

## **“Dragonhead and Dragonheart”**

*A Wielder and Wellspring Story*

*Author: D. Sanders*

### **Introduction - Of Wielders and Watchers**

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The world of Holst was a wild and untamed land full of dangers from the skies, the land and the seas. The only protection the people had were the ones called Wielders, those few men born with the talent to wield the magic of the land to protect and shelter. Wielders were always men, in the history of Holst, not a record existed of a woman being born a wielder. Wielders could use the energy in the land to shape magic and battle the beasts and natural dangers that threatened the land and its people. A Wielder could use any source of natural power to manipulate magic to protect the people of Holst. A Wielder was the most revered profession in the land and all Wielder's were highly respected and given rest, food and lodging in any village he chose to protect, even if they never stayed long and had wandering feet while young and unmated and looking for his perfect Wellspring of power.

A Wielder became even stronger when his Wellspring was found. A Wellspring could be either gender but was usually always a woman and they naturally and instinctually were born capable of drawing out energy from the land, collecting it like a pool within them from which their Wielder would drink. A Wielder and Wellspring pair would always be drawn to each other and more often than not, once they connected together as a pair, would never part from each other. Love was a foundation that made stronger bonds between a Wielder and his Wellspring.

It also was quite genetically common for a Wielder to be highly possessive of his Wellspring. Once he found, connected and mated to his match a Wielder was likely to kill a man over just looking at his Wellspring. It was a side effect of their deeper bonding of power. Once a Wielder supped from a matched Wellspring, he was a man possessed and would never lose the desire to drink of the power his match fed to him. It was more addictive than a drug and more potent than an aphrodisiac.

Male Wellsprings were rare and it was even rarer they bonded permanently to their Wielder. Male Wellsprings were often kept at hand just as an extra source of power in emergencies from which many Wielders could drink from simultaneously during battle. Male Wellsprings often died young, drained of power and used until the breaking point. It was accepted truth and it was the norm that a male wellspring was kept apart from others in his village, knowing that his duties were to the people and the land and not to himself. They did not socially interact; they were objects and tools and made no familial attachments. Knowing their fates were short lived and the fewer people to love him, the fewer would be hurt when he died.

After all, Wielders were always male and the Wellspring he was fated to partner with in life would be more than a source and bolster of his power, but a mate to bear his children and keep his bed warm at night. Very few Wielders would choose a male to be his Wellspring and certainly no children could be bred from such a pairing. It was imperative that Wielders and Wellsprings passed on their powers to their offspring; it was a hereditary trait that needed to be carried on for survival.

Male Wellsprings being the exception, they were not encouraged and in fact forbidden to mate. They were a genetic anomaly and it was not a desirable trait to be passed on to children. If a Wielder's son was born as a Wellspring and not a Wielder he was immediately given to the temple to be raised apart, severed from his family at birth. It was an insult to the Wielder's pride to have a son that did not have his gifts and rather than get attached to a child that would die before the parents, the parents gave him to the temple scholars to be raised and taught his duties to the people.

He was village and public property, he was less than a man, he was simply a village commodity, a source of power for wandering Wielder's to use at will and drain dry.

It was the way of Holst for centuries and not to be questioned but to be accepted...

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That era of oppression lasted almost three hundred years Until King Gardar ascended the throne and through his diligence, love, compassion and fortitude brought about the end of male wellspring suppression and imprisonment. His love for his Uncle Dune and Uncle Parna cemented his beliefs and through his beloved nephews Goh and Obie and Gandes and Yidane helped paved the way for a new era of freedom.

Male Wellsprings no longer were objects and public property forced into a life of sequestered celibacy and Male and Female alike no longer were forced to give up titles or lands when they bonded to their wielders. It was a golden era in the land of Holst, when bonding was returned to that state of being which was an equal partnership ordained by the gods and ruled on love alone...

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### **Act I - The Children We Once Were**

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The sun was bright, the breeze balmy and the afternoon sultry and it would have been the perfect backdrop to a relaxing and ideal romantic tryst had there not been the squealing, shouting and laughing permeating the air as a pair of children splashed and cavorted in the surf.

Goh looked at Jujain and Rendra and cocked an eyebrow. “Does your offspring always have so much energy?” Goh asked and Jujain chuckled.

“I think Juubie keeps it in his pocket.” Jujain chuckled and Obie grinned at his semi-namesake dashing across hot sand.

“But he’s naked.” Obie added with a grin as the five year old miniature wellspring streaked by the group enjoying a southern trip with his parents and his favorite ‘uncles’.

“The little fountain has invisible pockets like all wellsprings.” Jujain replied as an equally miniature wielder and native of the area chased after his new playmate.

“What’s that little guy’s name again? I can never understand the native dialect here. The accents are so thick.” Rendra asked and Goh smiled.

“Tahnapay. His Father is Tahnoapatet, the tribe’s dragonhead.” Goh said watching the children pause to examine what looked like a dead fish on the shoreline, typically disgusting behavior for young boys to engage in at their respective ages of five and six.

“I thought I sensed a wielder in him.” Rendra said grimacing as she watched her son prod the dead fish with a stick.

“Potentially a powerhouse of one, like his father. They grow wielders strong down here. It has to do with proximity to the dragon nesting areas and the even richer natural power matrixes that collect down here. You have to be able to manipulate vast amounts of raw power if you want to use the land to work, it’s also why we northern bred wielders always feel high on life down here, we are high, literally. The land alone recharges us just by walking on it.” Goh said curiosity getting the better of him and he wandered over to see what the two kids were up to, he regretted it the moment the stench of rotting fish wafted over his nostrils and he turned back and headed back to the adults and fresher air.

"Boys will be boys and will be revolting while playing with noxious corpses." Obie said and Goh nodded looking green.

"Papa come look at this fish!" Juubie hollered and Jujain indulged his son and walked over and pretended to be interested in rotting scales and fish guts.

"It's an Angler. Deep Sea fish, strange to have on shore." The dark little native said pointing out a rather adult fact that had Jujain cock his head.

"Really?" He asked and the boy nodded.

"Father say, when beasties from the deep come to death on land the dragons will be flying and many will not return. It is sad." He said and now everyone was listening to the youth with interest.

"Aye, losing a dragon is very sad. You're a very smart boy." Goh said and Tahnapay smiled winsomely. His dark tanned skin a reddish brown in hue, his midnight black hair already long and braided down his back and his almond shaped deepest brown and nearly black eyes were full of southern mystery if one didn't notice the two missing front teeth in his smile that made him an adorable boy of six like any other his age.

"Father tells me many stories. If I am strong I may one day be dragonhead of my own tribe and I must learn all I can and tell what I learn to others." Tahnapay said, puffing up his little chest and Juubie grinned.

"Papa tells me stories too. Did you know that boy wellsprings used to have to live in temples? Papa says I'm the first born that didn't have to." Juubie said and Tahnapay nodded.

"We have no temples down here, our boy dragonhearts always live free. Father says the tribes saw only bad things if making the heart of our people suffer. Boys like you come very rare. Most dragonheart's are girls." Tahnapay said and Juubie nodded.

"That's very true. Right now in Holst according to the palace archives there are over two hundred female Wellsprings and only ten males. Parna is the eldest living right now, he is sixty seven and retired with my Great Uncle Dune up on the north western sea. He is my great uncle by bonding. Then there are in order of age Fausten fifty, Marigol thirty-five, Rubigen thirty, Stanisha twenty-eight, Periwyn twenty-five, Glyndus twenty-four, my Obie at twenty-two, my brother Gandes at twenty-one and young Juubie here the runt of the litter at five. That's all we have on record at the palace." Goh said and Tahnapay nodded.

“There is one here. He is very old. Dragonheart Queza is mate to Dragonhead Mezzaitapal. They old as dragons almost. One hundred says father. They come not to the tribe gatherings any more, they stay up on mountain with dragons now. Ends days soon, but they most happy and love many, many years my Mother says. She tells me they so old they are scaly wrinkled like dragons but Mother says she saw them once when she was little and they smile like boys still. Queza never sent away from the tribe for being born a dragonheart. Father says he bond to the Dragonhead very young, only twelve summers old when they fly as bonded dragon pair.” Tahnay said and once again the grown-ups were astounded with this child who talked like a tribal elder and not a mere six-year-old boy.

“Tahna, you are a wise little dragon yourself. I don’t have to be a dragon to foresee you will be a fine dragonhead one day yourself.” Goh said and Tahnay beamed.

“I try to be good like my father. I love my father very much. I hope I have a good dragonheart like my mother too. Father may be Dragonhead, but mama, she can make even papa behave.”

“Oh baby, that’s what wellsprings do. You all can throw around the power, we make sure you never forget who you get it from.” Rendra said with a wink ruffling Tahna’s hair.

“I never heard a truer statement!” Goh said with a laugh and Obie just cocked an eyebrow at him.

“You’d better believe it.” Obie winked down at Juubie who laughed.

“It’s lunchtime and you boys need to eat and that includes the grown-ups.” Rendra said taking the boys hands and leading them back to the little grass huts of the village to feed the males old and young alike.

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The adults watched the children with heightened interest as the weeks of their winter sojourn passed. To say that they had become inseparable would have been an understatement. From Dawn until Dusk Tahnay monopolized Juubie’s time without a modicum of complaint from Juubie who eagerly scampered off after Tahna daily. Granted there were no other children Tahna’s age in his small village and children of a like age always managed to find each other in these situations, but something else was there that the adults noticed.

