked as she eyes lit up with pride.

"I am now, Kyzudo, I am now," she said as everyone stopped to look at us.

"Is that Kyzudo?" they asked each other as they gathered around not wanting to fight their friends and neighbors any longer.

"Kyzudo, you are alive," Dabu stated as I nodded.

"And I have my mother's cure. It is back at the palace. Everything is going to be alright now?" I stated as my mother waved her tail in a wide arch.

"Yeah I think so," she answered as the people slowly began cheering, unsure as first but rapidly gaining certainty. I had proven myself worthy of being their leader. My newfound honor and bloodline insisted that I must take my mother's place as the only rightful heir to the throne. No one would dare question my right due to my age or my lack of experience after I boldly accomplished what even the bravest would never attempt. I saved my people and my dying mother. I came in their time of need and exceeded all of their expectations. I was no longer the same pup they once taunted. Now I was a warrior worthy of bearing my royal name, worthy of my mother's respect.

[The Dawn of a New Era](#)

I looked myself over in the mirror. I was wearing my mother's royal robes, well I guess they were mine now. The black fabric had been altered to fit my small frame yet allow for flexibility and comfort. It was splendid with its stunning red sashes that were tied securely about my waist and all four of my ankles. The black silk formed a loose cocoon around me yet did not hang freely like my old robes. Upon my arm I wore my mother's bracelet. The black scorpion levitated within its plastic tome, its black band pressed against my skin leaving a deep impression. I carried my blade at my side, its bloodied edge was whipped clean and its metal gleamed once more.

"You look quite presentable, Kyzo," my mother said walking over to me. Her limp was almost unnoticeable and her posture hinted at her immense strength.

"Thanks Mom," I said as she stood behind me. I could see her through the mirror. She was wearing her Death Stalkers' uniform. The Death Stalkers may be unsure whether she was strong enough to lead them but the only injury the Death Stalkers

acknowledge is death. My mother has always been a warrior and I am sure even death won't change that.

"This will be your first speech as the leader. Do you know what you are going to say?" she asked as I tried to ignore my nerves and focus on all the amazing feats I accomplished recently.

"Yeah, I do actually,"

"Well then I am sure you will do fine." my mother said dusting some loose hair off my outfit with a practiced hand.

"Then I will prepare to leave in a few days." I said turning to my mother who stared at me, obviously confused.

"Leave?" she asked as a sense of fear began to build in her voice.

"Um you remember I told you I want to learn more about the humans?" I reminded her as she slowly bobbed her head in agreement.

"Oh yes... of course, but be careful." she stammered as I thought about how pleased the kids would be to see me again so soon. I missed their company for they were my only friends. They were the only ones who understood me and completely dissociated from me from my title as leader.

"Don't worry I can take care of myself now." I stated as my mother looked back at me.

"You sure can, well when you are ready to leave I will be waiting with the royal guards." my mother announced then rushed out of the room.

"May I enter, your Majesty?" someone asked as I turned to see Maya peeking behind the door, which my mother carelessly left open.

"Yes I wish to speak with you," I said as Maya bowed then hurried over to me.

"Yes, your majesty,"

"I now understand what it means to be wise,"

"You do?"

"Yes, when I was looking for my mother's cure I learned that information is extreme vital to success. I think wisdom is a great respect for knowledge gained by experience and the understanding of the significance of that knowledge."

"Yes I believe that is correct for knowledge is meaningless if it is not evaluated,"

"Thank you wise one but why did you come here anyway?"

"I came merely to congratulate you on your success. You saved us all and I thank you."

"Giving up was not an option so I had no choice. I had to succeed."

"Well I am thankful all the same."

"Let's leave. I have an important announcement to make."

"Of course your majesty," Maya said bowing as I hurried out the room to join my mother and the royal guards, who quickly got in to formation. I led the way with my blade raised. My mother followed close behind as the guards encircled us, rushing

about our feet. The Death Stalkers joined the procession when it passed them by after gaining affirmation from me. Dabu walked silently beside me but I knew he was proud to be in my company.

Our group stopped when we saw the others gathered around the great central light to sing our anthem proudly in remembrance of our species. Its lyrics echoed from past generations, powerful and unchanging like the passage of time always marching forward.

When the singing died down we continued to the front then turned to face the people. I stepped ahead of everyone within my group then raised my blade to get everyone's attention.

"I am your new leader, Kyzudo daughter of the former leader Sanoka, and I came here to tell you there must be a change or this problem of leadership will return and we may be unable to stop it next time. I came here to propose a change,"

"But we need tradition," my mother interrupted but I continued as if I had not heard her.

"But we may stray from tradition so we must set rules that are both comprehensible and flexible to adjust to our growing people's demands so if one believes an act is unjust then I implore that person come to the palace so my mother may consider it. She may no longer be the leader but she understands the importance of our tradition more than anyone else. Her knowledge exceeds mine and I would be a fool to argue otherwise. Also I believe that Dabu should lead the Death Stalkers until my mother has regained her health."

"But he is a..." my mother began but I cut her off.

