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"Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is." - Carl Jung

If you believe that you can damage, then believe that you can fix. ~Rebbe Nachman of Breslov

Tribes

Mari awoke in darkness, to a world that was all noise. Noise dominated her consciousness: rushing wind, the continuous sound of impact. She could not tell if trees were falling against each other outside, or if the roof was caving in, or if the entire land was simply striving against itself, tearing itself to pieces. She could not at first pick out individual sounds. There were human screams, there was the clash of metal, there was the driving rain against the front of their dwelling; being that most of the dwelling was built into a hill, she had to think that many of the sounds, loud and overwhelming as they were, were muffled.

She heard a small, metallic clank near her in the pitch darkness and sat up, sliding out from under her quilt and folding as silently as she could manage into a crouch on the floor, her hands braced against the mattress. Which way to move? She felt around on the floor for her clothing and gear.

“Mari. I’m going to fill a few game bags with food. Get dressed. Quickly.”

Jac’s whisper came from somewhere near the door. The sound Mari heard had been Jac, then, probably getting her spear. Mari’s muscles loosened, and only then did she realize she had awakened with senses in full alert, adrenaline pumping through her body.

She got dressed, not bothering with quiet now. Belt. Boots. weapon. a leather vest that Jac had made for her to go under her coat: that would provide some protection. Kippah. Over the kippah, she tied a thin, supple leather wrap that Jac had made for her; it was like a headscarf, only made of leather. It kept out some of the rain during their morning hunts, and would now serve as both an aid to camouflage and protection. She wrapped the remnant of the garment around her lower face, and secured it in the knot in back of her head. She tied a leather strap across her body diagonally, from shoulder to hip, looping it through her belt; in it she secured the small darts she had made from the rabbit bones. Before fastening the tiny leather quiver in the strap, she re-tipped each dart with tannic acid from the bark flask at her belt.

She didn’t think about killing, and whether she would be able to do it. She was focused on listening to the noise outside, picking out as many sounds as she could, while quickly getting her gear ready. Her heart thudded; her muscles felt tense and ready. She felt...good. She paused for a moment in the doorway,

processing that thought. She felt good? She felt better than she had in a long time. There was no fear - there was only the desire to act, driving her body forward, making her mind sharp and fast as it assessed, took stock, prepared. She felt so alive.

In the main room, Jac had thrown more kindling on the fire so they could see more readily in the flickering light. Jac was on the floor in front of the table in a slight crouch, yanking leather thongs that sealed the mouths of the game bags she held clamped under her arm, tying the knots quickly. She turned her shoulder swiftly, looked at Mari, and flashed her a dagger-swift, feral grin. So, thought Mari, she feels it, too. The almost pleasurable excitement. The quickening of her blood. The readiness.

Jac handed her a bag, and she slung it over her shoulder. "We'll just go out the front door," Jac whispered. "No need to force ourselves through the exit tunnel; there is no sense now in trying to stay hidden." A few days ago, Jac had shown Mari a small, earthen exit tunnel that was dug in the room where Jac's mentor had installed a primitive water pump. It was only to be used in extreme emergency, as it was a small, long tunnel, and could only fit one body. Crawling one behind the other meant possible danger to them both, if the tunnel had collapsed somewhere along its length in the years since it was created.

Jac opened the door cautiously, and slipped out sideways through the narrow crack. Mari followed; they both stood there for a few heartbeats, then straightened slowly as they saw they needn't have bothered with caution. There was no one around, but Mari heard, under the roar of the storm, the sharp clash of metal, and an occasional human cry. She smelled the sharp tang of smoke, and her eyes burned. Fire.

Mari was glad of the thin leather covering her mouth as they set off into the acrid air in the rising light of dawn, dodging and weaving from tree to rock, trying to stay somewhat hidden, so they could see what was going on before they became involved in it. There was no need for them to move silently. The thunderstorm raged, trees sawed the air, creaking and groaning; every now and then there was a deafening crack, sometimes followed by the rushing groan of a falling tree, which would usually stop before it hit the ground, held up by the trees around it. Mari could not see the source of the fire; she had thought at first that the forest was on fire, but as they made their way toward the mist wall, she saw no sign of it. There were no animals, no living things. If there was a fire, they would be in full view, retreating to higher ground.