The way they really didn't have to speak much for the other to know and understand the silent communication. All Tahna had to do was point at something and Juubie's interest was captured and the pair would huddle over the object together in silent wonder. "I think they are speaking telepathically actually." Goh said as he watched the boys on the beach.

"Juubie can't yet, he's not old enough to open his senses to his own well."  
Rendra replied and Obie shook his head.

"I could at his age, my Father was already tapping into me before I was even aware of my own well of power fully. It's possible." Obie said scrutinizing the boys with the others.

"But Pandar was already a wielder and a crazy one. Little Tahna is about as aware of his own gifts as Juubie is." Jujain said and Goh smiled.

"All the more reason they've discovered it accidentally. Tell me I'm not the only one here seeing a bond forming." Goh said.

"They are children!" Rendra gasped and Goh held his hands up.

"I'm not talking about the kind of bond we have. Well, yes I am in a way. However, neither boy is obviously anywhere near the stage of life where they have adult needs in a bonding. Nevertheless, it's there, I'd bet money on it actually. Right now all they need is a friend and someone to share childhood excitement with. I'd wager in ten years it would be another matter entirely. Look at how Juubie reads Tahna like a book and responds like every wellspring does over their wielder. You all have that innate sixth sense to know what we need before we do. Moreover, wellsprings can only sense that from their bonded wielders. You are all as clueless as we are when it comes to others you're not bonded to. Look at Tahna and how utterly possessive he is of Juubie's time and attention. Wielders only get that obsessive over their own wellsprings. I tell you, this is a bond I'm positive of it." Goh said and Jujain flopped into a beach chair and raked his dark brown hair back out of his eyes.

"Then what do we do? If this IS a bond, separating them could be harmful and I am not leaving my five year old son half a world away from me." Jujain said and Goh shook his head.

"This isn't to a sexual stage, separation wouldn't harm them the bond is not consummated like ours. Granted they'll probably miss each other like nobody's business and pine a long time but they are children, they will adapt. Once that cord of bonding becomes too taut for them to deny, it'll act like a rubber cord and snap them back together. I'm not suggesting leaving Juubie here, but I do suggest once he's of age you definitely bring him back here. Its not likely Tahna will leave, he won't be able to, and that kid is sharp as a tack. He'll be

dragonhead of his own tribe village probably before he has hair on his balls.” Goh said and Jujain chuckled.

“Hell, I’d follow that kid NOW as a leader and he’s only six. That I don’t doubt in the slightest. He’s like his father, and his father was dragonhead of this tribe at fourteen.”

“Precisely, so Juubie will have to come back for him. I may be wrong I know. I do tend to wax romantic when it suits me to be so. If I am wrong then what are you out but another southern holiday? If I’m right, the next time you bring Juubie back here, you’ll leave without him.” Goh said and Rendra sighed.

“The dragons, can you ask them? I know the females are oracles.”

“If they’d tell you. The only one I know that told us point blank our own futures was the Golden one that Dune and Parna met all those years ago. Parna told me he suspected the only reason she bothered to tell them anything was just on a whim because she was amused with Parna and Dune for playing with her babies.” Obie commented scratching his chin.

“And not to mention all the dragon’s took flight last week out to sea and haven’t been seen since. Tahna was right in predicting they would fly when he found that fish on the beach.” Jujain added and Goh nodded.

“I can feel the turbulence. It’s way off shore, probably a rouge node they are dealing with. The waves are a lot higher than usual too.” Goh added as his face took on deep contemplation.

“Whatever the truth, just let it be and go on normally. We can’t change fate so why bother about it? Right now they are just boys and I intend to just let them be boys. Whether or not if one day they will grow up to be a bonded pair. They aren’t causing any harm and they are happy playing so let them play.” Rendra said and Obie smiled.

“Good idea and I think I will join them.” Obie said sauntering out to the beach in his colorful patterned loin cloth and joining the boys in making sand castles on the beach and combing the sand for shells. The others joined them and before long Jujain and Goh were buried up to their necks in sand and two young boys were laughing as they buried the grown-ups.

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Rendra sighed as she watched two tearful youths say good-bye. It was time to leave and Tahna’s face was red splotched with tears and Juubie’s was no better as they gave the boys a little private time to bid farewell.

“Promise come back?” Tahna asked and Juubie nodded wiping his running nose on his sleeve.

“I promise.” Juubie replied as Tahna reached out and hung a beaded coral necklace around Juubie’s neck.

“Mama helped me make it, it’s good luck from the sea. Coral protects fish from sharks it protect you from bad things.” Tahna said and Juubie cried even harder as his hand reached up to clutch at the necklace around his neck. From his finger he took off the little silver ring he wore, a gift from his grandmother and he placed it on Tahna’s finger.

“Remember me?” Juubie asked and Tahna sniffled.

“Always. Miss you already I do.”

“Me too. I’ll send you letters I promise.”

“Me too.” Tahna replied as they hugged a final time and Jujain and Tahnoapatet silently collected their sons.

“You always welcome in our tribe, you give us all great joy and my son much spirit to have such a friend in your son.” Tahnoapatet said and Jujain smiled.

“We’ll come back someday, I promise. Thank you for such love and welcome while we were here.” Jujain replied and both men shook hands and smiled sadly as they separated their sons. Tahnoapatet took Tahnay aside for comfort with his mother while Jujain delivered Juubie into his mother’s arms in the cart as they headed north again.

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Juubie was sitting at the kitchen table helping his youngest brother, a wielder, do his arithmetic homework from school. While his younger sister sat across from them at the table helping their mother peel potatoes for dinner.

“I don’t know why you bother Juubie, Renju is pathetic at math.” Jana sniggered and Juubie at seventeen leveled her a stern look.

“So were you Jana, I had to help you too. Don’t be so mean.” Juubie scolded and Rendra just smiled as she browned meat for the stew in a pan. Juubie never made her worry, he was a saint in patience when it came to his younger siblings. Jana was eleven and had been conceived on their trip south all those years ago and Renju was now eight and being so much older than his siblings, Juubie was a great help in taking care of them and helping out his mother. He always had infinite patience in helping them with their reading, writing and arithmetic. Juubie

had gotten remarkable grades in school and the monks at the temple that taught the local children were always giving him high praises.

By the age of fifteen he'd completed all his rudimentary learning and was already studying higher learning on his own. History was always Juubie's favorite subject, and the monks often said there wasn't a book or story left in the archive that Juubie hadn't read at least once if not more. He just said he found history to be like a fanciful story of adventure that just happened to be true.

When he wasn't studying he was either helping his father at the jailhouse organize files and records or with his grandfather helping at the Inn he ran by busing tables or washing dishes. Juubie was always industrious and the word lazy couldn't be used in the same sentence as the youth.

During times of battle or upset Juubie would open his well to everyone in the area, making himself a public wellspring of additional power to aide and Jujain often remarked how similar Juubie was to Obie in power. It seemed male wellsprings were just naturally stronger than the females even without having to be ripped open like Obie was. Juubie wasn't as strong as his favorite uncle Obie, but he was no slouch in the amount of power he could generate in times of need.

Rendra was musing silently, when Jana jumped and a box appeared on the table. Juubie squealed and dived for the box. Over the years, everyone knew that if something just appeared on the table, nine times out of ten, it was going to be for Juubie from Tahna.

Juubie grabbed the box like a young man possessed and headed over to his favorite chair by the fire to open it. First was the letter tied to the top and Juubie always read the letter first before he opened the box.

"Mama how come we don't get presents from the south?" Renju asked and Rendra sighed.

"Honey, because that's Juubie's friend, you get presents from yours, Juubie's friend just lives much farther away and it's as simple as that. Do your homework." Rendra said chewing her lip. What with having two more children and school and Jujain's job and that winter of plague they just hadn't had time to take another trip south and it was obvious now Juubie was going to be alone if they didn't. Just the way his face became filled with joy and then sadness spoke volumes.

Rendra watched Juubie devour his letter, his eyes rapidly scanning the words while his fingers absently played with the coral necklace he had never taken off since the day Tahna had given it to him all those years ago. His eyes were filled with longing as he read and Rendra knew they couldn't avoid it much longer Juubie was seventeen and in three months would be eighteen. He was well passed the age of consent and the longer he was apart from his wielder the

worse he would become. Goh had been right, she could tell by looking at Juubie he was well bonded to Tahna, his heart was already hundreds of miles away and had been left there twelve years earlier.

“What’s Tahna have to say?” Rendra asked and Juubie looked up and smiled.

“He’s busy with his tribe. They moved further south last winter when the storms that blew in destroyed a lot of the beaches. They are growing sugar cane, pomegranates and pineapples in their new territory and the first crops just came in and he sent me the first pineapple he picked since he knew I loved them so much from when I was there. We’ll have a nice dessert tonight after dinner.” Juubie said and Rendra smiled.

“You don’t have to share your treat, he sent that to you.”

“But it’s plenty big enough to share. I don’t mind. Renju and Jana never got to taste them, it’ll be a treat for us all.” Juubie said opening the box and handing the prickly fruit to his mother. Jana wrinkled her nose.

“You eat that?” Renju asked making a similar face.

“Oh gods yes, they are so sweet and tangy it tastes like the south.” Juubie said smiling ear to ear as he settled back into his chair to read his letter again and discovering there was more in the box. A lei of hibiscus blooms and plumeria blossoms that Juubie inhaled deeply before hanging them around his neck.

“He’s sending you flowers too?” Jana asked and Rendra’s heart stopped with the dreamy look that arrested Juubie’s face.