"A male" I finished "I am aware of that but he is skilled and loyal and I know his strength will not falter. I am young and I current lack any training in the art of fighting. It would be foolish to insist for me to lead the Death Stalkers when our survival depends on their success. Dabu is more qualified than me so I will not attempt to best him when your need is great for their services but I will follow under him until I am knowledgeable enough to top him in both skill and strength. I am not my mother and I will no longer try to mimic her actions in an effort to steal her glory. I am Kyzudo and under my rule the people will get a say and those of you who have the strength to lead will be rewarded. The time of oppression is finally over so lets us progress into a new era." I ended as a deafening wave of sound washed over me.

"I was afraid at first but now that I think about it I think your plan will help us advance as a people. You did well Kyzudo," my mother said stepping beside me as I nodded.

I am not sure when it occurred but at some point a great transformation had taken place for I was no longer that clueless pup I once was. Now I was a warrior who could do all. It seems that if you follow your ambitions wherever they may lead and

possess enough wisdom to recognize when your target is within reach then all goals are obtainable. It seems that at some point I became wise.

Just a few weeks ago I was unsure what it meant to be wise but now I know with great certainty. Wisdom is the balance between ambition and insanity. It is the ability to realize that one is limited while possessing the power to overcome challenges in an innovative manner. It is an understanding about the nature of one's world for the wise notice the formation of patterns and react according to their predictions. The wise value knowledge but recognize their limited retention. The wise know action must be taken but rarely rush into it. The wise accept that they are flawed yet relentlessly seek perfection for the betterment of their world.

###

I hope that have you enjoyed this book and that you will seek out other books written by me in the future. I will keep you updated on my progress on my [blog](#) and on [Smashwords](#). You can also follow me on [Twitter](#). I encourage you to review my book and let me know how you felt about it.

The Story Behind the Book

I wrote this book in my sophomore year in college after Snickers, my childhood dog passed away along with my grandfather who everyone referred to as Pa-Pa. My grandfather had his flaws often coming off as a mouthy alcoholic but he was also a hardworking provider who cared for his family members. I attempted to showcase his better nature to honor his death and to remind those close to him all that he has given to them and about the positive affect he has had on the world.

I intended for this book to be about wisdom. I believe that the wise know that absolute knowledge is beyond human observation so they recognize how information is susceptible to change as more data is collected over time. I also believe that the wise understand the value of information and recognize our need to analyze it even though as I already mentioned that true knowledge can never be verified with absolute certainty. I believe that the wise intuitively know when meaning can be assigned to a collection of otherwise meaningless experiences acquiring useable knowledge that can benefit many. The wise never accept claims of absolute knowledge, so no conclusion goes unquestioned as they actively attempt to construct a comprehensive view of the world, coming as close as one can come to absolute knowledge.

I am a creature of dreams. I am the Black Wolf



Another book that has been written by me that you may enjoy is Fate's Twists and Turns, which is about a girl named Jessica who finds a mysterious book that seems to predict the future. She silently battles with her own fate as shape shifting creatures pour in from another world. She is forced to run for her life as she discovers a hidden power within herself that may just be the key to saving the world.

[Fate's Twists and Turns](#)

*She is a dreamer,
But no one can redeem her
From her quest,
That will put her to the test
Chosen by Fate,
To save all
She dare not be late,
or the world will fall*

I closed the book then pushed it away from me too afraid to read anymore. I closed my eyes hoping to rid my brain of memory of ever reading it. It could not be true. It had to be a mistake. This had to be a dream. This book could not exist. I hid my face in my hands as Snickers tried to lick away my tears.

"That is my book." came an angry voice from down the road as I opened my eyes to see the young man from before, the one that was asking around town for the book.

"I am sorry I found it in the forest." I said holding the book out to the nameless man, who rushed toward me. He looked at me in disgust like I was a vile lowly thief.

"Don't lie to me. I saw you reading it," he said angrily as Snickers left my side to confront this fierce enemy.

"I was curious and I regret it." I said averting my eyes from his that seemed to be raging like the waves of the untamed ocean.

"It is a crime to read that book." he yelled as my breath got caught in my throat.

"What, you mean you are going to arrest me but I just found it by chance." I said feeling my tears starting to run down my cheeks as I thought back to those words.

"And it has been damaged," he yelled his voice growing in volume as he reached for it but Snickers stepped between us growling.

“Tame your beast or I will do it for you.” he yelled as Snickers snapped threateningly at his leg.

“What do you mean?” I asked shyly as I grabbed Snickers by the collar silently begging her to be good but she would not let the man any closer.

The man growled very much like an irritated beast. His eyes began to glow an eerie ocean blue as his clothes became a thick smoke that completely covered his body. He lifted up his upper lip to expose a line of very sharp inhuman teeth before the smoke engulfed his head also. When the smoke cleared there was a large blue dragon standing in his place.

It had a serpentine head with long fangs and thin bony spikes connected by a thin membrane to form a fin along its long neck. It had a long flat tail that resembled an alligator's. Skin as rough as sandpaper, covered an elongated body. Its leathery wings were folded neatly over its back but its clawed webbed toes were poised for a strike.