Then, there it was: fire. An enormous bonfire, with bodies moving to and fro, heaving, striking each other: a confusing, writhing, sharply moving mass of people that set Mari's heart hammering against her ribs, in her throat and

temples. They broke into a run. For the first time, Mari wondered what they were running toward. Who was fighting? Why were she and Jac going there? What side would they take, and how would she tell one “side” from the other, anyway?

Then she saw him: Grandpa, the light of the fire illuminating that face she would pick out of any crowd. It would have been ludicrous under any other circumstances, to see him now, in his ordinary clothes. But it was not ludicrous: it was horrible, grotesque, shocking. He stood with a fierce grimace on his usually gentle face, one hand holding Is by the arm, the other raising a club to strike. To strike Ismael. Grandfather was wearing his cardigan; he was not dressed for battle. Is was wearing a smoking jacket, of all the ridiculous things. He was holding a large rock in his hand. As Mari raced toward them, she saw Is grab Grandfather’s upraised arm, turn him slightly with brute force, and smash the rock into the side of his head.

Her Grandfather crumpled. Is had not seen her. He glanced at Grandfather’s still form, turned, jumped over another fallen body, and was lost in the mass of people. There had been screams, but now she heard only sharp animal cries and grunts as people locked with each other, trying to harm. Trying to kill. Mari reached Grandfather, and gathered him into her arms. He was unconscious, very heavy, his head flopping hard against her arm, just below her shoulder. She tried to shift him. There was a faint pulse in his neck.

The fighting seemed to have shifted to the other side of the bonfire, because she could see nothing, only moving bodies in the flickering light and smoke. She laid him down gently, and kissed his cheek. "What are you doing out here in that old cardigan?" she breathed a ragged laugh that threatened to become hysterical tears. She felt her chest clench as she bottled it up; when she stood, it came over her:

Rage.

She would kill Is. She would kill all of these people. She saw a woman across the way who was not occupied in fight. Their eyes met, and Mari felt only the desire to kill. All thought fled; she lunged around the bonfire, raising her dagger.

The woman was gone. Mari whirled; as she squinted through the smoke to pick out the writhing bodies, looking for Jac, she noticed something odd. As the sun rose and the darkness lifted, she could see their faces more clearly; all of their faces. All of them familiar.

She lowered her hand slightly. She still felt the need to fight someone, anyone, the need thundered like the voice of starvation, drowning out everything else; but her mind was rapidly taking over.

These were all people that she knew. There was Is again. He was fighting her Grandmother's seamstress. There was the woman from the coffee shop. There was Jac, at last; she seemed to have lost her spear and was grappling hand-to-hand with Owen, one of Mari's old neighbors. The more Mari looked closely at the individual faces of each person, the more she saw that she knew every single one.

"Manuscripts," she whispered, and took a bone dart out of the quiver at her breast. She set it into the wooden blowpipe Jac had made her, and targeted Owen. She moved closer; no one was paying any attention to her. The forest floor was sticky with blood, and Mari nearly fell as she stepped on the arm of a limp body, dead on the ground. Mari hopped over the body. Owen turned to her, his balding head shiny with sweat; she saw recognition in his eyes, and then, she blew.

The dart sank into his neck. If he were human, Mari thought, it would do nothing. She repeated the thought again. Human, no effect. I am no murderer.

His eyes bewildered, Owen let go of Jac, and reached up to feel the dart at his neck. "Mari?" he was asking, and then - and then he was like a paper lantern burning from the inside. Some bright patches grew rapidly over his skin, and his body just...crumpled in on itself.

Mari shrieked, and Jac lunged to her, grabbed her arm.

“This is not natural.” Jac hissed, “This is...against the order of things.” She dragged at Mari’s arm; Mari stumbled along behind her, her legs feeling rubbery, her feet like wooden blocks. Her eyes were still riveted on the spot where Owen had fallen, dear, gentle, maddeningly quiet, certain, always-right Owen: Owen screaming, writhing, burning light flashing out from between holes in his skin, until he was gone, just a crumpled mound on the ground to show where he had been.

“Mari!” Jac stopped, yanked Mari’s arm until Mari faced her, and slapped her, hard, stingingly, across her mouth. “Come!”