“I love them and you can’t grow them here in the north. They smell so nice. I can’t wait to go back and smell them in the air all the time again. The south always smells like flowers and fruit. It’s warm all year round with no snow ever. The rain is even warm and you can run naked and splash in puddles and get soaking wet without fear of catching a cold.” Juubie said and Rendra chuckled.

“You did run around naked for months. I couldn’t keep clothes on you.”

“Too hot mama.” Juubie smiled but it never reached his eyes, his eyes were miles away running naked on the beach with a boy in the rain.

Rendra was going to talk to Jujain that night after the kids went to bed, it was high time Juubie went where he belonged. He was no longer a child and he needed his freedom, he needed Tahna.

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Tahna was listening to the crickets chirp late that night and wondering if Juubie had gotten his presents. He knew Juubie couldn't send a reply until his father was available. Being a dragonheart he could not transport items on his own, but Tahna knew from experience a reply would eventually arrive to confirm Juubie had gotten his letter and a return letter would follow. Tahna sighed and lay back in his bed pillows. He knew damn well Juubie was his dragonheart and he had known since he was a boy, that very first day he'd laid eyes on the brown haired, green eyed northern stranger whose nose had been covered in freckles from the sun by the time he'd left. Over the years, the longing to have Juubie back had just grown stronger and the minute Tahna learned how to transport items he focused on the coral necklace he'd made and began sending his dragonheart tokens of his affection.

The coral necklace and the silver ring that Tahna now wore in his ear since it no longer fit his finger was his only connection to Juubie that they had both touched and Tahna could focus on to send items back and forth and thankfully Juubie never took his necklace off which made sending items such vast distances easier.

Tahna was about to doze off when a box appeared at his feet and like Juubie he dove for it and ripped open the letter.

*Dearest Tahna,*

*I just got your present and it tasted lovely. My brother and sister are now pineapple devotees and are begging me to ask you to send more soon. I still have a slice left and I'm saving it for breakfast. That is if my sneak of a little brother doesn't snatch it while I'm sleeping. Sometimes I wish I was a wielder just so I could put a ward on it to keep light fingers off it. However, sadly, I'm just a wellspring and must wake in the morning and race to it before he gets out of bed, the little rotten light fingered silly.*

*I was happy to hear your new territory has been so good to your tribe, I can't wait to see it for myself. I'm beginning to fret that we'll never get a chance to come south again. Between my parents having more children, the troubles up here and Papa's constant stress over his job, more and more years come and go. I've asked to come myself but Papa won't allow me to come by myself, it's too dangerous for a wellspring to travel alone without protection from rogue nodes and were-beasts since they are drawn to our power. I understand that, but it does not make me happy in the slightest.*

Tahna jolted with fright at reading that section of his letter and wholeheartedly agreed with Jujain that Juubie was not to come by himself under no uncertain circumstances. Regardless of the fact Tahna wanted him here as much as Juubie wanted to be here. Some risks were just not worth taking. Tahna read on by the light of his fire.

*I miss you so much, I think about you all the time anymore. I'm talking like there was never a time I didn't think about you, it's just more so now. I'm going crazy here wanting to come back and waiting is getting so very hard. I guess I'm just a spoiled brat and I feel guilty for wanting something that most people don't even get once in their lives. I had the most wonderful trip that year and I made the best friend I could ever ask for, I am lucky and I am grateful for that but I can't help it, spoiled brat or not I want to come back to you. Is it wrong to want something like that?*

*Father Durem says my head is lost in the clouds and I should be grateful for what I do have. I am grateful I really am. It's just, it's hard to explain I have this need I can't describe and when I try to tell someone how I feel they just tell me I'm selfish and I should be happy where I am. I don't know what to think anymore so I've stopped talking about it to others. All I do know for certain is I want to see you again someday before I die, I don't think that's too much to wish for selfish or not.*

*I'm sorry for getting so depressing, I just miss you so much sometimes I just want to cry with frustration. Forgive me for not sending a more cheerful letter, I promise next time I'll write something happier.*

*Please take care of yourself and tell me when you find your dragonheart I'd like to know what she's like. I'll bet she'll be awfully pretty.*

*Love Always,  
Juubie*

*P.S. I sent you some of Mama's plum candy, I know you like that. Don't eat it all at once.*

Tahna folded his letter back up with a sigh. "Juubie, you are my dragonheart and no my heart, it is not selfish to want to be here with me, it is our bond. It hurts for me now too the longer you are away from me." Tahna said forgoing the candy treat since he wasn't in the mood to eat sweets. He was too concerned over Juubie and the obvious signs that it was now getting dangerous for them to be apart. They were bonded and a bond denied was painful to endure. Especially when it seemed the members of Juubie's clan were all idiots.

Who would call a bonded dragonheart selfish for wanting to be with his mate? Tahna thought. That was crazy, everyone knew in the tribes that the dragonhead and dragonheart bonds were too strong to ever be considered foolish or selfish. It was a need, a drive and it seemed Juubie's tribe members were blind or just undereducated where bonds were concerned.

“Selfish? Not a selfish bone is his body! Share his gifts all the time he does. He always is thinking of family before himself! He who calls my dragonheart selfish knows him not!” Tahna grumbled now angry over Juubie’s letter. Tahna had to stop himself before he crushed his gift in his hands.

“Proof not more I need you are mine. You make me rage even far away.” Tahna said setting his box of hard plum candy down and going for a swim to cool off. There was nothing he could do from here anyway and raging about it like a mad man wasn’t going to change things.

He was a far cry from the child he once was, so was Juubie for that matter and it was high time they were together again for good.

When he got back after his swim, he moved the box his candy had come in and something additional fell out he hadn’t noticed before, a surprise present.

Tahna picked up the piece of paper with the charcoal pencil sketch on it, it was a portrait of himself as a boy, the likeness remarkable. On the back of the page Juubie had written “This is how I remember you.”

Tahna smiled. “I remember you much the same Dragonheart. I am thinking we will both be much changed than we remember when we meet again.” He said as he carefully hung the paper on his wall by his bed. The chubby little boy was gone and Tahna chuckled at himself. He was very tall now, almost six and a half feet like his father. His chest extremely broad and his bone structure massive.

Most men were built like him in the south. Large, strong oxen built men, Tahna was even bigger than most now at nineteen and he had some room to grow still truth be told. He’d been dragonhead for six years already and hard work added to his growing physique. He wondered what Juubie looked like now.

He knew most northern dragonhearts were very small creatures. In the south dragonhearts tended to be much smaller too but plump women with sturdy frames. All the northern ones he had ever seen were tiny skinny things. Rendra had been very small and Obie and Gandes weren’t much bigger. Tahna suspected Juubie was going to follow suit and he wondered just how much smaller his dragonheart was now. Before they had stood eye-to-eye, Tahna suspected that was no longer the case. They were not the children they once were.

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## **“Dragonhead and Dragonheart”**

*A Wielder and Wellspring Story*

*Author: D. Sanders*

### **Act II - Broken Faith and Winged Intervention**

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Summer turned to Winter and Winter in summer again, the cycle ever repeating and ever adding to the agony that now filled Juubie’s heart day in and day out. Every winter another excuse, another delay and another heartbreak. He had all but stopped mentioning his desires anymore; the less he voiced them the less they hurt. His twentieth summer had come and gone and he was still alone, still unmatched and still pining to return south silently. The only joy he found was the letters that still came from Tahna faithfully every week.

Rendra watched her son with growing concern he was a shell of his former self. He was pale and stayed in his room most of the time. Never venturing out to do the things he once enjoyed doing. Unless there was trouble where an extra wellspring was useful to bolster power, Juubie never bothered to make his presence known, he had imprisoned himself much as Obie had been imprisoned unwillingly. Juubie just existed day to day, hardly smiling, barely speaking and he had retreated in upon himself like he was dying in soul and Rendra had, had enough.

“Jujain, I don’t give a rat’s ass WHAT this town needs. Your son is DYING! If you can’t see it, you’re a blind mule! When does JUUBIE’S needs come first to you? Every year you promise you’ll take him south and every year you break your promise because something else comes up you can’t tear yourself away from. You can damn it and you will! I am sick to death of watching our son waste away!”

“Rendra, I have a duty to this town. I am the only resident wielder that’s not old and retired! I can’t just up and leave like we could when he was little. Do you think I like having to break promises to him? Of course I don’t!”

“This goes beyond a vacation Jujain! Look at him! He’s suffering bonding separation and you can’t deny it! He’s not a boy anymore, he’s a grown man and he’s suffering. If you can’t find time to take him south then you had bloody well better write to Goh and Obie and ask if they can take him. It’s been fifteen YEARS, fifteen! He should have consummated his bond years ago! The longer you put this off the more damage you cause to them both!”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“You will Jujain, I don’t give a damn if you find it difficult to talk about your son’s sexual needs. You have to face the facts, he’s a wellspring, he’s not going to

suddenly develop a liking for girls and breed you grandbabies! There's not a single person in this hole-in-the-wall town that can give him what he NEEDS. He's already bonded, even if there were a non-breeder in town, Juubie would not be interested. There is only one person in this world who can give Juubie happiness and he's certainly not in Garth!"

"Rendra, can we talk about this later please?"

"No. Later becomes tomorrow, becomes next week, becomes next year. How long are you going to make Juubie wait? You break faith with him as his father and with me as his mother. You break faith with your oath to the brotherhood when you deny a bond pairing that needs aide! You will promise me you will not make him wait any longer!"

"Rendra, I can't! Should I also break faith with the people I've sworn to protect?"

"Isn't Juubie one of them?"

