

Prologue: Ayoli na Ani'yun'wiya (Child of The People)

"Ani'yun'wiya adanvto na Innatraea (The People's heart is that of Innatraea.)"

-Rinowhn Saying

18 years ago...

Tzelem slowly stood up on his shaky legs, it did feel good to be back in the physical world again, even if he did always feel awkward and weak at the beginning. He stretched and started pacing around the small forest clearing where he'd appeared, he needed to practice moving his body again. Pausing he regarded his furry grey faced and yellow eyed reflection in a small pool of water, then sighed and rolled his eyes. Whatever quirk of Kanraphim's, or the "Spirit World's," magic that made his people look like giant wolves when visiting Innatraea was more than moderately irritating and he didn't really understand it. He would have to ask one of the older Amarok if they knew, though they'd probably bite his ears instead of answering. His eyes went wide and he shook himself, he was already starting to think like a wolf!

Tzelem growled grumpily, a low rumble in his throat, before looking around more carefully. He was somewhere in The Sea of Grass, the vast plains that made up the center of Innatraea. The Rinowhn Tribes lived here, though they called themselves "The People," which he had always found amusing, as if they were the only people that mattered. The pompous beliefs of some Innatraeans always seemed to exist between amusing and disrespectful, such was their way.

It was good that he was here, even if he didn't know which tribe's land he was on, though it had better be one of the more polite ones; because he was in he mood to bite someone. For some reason Tzelem



had been told that it was absolutely necessary for him to be here at just this moment, because only he could do what was needed. One day he would bite that farm boy's rump! He shook himself again, ears twitching in annoyance. Then he heard the most terrible noise, a young child was crying nearby, no two of them, both girls by the sounds of it and probably children of The People. Tzelem hated children, they were loud, obnoxious, didn't understand anything, and eating them was frowned upon. This was no coincidence however, and he was already in a bad mood, so these two young girls were probably why he was here.

As he started trotting in their direction Tzelem used the Farsight to see what was happening and hopefully where it would lead. There were indeed two young girls, twin sisters, and wailing with a quite impressive amount of noise for ones so small, they'd fallen into the nearby river and were being swept downstream. There were also adults, further up river and from the Ta'al Rinowhn by the looks of them, but they would be too slow to save the children, he started moving faster. Tzelem didn't like the idea of being a savior, especially of children, but the farm boy had sent him here for a reason.

He followed the Farsight and arrived at a rock outcropping that reached out into the river. One he could save, she was close enough, for the other he was too late. Her path became strangely shadowed, but not the shade of death. Something else. How Interesting, if he could locate her later that would be worth investigating. Tzelem lowered his muzzle into the water and lifted the small babe out. She was cold, and crying but alive, and grabbed onto him for dear life. Their eyes met as she held onto his face and he felt a connection instantly. She wasn't just one of The People, but something different, a very old thing that had not occurred in generations beyond counting. He would have to watch her grow up and take care of her, he was stuck like a fish in a bear's mouth, bastard farm boy and his damned quest to save everyone!



Tzelem started heading back towards the adults he'd heard earlier, her mother and their camp were probably in that direction. But then he heard another sound, further away, out near the Coastal Trade Road that ran along the Sea of Grass' southern edge. Somehow that sound was connected to the Farsight also, so he was able to shift there quickly.

There was another of The People, a woman of the Zimsway tribe. She was crawling towards the trees, her clothes were torn and she was bleeding, she had suffered so much. It was wrong, you didn't play with or torture prey, life was supposed to cease quickly. He wanted to end her pain, but something stopped him, there was a baby growing inside of her, and not just any little one. The Farsight showed him who it was, Tzelem knew him, and finally understood why he was here.

Tzelem had never experienced this before, the Farsight pulling him in two different directions at the same time. Terrible as it was to admit he needed help, and so he called for it, receiving an answer much more quickly than he thought. Two of them came, the last Re'em. He'd always wondered if they disliked being white horses, with horns stuck on their faces, as much as he disliked being a large wolf creature. Some day he'd have to ask them.