The shock brought Mari back to her senses. She followed at a run; Jac stopped and slipped into a ring of redwood trees. They had often made use of these small rings of redwoods; they would be hidden here, unless anyone came too close.

Mari crumpled forward to the ground, half sitting, half kneeling. She buried her fingers under the needles and debris on the forest floor, clawing with her fingers until they were deep inside the springy earth. Dry sobs burned her throat; the image of Owen, her dart in his neck, a bewildered question on his face, collapsing and burning from the inside, still hung in front of her wide, staring eyes.

Jac had been trying to say something; Mari was aware of her voice, far away, but did not catch the words. She felt Jac's hand dig into her upper arm, hard- her upper arm where Grandfather's head had fallen and left a bruise. Mari flinched; Jac shook her sharply, and let go.

"Mari. It's Manuscripts. Who did you see?"

"Everyone. I saw everyone I know. Everyone I've ever known. Fighting. Killing."

"Mari, listen. I saw everyone I know. This is not natural. These are manuscripts. The Archives have gone wild; it has turned upon itself. What else did you see? Or, more importantly, what did you not see?"

"Not...see?" Mari turned to Jac, her breathing slowing at last.

"The wall of mist. The wall. the border between this time, this place, and the Time-Between-Times. I know that place, Mari. We were right where the wall of mist should have been. "

"What does it mean?" Mari unwrapped the thin leather from her head and face, and mopped her streaming nose and eyes.

"Somehow, the wall has been breached. For some reason, the Manuscripts are trying to get into the Lost Kingdom. I don't know why they are killing each other.

“The Shadow?”

“Yes. the Shadow must have turned them wild, only worse: it must have tainted them, twisted them beyond all recognition, and it must be striving to get into the Lost Kingdom now.”

“What is the Lost Kingdom? You were there.”

“I don’t know, Mari.” Jac hit the ground with a balled fist, “I wish I had done more investigating. I just wanted to leave! I was focused on getting out! Now I don’t have enough information. I don’t understand why...the cruelty back there...Mari,” Jac gasped, “Mari, there were children there. Women. It didn’t matter.”

“My Grandfather. An old man in a cardigan sweater, the one he used to curl up in, with a book by the fire.” Mari’s voice was stopped by a sob.

“I wanted to kill, Jac. I destroyed Owen. I would have killed anyone. There was a woman; I don’t know who she was, maybe someone I knew long ago- maybe someone I only met once. I would have killed her. I wanted to- I *wanted* to.”

“You saw everyone you knew-”

“Everyone. Jac-” Mari’s breath caught on a mad, impossible idea. “I came through the door to the future. So did you...?”

Jac's hands, which had been blindly sifting around the forest floor, grasping pebbles and putting them in a small pile, slowed, and then stilled.

"Yes. The future door." She looked at Mari, hope lightening her smudged, exhausted face. "The Shadow. the Darkness. We are still inside you, Mari, this is your trial. It's mad..it's insane," she muttered to herself, rubbing her hand across her lips as though to shove the thoughts and words back in. "Mari. It's a wild guess, a desperate one. I have been here many, many years- more than I have counted. But if we are somehow- inside you now,"

"In my future."

"It's changeable."

"I can fix this?"

"Go. Go back, Mari. Find a doorway. Find a way out. Go back to where you came in. Cross the stream. Pass the log where you dug that pathetic shelter. Keep going. Find a door, go through it. Erase this, undo this, try to find Is, the real Ismael; somehow we have to stop the Manuscripts from opening the way into the Lost Kingdom. It has something to do with time. We have to find out why the Shadow wants the way open. We have to find out why there was murder done here tonight. Why they would all kill each other. We have to prevent it from happening."

“We?”

“I will find a way, Mari. I’ll help you from here, if I can’t find a way out. Just Go. Raven.” Jac smiled, then. “Raven, own your name and go.”

Mari rose, looked at Jac’s shining, clever monkey face one last time, did not say anything- there was too much to say- turned, and ran. With her knowledge that she could kill, she ran. With her heart still wanting to kill, she ran. With her own shadow on her back, in her mind and heart, the knowledge that she was capable of the greatest hatred, and so she carried the Shadow inside her, with this knowledge bringing a new hardness to her face and sorrow spreading over her like the black wings of the raven she was named for, but with a resolve to heal this - to fix this - kindling in her heart, She ran.