"Damn it woman you're pissing me off. Of course he is! But the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the one!"

"I have never said this to you in my life Jujain. But right now, I utterly despise the sight of you. You'd forsake your own child? I thought better of you." Rendra fled the room in tears and Jujain slammed his fist into the table just as Juubie entered the room looking upset.

"For what it's worth Father, I understand. It doesn't hurt any less, but I do."

"Juubie, I..."

"Don't make me promises anymore father. I don't want to talk about it either." Juubie said fighting his own tears as he headed up to his room and shut the door with a soft click.

He sighed as he brushed out his long chestnut hair and braided it over his shoulder before he got into his night shirt and settled at his desk to write to Tahna.

*Beloved Tahna,*

*How do I begin? How do I confess to you my heart? How do I tell you how much I need you? I can't say it any other way other than bluntly. I love you beyond all scope and reason and it kills me to write this to you.*

*My parents are arguing again, yet another year Mother begs father to bring me south and father's duties trap him here. Just as yours prevent you from coming north. I have all but given up hope of ever seeing you again and I pray every night to the gods you will bond quickly to a dragonheart and put to rest my fears that we are truly bonded.*

*As much as it would thrill me to know I am yours beyond the love I feel in my heart, I cannot escape the fear I am really bonded to you and you suffer as much as I do now. I beg the gods every day to release us so you are free and not trapped in this as I am. I know you tell me otherwise and tell me you love me in every letter you send but I cannot help fear this love as much as I want to embrace it.*

*I pray this is all a horrible mistake and we are mistaken and our affection ends there. I know however this is not the case; try as I might to wish it otherwise. I am sick, I cannot eat anything other than bread and water anymore. Anything else cannot stay in my stomach that is in constant knots. I can't sleep, I have horrible nightmares of you and the dragons fighting and getting hurt and I'm not there to lend you power when you need it most. I can't even bear to be near couples in love without it making me weep with envy. I really am selfish I guess and this is my punishment.*

*I just wish you didn't have to suffer it with me.*

*Words cannot express how much I wish you didn't and how sorry I am I have broken my promise to you to return yet again.*

*For what it's worth, I love you with all my soul.*

*Forever Yours,  
Juubie*

Jujain was still sitting at the table when Juubie came down the stairs with the sealed letter.

"Papa, will you send this for me?" Juubie asked quietly and Jujain nodded and took the letter and it vanished from his hands.

"Son, I am sorry."

"I know. Goodnight." Juubie said turning and heading up the stairs on quiet feet.

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*::So they keep the heart another year. His tribe is foolish and his dragonhead sire most of all.::* The red female dragon mind spoke as Tahna oiled her scales behind her neck.

“From our point of view yes. However, as a Dragonhead myself I can see his torn loyalties. However much it displeases me personally.”

*::You would not forsake the one if his needs were greater. He puts little faith in the older dragonheads that could cope for the short time he is away. You cannot go because you are the only dragonhead in your tribe. He has two others in his tribe who not so old as to be facing end days as he likes to think. You are dragon wise.::*

“Thank you.” Tahna said as a fit of coughing arrested his breath.

*::You sicken more. You worry me Dragonhead. You are denied your heart and you weaken every day.::*

“I’ll manage, I have to.”

*::You will come to a point you will not be able to Tahna. You are many years passed the point you should have mated your heart. The bond will consume you if denied.::*

“Believe me Wise one. If I were able to transport myself to where Juubie is sleeping right now I would and mate him before he had breath to speak. However, since I cannot, I will have to suffer. I have little choice. Is that better has your skin stopped itching?”

*::Yes, you have oiled the dry patch nicely. Thank you.::* She said her violet eyes whirling as she lifted her head to look at Tahna. *::You must go rest Tahna, your lungs ache being this high up. Go take care of your health.::* She ordered and Tahna nodded and coughed again as he made his way down the mountain trail. Violet eyes looking after him with dread and worry.

*::You are thinking of taking flight my heart.::* The large green dragon male said as he landed beside his mate.

*::I am thinking if I do not what I see will come to pass. I wish not to lose Tahna as I have foreseen. The young heart is also growing very ill. We will lose both in a matter of months now, they have been apart too long.::* She replied.

*::It is cold in the north you too would suffer my heart.::*

*::Not for long. I intend not to linger just collect the heart and return the dragonheart to the tribe he belongs with and to his head who needs him.::*

*::You just fancy the one like you, you did when he was a dragonling too.::* Her mate accused with amusement in his eyes.

*::And who was it gave him rides over the sea just to hear him laugh because you liked it? Tell me not again my head the obvious. You liked the little heart too.::*

*::I did and do and I will go with you if you are so inclined to meddle in affairs of humans. They will fear you in the north and I must be there to protect my heart.::*

*::Then do we fly?::*

*::We do.::*

Both dragons vaulted skyward and circled once. *::I can feel Tahna's luck coral, he has used it many times to transport gifts to his heart. It has a strong aura we will follow it.::* The green male said setting his course and leading the way northward.

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Juubie's chest hurt, like he'd been coughing for days and yet he wasn't congested. He'd been having more nightmares too, ones that woke him disorientated and feeling dread loom over him like a plague. He couldn't eat, his eyes were hollow with pain and Rendra was frantic now with worry, she heard Juubie muttering Tahna's name in his sleep like a mantra for days.

"Juubie, can you take tea?" She asked coming into his room where he sat shivering under a blanket.

"No Mama, my stomach is still upset."

"You need to try though love, please you've lost so much weight recently you look gaunt."

Juubie sighed and looked at his mother with resignation in his eyes. "Mama, do we need to continue this charade now? You know as well as I do this is not some little cold I have. I'm dying. You know that as much as I do. Please just let me die in peace I'm tired of pretending I'm happy at the moment. I'm tired of being the good little boy, I'm tired of everything now. I hurt all over, I really do want to be selfish now like the monks always accused me of being. I want to selfishly sit here for however many days I have left and be comfortable as I wait to die. I don't want to pretend your teas help when they don't I'm sorry."

Rendra sobbed "Please don't say that Juubie! Please."

“Mama, I’m sorry but it’s the truth. I don’t mean to upset you I just don’t have the energy to fake it anymore. Have Papa send my ashes south at least that’s all I want now.” Juubie said and Rendra fled the room hysterical with fright and raced over to the jail house and slapped her husband hard across the face.

“Save him now or so help me by the Gods I will never forgive you! He wants to DIE! He’s in pain! He just asked me to have you send his ashes south! Will you wait until we have to burn him in a funeral pyre to keep your promise to him?”

“Is he that ill?”

“Are you blind Jujain? For the love of the Gods he cannot wait anymore!” Rendra shrieked just as the town square erupted with equal amounts of screaming and Jujain and Rendra raced outside and Jujain had to physically stop a man from charging the dragon’s with a pitchfork.

“Stop you fool! They are dragons you idiot! Never kill a dragon!” Jujain hollered walking over to the pair who landed in the square. “Why are you so far north wise ones?”

*::You wait too long to make good on a vow. They suffer needlessly. Give us the heart, we will carry him home.::* The large male said, his golden eyes flashing with anger at the dragonhead sire.

“What?”

*::You heard us foolish dragonhead. Bring forth the dragonheart with haste it is too cold here for us to linger long. Tahna suffers as Juubie does.::*

Rendra raced to the house only to see Juubie stagger out of the door and come tripping over to embrace the dragons laughing for real joy even though he was in pain.

“Why did you come all this way Wise ones? It’s too cold! Is Tahna hurt? In trouble?” Juubie asked and the red female nuzzled his cheek with her hooked beak of a nose.

*::Nay, no trouble little dragonheart. Beautiful as I knew you would be my flightless one with jeweled dragon eyes. We come to take you home. Tahna suffers as you do and we will not let ones we love suffer.::* The female said and Juubie’s whole face came alive with new hope.

“You can’t mean to carry me all that way! I’m not five anymore.” Juubie gasped and the Green male butted his chest with his head.

*::Hardly bigger than when you were a dragonling. I carry Tahna, you will be like carrying feathers. Go collect your belongings. My heart will carry your treasures and I will carry you little heart. Hurry, make haste.::* The green said and Juubie was in a daze as he gained new strength and raced back inside to shove his most precious keepsakes into a sack. Rendra and Jujain following him and Rendra packing food and water for the journey and Jujain just following in their wake in shock at seeing his son leaving and leaving for good.

Renju and Jana were standing there in awe as the dragons inspected them and spoke to them mind to mind. *::All such fine offspring. You must come visit your brother elder and not forget him. He will miss you.::* The red said and both nodded. Jana at fifteen was a beautiful girl and Renju at eleven was utterly fascinated with the large male who preened for the boy and let him take one of the loose scales from his neck in reward for a good scratch.

Juubie came rushing back out a single small sack in hand which he tied firmly to the female's back and she snorted. *::You can bring more little heart, I will not break under such little weight.::*

"I have nothing else wise one. I have all of Tahna's gifts with me and most of what he sent I ate long ago." Juubie said with a smile and the Green snorted in draconic laughter.

*::Tahna thinks much with his stomach. I have back pain to prove it when he rides.::* The large male said and Juubie smiled.

"I remember his father. If Tahna is anything like him now I am not surprised." Juubie said turning to his parents who stood there crying. Juubie rushed to hug them tightly. "I'll miss you, but I have to go. Tahna is my wielder, I've known this forever. I need him."

"We know baby. Go and be happy and write to us." Rendra said hugging him tightly.

"I promise mama."