He showed them the Farsight. Some of it made them sad, but they understood Innatraea's need, they would take the woman to where her newly forming babe would be safe. One day the two children would meet again, their destinies were as intertwined as his was now.

Tzelem shifted away, back to the river and the Ta'al Rinowhn he'd seen earlier. It was time to return the young child to her mother, and discover what kind of hornet's nest he was stuck in. He found them easily, though by the look of them they thought both children were lost, and



seeing his giant form emerge from the trees didn't seem to help either. He made himself smaller, or at least as much as his pride would allow him to, but he was still bigger than their horses.

One of them caught sight of the child as he got closer and they all became very excited, even if they were still terrified. A woman left their group and came hobbling towards him using a staff and a man's shoulder to stay upright, obviously injured, she must be the mother. Tzelem lowered his head carefully as the woman and the man helping her approached. Much had begun, he would watch the child and protect her.



Zehava was frantic, she knew it was bad for the current situation but she couldn't help it. Both of her daughters were missing and she was hurt, all thanks to her fool of a husband. He had insisted that the river was safe after the recent rainstorms, that their crossing wouldn't have any issues, and she'd listened to him because she was tired and busy with her babies. Now those babies were missing, swept away to certain death by the river's current, after the rocks had given it from under them. He was out looking for them with several groups of Ta'al whip masters, their tribe's warriors, while she was here licking her wounds and crying like a little lost child. It was shameful, and she knew it, but what else could she do? They were daughters and she was too injured to go searching for them herself. It was a horrible situation for any Ta'al, even worse because she was their matriarch.

Suddenly her old friend Orev, their ojibwe mashkikiwinini, or more simply medicine man, who was next to her and tending her wounded leg, pointed towards the trees. "Matriarch!"

Zehava looked where he was pointing, curious because the man sounded alarmed, and Orev was not usually one to panic about anything. She saw it immediately and felt her heart skip several beats. There was an Amarak emerging from the trees, or at least she assumed that's what this giant wolf creature was, she had thankfully never seen one before. It paused and looked at them, its giant yellow eyes even with the treeline as it surveyed their large camp by the river. Sacred Folk, those mystical beings who lived on Innatraea before them, were generally friendly and rarely revealed themselves to Innatraeans. But that didn't account for one's reaction to seeing a wolf taller than most trees appearing next to their camp. Her heart started beating again as the whip masters still there surrounded her protectively and blocked her view, but she scoffed at them almost laughing. It was odd how incredibly dangerous situations affected



everyone differently. "If that thing decides to eat me there's nothing any of you can do, move aside and let me see."

Citlali, an older man now and the highest ranking whip masters still in the camp, eyed her doubtfully but he signaled the others and they all moved. "As you wish, matriarch."

The Amarok had taken a few steps towards their camp and paused, watching the way they reacted to its presence, there was shrewd intelligence in those monstrous eyes. Then it started becoming smaller as it began approaching again, oddly as if to make them more comfortable with its fearsome presence. Suddenly another of the whip masters, a young woman named Euna, pointed at it. "It has a child!"

Zehava immediately le eeages herself up taking Orev's medicine staff as a cane, while ignoring the pain in her leg. He put a hand out, but he noticed no one else was moving to shop her and stood up to help her walk. "If you're going to be a fool, I may as well help you."

She didn't even respond, just leaned on his shoulder as they started walking, she needed to see what child the beast was carrying. As they came close to it the Amarok was only the size of a horse, and she could clearly see her daughter Valen holding onto its about in desperation. She took her daughter into her arms, lost in tears of joy and sadness for a few long moments. After hugging her crying daughter close and checking her for injuries, Zehava forcefully swallowed her fear and looked at their Sacred Folk visitor again. It had sat on its haunches and was regarding her calmly. "Thank you. My other daughter? Did you see her?"

The Amarok didn't move or reply, just sat there looking at her, which was answer enough. Perhaps the whip masters with her husband would find and bring her Elsara home too. She kissed her daughter



again then looked back up, it hadn't left, or even moved for that matter. Why wasn't it leaving? Why had it helped them at all? If an Amarok cared about her Valen so much, what was her daughter meant to become?