"Be careful, I know the wise ones will protect you on your journey but make sure you write as soon as you can to let us know you got home safely." Jujain said and Juubie smiled.

"Home. Yes. I am going home and I promise Papa." Juubie said turning to his siblings.

"Jana, be good and Renju please take care of Mama and Jana and please, please don't forget to do your homework."

“I promise Juubie. Can I come see you someday?”

“You’d better.” Juubie smiled and kissed everyone good-bye and carefully crawled up on the male’s back much to the awe of everyone standing bug-eyed in the town center.

Dust flew as two dragons vaulted skyward and Juubie clung on for dear life. Forgetting how violent the take off was in comparison to the soft flight. Once airborne Juubie’s heart raced as fast as the ground raced by beneath them, dragons could fly incredibly fast and Juubie’s braid was whipping so hard behind him he had to pull it forward and tuck it into his shirt to keep it from giving him a severe headache.

*::Are you doing well little heart? Too cold this high?::*

*::Nay! Oh wise one this is as wonderful as I remember! I’m not too heavy am I?::*

*::Foolish heart, my newly hatched dragonlings weigh more than you! We are flying fast to make as much distance as possible before we rest. There is nice mountain range we will make by tonight. You must help us build large fire to keep warm, nights very cold this far north and I alone almost made poor forest burn down. I have no human hands to gather wood, my heart scold me much.::*

*::Poor Wise one. I will gather all you need I vow.::*

*::Thank you little heart, hold on tight.::*

That night Juubie did indeed gather arms full of firewood and they all huddled around the large blaze to keep warm. A foolish deer had become dinner for the dragons and Juubie for the first time in weeks felt good enough to eat and ate some of his bread rations and fixed tea on the fire and settled against the dragons to sleep peacefully until the nightmares began again and the red female nudged him awake.

*::You have bad dreamings. Tahna sick and make you feel bad as his heart. I too get bad sleep visions when my head is ill. It is what makes you a dragonhead and dragonheart true bond pair. You are ever in tune with your mate and distance makes not a difference.::*

“He refused to tell me how bad he was feeling. Please tell me.”

*::Much as you young heart. Cannot eat, cannot sleep, cannot mate with another. He has become weak and has taken ill with mundane sickness that before he would not have suffered from. His chest full of bad spirits, he coughs much.::*

“So that’s why my chest always hurts like I have a bad cold when I don’t.”

*::Aye little heart. He will need you much when you arrive to tend him, he tries to do too much, and he is stubborn but good. He is all alone, his tribe is far from the others so he is needed much. The tribe tries not to ask too much of him while he suffers your distance they understand his needs but only you can tend him as he needs.::*

“I will. By the Gods, I can’t sleep now I’m so anxious to get to him.”

*::Try though. Cannot sleep on back of my mate you will fall.::* The red teased and Juubie curled up under her chin and forced himself to relax until he slept.

They spent four days flying hard and mid-day of the fifth day the dragons circled and landed on a sandy beach, a lone little grass hut set apart from the others further up the shoreline was there and Juubie slid off the green male’s back with orders he not delay. He left his belongings with them as he raced to the hut and threw back the flap that made the door. There huddled by the fire even though it was warm outside was a shivering Tahna who looked miserable and Juubie sobbed as he raced inside and threw his arms around him.

Tahna was speechless as a petite and beautiful youth with vibrant green eyes and long chestnut hair stumbled and fell into him. The moment they touched however, Tahna knew. The shock was like fire and the power of his dragonheart swarmed him and encased him in a protective glow.

“Juubie? Juubie!” Tahna rasped, his voice thick with illness but joy as his large arms pulled the slender form closer, drinking in the warmth of his dragonheart.

“Oh Tahna. I missed you so beloved.” Juubie sobbed into a huge chest, covered in tribal tattoos of dragons in flight and intricate knotted patterns.

A fit of coughing once again arrested Tahna and Juubie pulled back out of the embrace and urged Tahna to lie down. “Let me make you some of Mama’s honey tea. It will ease your cough dearest. I won’t be a moment.” Juubie said and Tahna wanted to protest him leaving his line of sight as he exited the hut. Nevertheless, he returned moments later with a small sack in his hands and he immediately set about bringing out tea to brew.

“How?” Tahna asked when he caught his breath again.

“The wise ones came to get me, we’ve been flying non-stop for days. I had to promise them when you are well we will both go up and give them a good sand bath and oiling for their efforts. They’ve gone up to sun bathe and sleep now.”

“I’m dreaming this. They didn’t tell me that.”

“I don’t think it was planned dearest. They caught me by surprise too. Now hush, don’t talk your throat is swollen and you sound dreadful don’t risk coughing. I’ve been feeling your infection in MY chest for weeks. You have pneumonia. I can feel it so just rest and let me take care of you beloved.”

*::You’re really here to stay? This isn’t my fever dreaming?::*

“Forever my Dragonhead. Even if this is a dream come true it’s very real.” Juubie said reaching over to smooth dark black hair off Tahna’s brow and his eyes closed as he leaned into fingers that burned his skin like glorious fire.

Once he was in contact with Tahna, all of Juubie’s suffering seemed to fade into non-existence and only the residual effects of Tahna’s actual illness remained. Their bond was getting healthier by the moment now that they were together again and just touching Tahna seemed to restore him by leaps and bounds.

Juubie fixed him tea with liberal amounts of honey added to soothe a rasping sore throat and coat abused insides. Juubie was grateful he’d read so many books growing up, specifically herbal remedies which he put to good use as he made an additional concoction over the fire. Willow bark to aid in bringing down the fever and dulling aches, peppermint and ginger for nausea and Echinacea to bolster immunity and help purge the infection itself. Added to it were oranges and bananas for their restorative qualities.

“This will probably taste vile Tahna, but do drink it, it will help.” Juubie said and Tahna choked it down with a grimace.

“Gah! Foul indeed!” Tahna gagged and Juubie pressed a plum candy into his hands.

“Suck on that to kill the taste.”

“You brought me candy in your haste?”

“Of course I did dearest. I brought plenty too. I stole mama’s whole stash of it for you.” Juubie grinned and Tahna just smiled.

“Come closer heart of mine. You by far are the most good for my health.” Tahna said patting his bed pallet and Juubie complied making Tahna rest his head in his lap so he could finger comb hair away from Tahna’s strong featured face.

“So handsome. I never dreamed I’d find you like this. I remember you so differently. You’re so BIG!” Juubie said with a chuckle and Tahna smiled up at him and lifted his hand to Juubie’s cheek.

"I always suspected you'd be a tiny one. All you northern hearts don't know how to grow properly."

"We grow just fine, it's you southern men who think six feet tall is short and two hundred pounds skinny. Goodness gracious."

"I am big. My father was too if you remember." Tahna smiled and Juubie nodded.

"I do. Even Uncle Goh looked short next to him and he's over six feet tall. How tall are you?"

"I don't know. I never bothered to get a measuring stick out when I got tall enough to look my father in the eye. Tall enough I was then." Tahna said and Juubie chuckled.

"I'm going to stand no taller than your bloody belly button then I think. I'm even shorter than uncle Obie. I'm going to need a step ladder to kiss you."

"Not if you lean over my heart." Tahna said reaching up behind Juubie's neck to pull him closer.

When their lips met for the first time, sparks did indeed ignite and there was absolutely no denying their bond was real. They were both in tears of joy as their lips parted and Juubie leaned back again.

"You get well first. You are in no condition to do what you are intending right now. No matter how much I'd give into you at the moment either. I refuse to loose you now."

"Wise one yourself my heart. Aye. I'd make myself worse you are right. I have waited this long to mate you, I will wait a little longer now that I have you near me at last. I have never mated and have never wanted one other than you. I have always known you were the only one and I have always dreamed of making our first pairing special."

"You're going to make me cry Tahna. I couldn't either, there was a boy in Garth like me and he tried to get me to sleep with him when I was fifteen and I just couldn't. I felt nothing from him, I kept thinking of you and I just couldn't betray you like that. I've waited a long time too for you my big man and making it special only has to involve you."

"Now I am one facing tears. Come sleep beside me where I can hold you my heart. I am never letting you go again."

Juubie stood and shed his clothes and crawled into bed beside Tahna and snuggled into warm, large arms that encircled him. "Tahna, you don't have to let

go, because I am not going anywhere ever again. I'm home." Juubie sighed as they settled in for an early night.

## **“Dragonhead and Dragonheart”**

*A Wielder and Wellspring Story*

*Author: D. Sanders*

### **Act III - Tending the Head, The Heart Comes Home**

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Tahna hadn't slept so well in years and he awoke fuzzy headed to the smell of rich coffee beans brewing and something decidedly like frying meat. He opened his eyes and just stared happily at the most glorious sight in the world. Juubie was squatting by the fire cooking, and wearing nothing but one of Tahna's bright patterned loin skirts. On Juubie it was wrapped around him almost twice and hung almost to his knees it was so large but he looked divine in the bright green fabric that matched his eyes, which was why Tahna selected it in the first place from the weaver.

Juubie's hair was unbound and fell down his back in thick waves where it had been braided and it looked so soft and inviting Tahna wanted to loose his fingers in it. The single hibiscus bloom tucked behind Juubie's ear made a delightful addition to his sheer beauty.

Juubie turned his head and smiled. "Awake at last I see. I thought I felt you staring at my back."

"When such a nice back hard not to stare my heart."

"Sweet talker. I can tell you're hungry, my medicine seems to have helped your stomach. Your breakfast will be ready in a minute, I have more medicine in that coconut shell there beside you. Please drink it." Juubie said and Tahna obeyed without grumbling even if he thought the medicine the most loathsome thing he'd ever had to swallow in his life.

Juubie brought over his breakfast using a large banana tree leaf as a plate. Fried bananas, shredded pork with coconut and fresh papaya and kiwi fruit were all cut and displayed like a work of art on the leaf. Just the look and smell had Tahna salivating.

"Are you sure you have not been back to south in all this time? You cook like native." Tahna said sitting up to eat and Juubie beamed.

"I like to cook and this is all you had in here to fix for you. It's the native food, not the cook." Juubie said with a grin fixing himself a leaf plate and digging in with his fingers like Tahna. Plates and silverware were not something southern tribes generally used, that much Juubie remembered. He'd have to get used to not eating with a fork again or else ask his father to send dishes and silverware.

He'd probably opt for the asking for dishes later, hot meat and bare fingers generally didn't go well together and Juubie was a self admitted personal hygiene fanatic. He hated dirty anything, including his fingers.

He'd seen Tahna eat with a pair of sticks before and he'd never mastered that trick the last time he'd been there, he'd have to ask Tahna to teach him until he could get a care package sent from the north. All he'd managed was to use the sticks to poke and prod the meat around in the clay pot over the fire.

Tahna inhaled his breakfast and Juubie smiled. "Want more?"

"Aye. You cook wonderful, I burn more than I like. I am not very good. I forget I have on fire and comeback to black food."

Juubie laughed and dished up more for Tahna. "My father is the same way. Mama won't let him set foot in the kitchen while she's cooking. She claims just his presence in the room is enough to make food burn." Juubie said and Tahna laughed and coughed for a moment after.

"Ah, make not laugh yet my heart. Still full of foul in chest."

"I'm sorry, but you do sound much better this morning, it's breaking up." Juubie said laying a warm hand on Tahna's brow and smiling. "Your fever is down too."

"I am feeling much better, Bond ache gone and your power gives me much to aid my health. I can fight off ills when my heart gives me what I need. Love you much I do my heart."

"I love you too big man. Eat your breakfast and stop wooing me until I melt already."

"Wooing you hardly begun, If you thinking presents I send you in north nice, you have no idea what I plan to give you now you are home."

"You'll spoil me."

"Is that not my purpose?" Tahna said with a wink and it was Juubie's turn to laugh and lean over to kiss Tahna tenderly.

"I adore you. Eat before it gets cold, I'm going to give you a bath when you're done and then change the bedding so you get better faster." Juubie said and Tahna coughed.

"You will make me crazy if bathing me."

"You'll live and I know." Juubie said with a wink as he filled a bowl with warm water and pulled out scented soap from his bag.

Tahna was hard as a rock within seconds of the warm rag running across his chest and Juubie smiled and just ran the rag gently over a swollen erection.

"Just relax Tahna. Right now be selfish and let me take care of you." Juubie said softly, lathering his hands and setting the rag aside to use his hands on Tahna who groaned and came very quickly with the slick administrations and focused attention. Juubie just smiled and ran the rag over Tahna's chest to clean off his semen.

"Now then you can relax properly while I wash you, it would have been worse to leave you in that state. That was for medicinal purposes only and doesn't count."

"Juubie... you? Not fair to you."

"Love, I'm fine. Honestly I'm more concerned with getting you well at the moment. I have wicked intentions that involve that beautiful gift of yours later and I want you healthy for that."

"Your touch is like fire."

"Because I burn for you and have done since my voice dropped and I realized what my own Wickerbill was for. You were the fuel of many sweet dreams."

Tahna smiled lazily up at Juubie. "For me also. So pretty you were and are even more so now. Eyes like a dragon's you have, so bright they are. I see your eyes most in my dreams."

"Really?"

Tahna just nodded as Juubie had him roll over to wash his back.

"It was your skin in mine. No one up north is dark like this. Like red clay from the earth. I love the color of your skin."

"And I think your pale skin nice to look at when it grows brown in sun and you get those spots on your nose. My mother loved your spots much, always talks about them she does."

"I do get freckles in the sun. I'm surprised you remembered that little detail."

"I remember them all. You liked pineapples so much you ate so many your tongue broke out in protest. You did not like poi at all."

"Oh god, that was that white goop wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"No I didn't. It tasted like paste I used to make paper pictures with to me."

"It is a very adult taste. I cared not for it young either. I like it now."

"I'll try it again I suppose later. I always wanted to try the cinnamon spirits then."

"So did I, both of us too young then. It is very nice, but very much make you drunk if not careful. Good reason they give not to little ones. Make throat burn like good fire all the way to belly. I can have no more than four spirit cups. Five and I am face down where I standing. You small, two and I think I may have to carry you home."

"You're probably right there, I'm tipsy after just a little wine, I'm sure spirits will make me a drunken fool in your bed." Juubie said laughing and patting a firm backside.

"Okay, bath over. I need you to go move over in that hammock a while. I want to wash the bedding and change it." Juubie said helping Tahna to stand. It was the first time Tahna had stood in Juubie's presence and he gaped as he craned his neck up.

"By the Gods balls! You're a bloody mountain!" Juubie gasped, his eyes barely level with a very broad and very firm chest packed with natural muscle. Tahna just smiled down at Juubie.

"I like much this. Makes it easy for me to do this." Tahna said before stooping to wrap arms around Juubie and as he straightened his knees again, Juubie's feet were off the floor and he was clinging to wide shoulders.

"Oh put me down you big ape." Juubie laughed and Tahna complied but not before stealing a kiss before setting his mate back on the ground again.

"You are feeling better you fool." Juubie said happily ordering Tahna into the hammock to rest as he scooped up blankets to wash in the tub outside the hut.

Bright linens were hung to dry in the sun and Juubie was changing bedding inside when the first visitor arrived.

“Tahna? Are you feeling better I noticed the washing outside and... Oh my...” The plump elderly woman said as Juubie stood and smiled at her.

“He’s sleeping. Yes, he’s feeling better.”

“Are you Juubie?” She asked and Juubie smiled and nodded once and the woman crushed him in a loving hug.

“Oh joy of joy. Our dragonheart has come home at last! No wonder the head is feeling better his mate comes home! So pretty just as he said. Can I help you settle in Dragonheart?”

“I’m fine for now. Tahna comes first he’s still sick but getting better. I’m not going to worry over myself until he’s better. If you could tell me where I can find meat to feed him though I’d be grateful. I used all he had for his breakfast.” Juubie said and the old woman smiled.

“Come with me, I’ll show you our cold house for the village. Always take what you need to feed your mate. I daresay he fills it most he does.” The woman said taking Juubie’s hand and leading him to the village. Where a crowd of approximately thirty families that made up the entire tribe immediately swarmed him in joyous welcome. It was small but a common size for most southern village tribes. Young and old welcomed him with smiles, kisses and hugs. The children clung to his legs singing him songs and the women were bringing him out clothes and flowers and the men were all promising to honor their dragonheart. Juubie felt wonderfully overwhelmed.

“Our dragonheart so pretty! We have prettiest heart of them all!” One little girl sang and Juubie squatted and pressed her adorable button nose.

“I think you are so very pretty. I bet your Papa and Mama are very proud to have such a pretty good girl.” Tahna said and he looked up to see her mother smile and her father’s chest puff slightly.

“I bet Papa is also making sure his spear is sharp for boys eh?”

Her father laughed. “Aye Dragonheart, Aye.” He said and Juubie smiled and stood.

The children made a game of helping Juubie carry back provisions and all the extra bounty he hadn’t expected on bringing back with him. He had flowers all in his hair and he was wearing a better fitting loin skirt and was sitting telling half a dozen children stories when Tahna awoke.

“Been to the village I see?” Tahna said and Juubie looked up and smiled.

“Muimei came to check on you and waylaid me. Aye. I was just telling the children about Garth while you snored away.”

“How are you feeling Father Dragonhead?” One little boy asked and Tahna sat up in the hammock.

“Much better Ahmuoei. Father Dragonheart takes good care of me.” Tahna said ruffling the child’s hair with a tender smile. It was common for the children to address the village leader with an honorary father before their title. In the south the Dragonhead was father of the tribe and the Dragonheart was the fabric that held them together.

Normally the dragonheart was the honorary mother of the tribe, but since in this case Juubie was male as well, they adapted the honorarium to befit his gender.

“Father Juubie says it SNOWS in the north.” One child said and Tahna nodded.

“I hear it does too. Very cold for it to be snowing.”

“You would freeze your lovely toes, even I had trouble with the cold and I was used to it.” Juubie said smiling where he sat cross legged on the floor.

“Because you were meant to live in the south my heart. Your body knew where it belonged.”

“Very true.” Juubie said standing and giving the children each a piece of plum candy before shooing them off home again.

“The children love you.”

“I love children, the feeling is mutual.” Juubie said coming over to wrap arms around Tahna’s neck where he sat in the hammock.

“This is MUCH better. We’re eye-to-eye again.” Juubie said as strong hands grabbed his hips and pulled him closer.

“Here I will be agreeing with my heart. Very nice.” Tahna said as they shared another tender kiss that was interrupted by a tiny tot of around three who just wandered in like he owned the place.

“Tabu! Oh I am sorry Tahna and Juubie, he runs so fast!” His harried young mother said and Juubie just laughed.

“It’s alright.” Juubie said scooping up the wayward and curious toddler and handing him back to his mother. She scolded him lightly as she carried him out

again an infant strapped to her back in a cozy sling. She definitely had her hands full with young children.

“Tabu wanders like a fox. Curious he is.” Tahna chuckled and Juubie smiled as he returned to Tahna’s arms.

“We all were at his age. Now where were we?”

“Right here?” Tahna said as they continued their kiss uninterrupted this time.

Tahna grumbled when Juubie danced out of his arms with a warning. “That’s far enough Tahna. You’re so much better but not yet. Cool off, hell I need to cool off.” Juubie said shoving hair off his face obviously as aroused and frustrated as Tahna.

“You, lay back down and I’m going to start dinner.” Juubie said and Tahna reluctantly obeyed.

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Juubie was pleased to see Tahna was able to sleep so much, the phantom pain in his chest was getting better increasingly which indicated Tahna’s rapid return to health. Now that their bond wasn’t suffering separation trauma and Juubie was able to feed Tahna power Tahna’s body had gone into a restorative action and was vigorously fighting off the illness and lung infection. Most wielders in Juubie’s experience were like that. They were usually very healthy men and able to fight off the worst of illnesses by using power to literally burn away infection within their bodies. The only reason Tahna had suffered was his bond was severely weakened with separation trauma and thus his ability to manipulate power was affected.

This was the primary reason wielders and wellsprings rarely if ever outlived each other. Once a bond was established it fed and nourished the pair and if the bond weakened they both did. This was the very reason why even over such a vast distance Juubie was feeling the affects and symptoms of pneumonia even though he himself did not have the infection. When his wielder suffered, the wellspring suffered and vice versa.

Juubie wrapped some wild pork, sage and mint leaves in a large leaf and buried it under the earth of their fire to bake for a while before he checked on Tahna again. He was still sleeping and his breathing was much easier and the wheezing was minimal.

Juubie tested for fever and that too was gone and Tahna was cool and comfortable to the touch. Juubie smiled and returned to making himself busy about the hut to pass the time. Juubie could never remain idle long, he always

needed to have his hands busy doing something. So first he tidied up the already fairly neat space. Making room for his belongings alongside Tahna's as he unpacked his bag.

The large conch shell that Tahna had painted now sat on top of the chest displayed lovingly as it had been before on his dresser back in his parent's home. It held all the beaded jewelry that Tahna had sent to him. Bracelets and necklaces of colorful wooden, stone, coral, jade, pearls and glass beads. The shell was stuffed full of vibrant colors as they spilled out of the shell. Tahna over the years had sent quite a vast array of pretty baubles Juubie hoarded like precious gems and loved to wear proudly because the man he loved had made them. The first gift however, the simple coral necklace always remained on Juubie's body. He had never once taken it off in fifteen years and he had no intention of ever taking it off, it had become a part of him and just the thought of being without it gave Juubie anxiety attacks.

Thankfully the necklace was charmed to that the string holding the beads would never snap, which was a good thing considering when Juubie was twelve it had become a game to some of the older boys to try and snatch it off him. Juubie's heart had almost burst with fright the first time one of the boys grabbed and pulled. Luckily all the boy managed to do was pull Juubie off his chair, the necklace had remained in tact. Much to Juubie's relief.

Next to the conch shell Juubie set a little wooden box that held dried flower petals. Every bloom Tahna had ever sent had been pressed into books and once dried and flattened Juubie had moved them into his little box of brittle paper thin blooms. The fruit naturally had been eaten and savored long ago, but everything else, every bloom, every bead, every letter was saved and cherished.

A large bundle of letters, tied with a red ribbon was set on a shelf next to the little cobalt blue glass bottle of perfume oil that Juubie had always used sparingly. It smelled and was distilled from plumeria blossoms and whenever Juubie was missing Tahna especially hard, just a little drop of the scent on his wrist would carry his memories south.

Tahna cracked open an eye and silently watched Juubie with his treasures as he put them away. It touched Tahna's heart to see how everything he'd ever sent was cherished and preserved.

Tahna had done the same, every letter was stacked in the bottom of his chest neatly, and every picture either hung on a wall or laid flat in a box to protect it and every candy savored. To say they were both highly sentimental over each other would have been a very true statement Tahna mused as he feigned sleep to watch Juubie.

Juubie folded his new clothes and stacked them neatly next to Tahna's in a chest, Juubie's brush set next to Tahna's bone comb on top of that and his favorite soap placed with Tahna's in the proper place. He brought little else with him, just mementos and trinkets that meant the most to him and most of those had been gifts from Tahna over the years.

There were a few interesting looking books that Juubie stacked in a corner, well worn and looked to have been read dozens of times. Tahna had always known Juubie loved to read and read often and he'd been exceptional in school and the past three years he had been teaching classes to young children with the monks. Tahna hoped Juubie would continue to teach the children here, they would benefit from northern higher learning. Tahna himself was hoping to be a pupil on occasion, his dragonheart's mind was very keen. In the south there were no temples of stone, and villages sometimes had to pack up and move at a moment's notice if the land grew angry and violent.

They had no places for children to attend school and the children learned from their elders before assuming duties in the tribe. Tahna himself had never been to school. His mother had taught him how to read and write and his father had taught him how to use his gifts and learn to listen to everyone before casting judgment over a situation. Wisdom balanced with instinct and survival skills.

At ten, Tahna had taken the test of Dragonhead. He had fought against a dragon in a battle of wills, knowledge and skills. If the dragon deemed him wise enough to lead, he was given his tribal leader tattoo at the gathering of clans and from there, people wanting to follow him would become his new tribe. It was good for bloodlines and health to change villages regularly and every five years the gathering of clans would occur and the people would divide and go to their new dragonhead and dragonheart for protection and leadership.

Tahna has passed his test with high praise from the dragons very young, and at thirteen, three years after he had passed the test the gathering occurred and a very young Tahna bid his parents farewell and had become his own tribe's Dragonhead.

For eight years he'd ruled his tribe fairly and wisely and he loved his people as much as they loved him. Tahna was always gentle and kind and ready with a smile as often as he was ready to fight a wild boar gone feral to protect those he had vowed to lay his life down for if needed.

He was the alpha warrior and father of his tribe. The first to the hunt, the first to the charge, the first to surrender his kills to the village for sustenance. He was always available to children whether it was comfort over a skinned knee or just to play. He was always an extra hand to help carry a heavy burden or erect a new hut for a new couple or family. He was as apt to praise a job well done as he was to admonish and punish those who purposefully did wrong.

His village was always open to northern visitors who were welcomed with celebration and warmth. Food was always plentiful, songs always being sung and dances around the bonfire common. Tahna couldn't wait to dance the warriors dance for Juubie. The dance all the men did for their mates, for years he'd only watched, but now Juubie was here and it was Tahna's turn at last to join the other men in honor of their mates to show their devotion and stamina to those they loved above all others.

Tahna smiled as he watched Juubie settle down to write a letter, Tahna couldn't wait to see Juubie dance the traditional Dragonheart's dance. The blessing for fertility and good luck for the tribe danced every full moon. He'd have to learn the dance, but as Dragonheart, his power was what sustained the village and nurtured it and gave it life. Juubie's role was second only to Tahna's. Juubie's word was to be obeyed and he was to be sheltered and protected by all the warriors and honored as the life bringer and heart and soul of the tribe.

Wellsprings from the north found themselves revered like goddesses in the south. Juubie, although male was no less revered. He may be without his own fertile womb, but the heart was a blessing regardless of the gender and represented life and power that lay in all living things.

Juubie would attend every birth and be the first to hold a new babe before giving it to its mother, it was new life and the dragonheart governed life and would ask the gods blessing for the child for luck and health before handing the babe to the new mother.

Juubie would attend every funeral pyre and scatter the ashes back to the sea and land at life's end for blessing of renewal. Whereas Tahna protected and provided for the tribe, Juubie would nurture and bless it. The tribe was at last whole now that Juubie had come home.

Tahna just smiled and felt his heart lift with joy as he gazed at his beautiful dragonheart. If he felt so nurtured in soul with just looking at Juubie, he was sure his tribe must feel the same in his presence. Juubie exuded calm confidence and kindness, like he was indeed touched by the gods grace.

Juubie looked up from his letter and smiled. "You're staring at me. Go back to sleep Tahna."

"I am thinking I am most blessed man alive, I cannot sleep when I love looking at my heart so much."

"You big soft hearted fool. I love you too." Juubie said setting down his quill and moving over to Tahna with a cup of cool water. "Drink and sleep, I want you well."

"I am feeling much more like myself already."

"Just think how much better you'll be tomorrow if you do as I say then." Juubie responded right back with logic and Tahna just smiled and settled back down after draining the cup.

"As always, dragonheart always knows best where life is concerned. Even if I protest a backside weary of resting."

"Too bad Tahna. Even big boys have to rest when they are feeling poorly. The bigger they are, the harder they fall as they say. You break things when you fall I'm sure." Juubie said and Tahna chuckled.

"Aye, I do. I weigh much."

"I can tell, I couldn't lift you if I tried. Now go to sleep, I'm writing Papa and Mama to let them know I got here safely. I promised them I would. Will you feel up to sending it for me later?"

"Surely, sending letter most easy, could do that in my sleep now I send to your home so much over the years. Just let me know when you are finished and I will send it at once."

"Thank you beloved." Juubie said leaning over to kiss Tahna's brow before he returned to his letter and Tahna shut his eyes again and forced himself to relax and sleep.

*Dearest Mama and Papa, Jana and Renju,*

*I arrived yesterday, it took five days but what a wonderful journey. The wise ones fly so fast the ground was a blur beneath us. It's amazing that what took us six weeks by cart took only five days by dragon flight.*

*Tahna is ill with pneumonia, that's why I've been suffering so badly recently. He's doing much better now that I am here with him and our bond is no longer strained and adding to his illness. I cannot begin to describe him to you both, he's wonderful. Remember his father? Tahna looks just like him now. I feel like a shrimp in comparison. I swear I only come up to his armpit if I'm standing on tip-toes. He's massive!*

*He's got to be almost six and a half feet tall and if I'm being conservative on body mass he must weigh a good two hundred and fifty pounds. He's a walking mountain of man. He's got muscles on top of muscles and then some. I can't even touch fingers around his biceps alone. I'm in shock, but such wonderful shock. There must be something in the food down here that makes all the people*

*grow so large. Even the women practically dwarf me down here. I predict I will be playing with children a lot just to feel tall on occasion.*

*Tahna is so very handsome, I find myself getting distracted and just sitting here staring at him and studying his features like a lovesick fool while he sleeps. Pardon me while I be rude and remark that I think my wielder is perhaps the most handsome brute in all of Holst. Sorry Papa. I love you, but I am rather biased now where my husband is concerned.*

*I am so very happy and I feel wonderful to be home with Tahna at last. This is where I belong by his side. North, south, east or west matters not. Tahna is my home and I love him so much I want to sing but dare not lest I wake him and it was hard enough to make him sleep off his ills.*

*I have a few things I need and Papa if you'd be so kind as to send them to me I'd be very grateful. First, in the trunk by my old bed is a book, the medicinal herbs text manual. I am so glad I read that book, it's helped so much in making Tahna better, but I'd like to have that here just for my reference in case I need it again.*

*Second, and please don't laugh at my fastidiousness. Please send me some plates and silverware. Eating with fingers is fun when you're five, I must have a fork now. I forgot how the natives eat off leaves and with their fingers and as much as I embrace the south, some northern traits I refuse to let go of, table manners being one of them.*

*Call me quirky, call me selfish, call me a git with a hygiene fetish but in my hut I want to eat off a clean ceramic plate and use utensils.*

*While on that subject, Mama if you have any spare pots and pans you don't use anymore will you send those too? Tahna has this little clay pot and while it's functional to cook with I'm rather used to a variety in the kitchen.*

*You can take the northern boy from the north but you can't take the north out of the boy I suppose. I'll have to adapt, but not without kicking and screaming for northern conveniences all along the way.*

*Well, I can smell our dinner is about ready and I need to fix Tahna another batch of medicine before I feed my monstrosity of a mate. I hope my letter finds you all well and happy and rest assured I am overjoyed and happier than I've ever been.*

*I'll miss you all terribly and I hope you will all come visit someday, but know in your heart I am content and happy and feel so very blessed with Tahna as my wielder or rather I should say my Dragonhead. He's my heart and soul and I could not have wished for a better man to call mine.*

*I promise I'll write again soon, I love you all and Renju please do your homework and Jana please don't tease him so much.*

*Love Always,  
Juubie*

Juubie sealed the letter and set it aside and fixed another batch of medicine before he pulled out the baked pork cutlets that disintegrated they were so tender and juicy from baking.

Tahna drank his medicine dutifully and raved for what seemed like hours about the best meal he'd ever eaten. Juubie noted that the wise one was correct and Tahna did indeed think with his stomach and knowing he was so easy to please with food had Juubie smirking into his own meal and hoping he got his hands on some nice stew pots from the north. Tahna wouldn't know what hit him if and when Juubie got his hands on proper cookware.

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## **“Dragonhead and Dragonheart”**

*A Wielder and Wellspring Story*

*Author: D. Sanders*

### **Act IV - Mating Flight**

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After dinner Tahna sent off Juubie’s letter and they settled together on the bed Tahna’s head in Juubie’s lap as Juubie told him tales of his siblings antics, the pineapple preserves he wanted to try making now that he was here and just idle chatter to pass the evening.

“Your brother sounds a handful.” Tahna chuckled, his eyes closed as he relaxed and enjoyed Juubie’s fingers absently combing his hair.

“He is, but he’s eleven and he thinks he knows everything right now. Papa is always having to zap him with a power bolt in the ass to prove the little know it all doesn’t quite know it all. Jana was like that too at his age, oh she was such a little stinker. She’s very pretty and she knows she is and for a while there mama and I were afraid she’d turn into a vain little princess. She thankfully got a dose of reality last year when the boy she fancied flat out told her he thought she was mean and that made her ugly to him. It was brutal but she became aware of how she was acting and she’s actually nice now. Except to Renju, oh she gives him hell.”

“Most siblings do. You never met the twins, they’re only ten and Mama tells me my sisters are identical nightmares to each other one moment and inseparable the next. My little brother is only eight and tends to avoid the twins at all costs so I am told. Being the littlest means you bare the brunt of the teasing.”

“Very true. And being the eldest makes you the bossy one.” Juubie said and Tahna laughed.

“I was already away from my birth tribe by then, I had not the opportunity you had to visit wisdom on them.”

“Wisdom? Hardly. It was just trying to spare my sanity at times. I don’t know how many times I caught Jana dressing up in my beads or Renju raiding the dried papaya you sent. He loves it and if I didn’t watch him and hide it, he’d eat it all in one sitting.” Juubie said laughing at the memory.

“We can always send more if he likes it and we can send Jana beads of her own. I’m sure they will like presents from their big brother on occasion.”

“Love, they’d never forgive me if I didn’t send gifts.” Juubie chuckled as the fire snapped and crackled and they enjoyed a peaceful evening talking as if they’d never been parted.

Juubie glanced down and noticed the glint of silver in Tahna's ear. It was a ring that had been affixed to another loop. Two circles of silver. One going through Tahna's ear and the other dangling from it. "Is that the ring I gave you?"

Tahna smiled. "Aye. I outgrew it very fast so I just looped it through an ear hoop so I too could always have you with me. I have never taken it off. Much as I know from the aura in your necklace it has never been from your neck."

"No it hasn't. I don't intend on taking it off either, it's the first thing you ever gave me and it means the most to me."

"I feel the same of my ring. Many presents you have sent me over the years but this one is the most dear."

"Listen to us, we're such a pair of sentimental fools."

"I am not complaining over that fact. I like it much."

"So do I. How are you feeling, you sound so much better."

"I feel much better. It is only minor discomfort in my chest now where before it felt like I had living fire in my lungs. I must resume my duties in the morning I have laid idle long enough."

"I think that is pushing it Tahna, I say another day of rest or else suffer a relapse."

"I vow I will only walk the perimeter of the village Juubie, I must make sure my protections around the village warding off the beasts are still functioning. Sick or not I am the only one here who can protect my people and you know that."

"I'm going with you then and if I sense even a moment of pain or slipping of health you are coming back here with no arguments is that understood?"

"That is a compromise I can accept."

"Good boy." Juubie grinned and Tahna smiled.

"I am tired of laying here Juubie, it is a nice night and I would like a walk and some fresh air please tell me you will not protest."

"Not if you take me with you no. Fresh air will do you good." Juubie said as they stood and hand in hand exited the hut to walk the beach under the moonlight.

They walked in companionable silence with just the music of the waves to serenade them under the nearly full moon. Juubie's arm around Tahna's hips

and Tahna's arm resting about his shoulders as they matched steps in the sand, the tide splashing their bare feet as they walked.

They came to a small grotto overgrown with flowers and Juubie inhaled deeply the rich perfume with a sigh. Tahna smiled and reached up and plucked several blooms to place in Juubie's hair.

"Your hair is so soft and made for the wearing of blooms. So beautiful to me you are." Tahna said softly and his smile of sincere affection went straight to Juubie's heartstrings.

"I feel so mystically happy. Like I'm dreaming all of this and I'm not really here but sleeping far away and fretting waking at any moment."

"That feeling I can very much say I share my heart. Many years longing can make one feel lost when it is at last gained." Tahna said his large hands coming up to cup Juubie's face in his hands. "I have but to touch you to know you are real and I am whole." He added leaning down to capture Juubie's lips in a tenderly passionate kiss.

They sank to their knees in the sand and Juubie's arms wrapped around Tahna's neck as they kissed with desires long denied ignited.

Tahna pulled off their loin skirts and laid them on the sand as blankets as he rolled Juubie onto them, kissing and caressing and touching skin on fire even in the cool evening breeze.

Juubie moaned lustily as Tahna's hips pressed into Juubie's their dual erections rubbing together wantonly. "Wait no more I will not, need you Juubie I do."

"We can't, oh Gods Tahna you're sick." Juubie moaned wanting to cry he wanted it so badly.

"Not so sick I cannot love you. Deny me not Juubie, please." Tahna said, his hand snaking down to grip Juubie's erection to stroke and Juubie moaned and arched into the touch panting.

"I can't deny you anything Tahna. Even if I'm scared of how big you are."

"Hurt you I will not. I would rather die." Tahna purred into Juubie's ear, nibbling on an earlobe that sent gooseflesh all along Juubie's trembling and electrified body.

Tahna dripped kisses along a delicate jaw and shoulder and down a heaving chest as his hand cupped and stroked and had Juubie mewling and moaning with pleasure.

Tahna gently moved down a very responsive body that made his own taut with anticipation. However, Juubie's fears were valid, his body was much smaller than Tahna's and pain was a very real concern if Tahna didn't take his time and not rush into mating as he so very much wanted to at the moment.

Delicate Dragonhearts needed care and his northern one even more so being male as well, he had very different needs and precautions against pain that needed to be taken.

Juubie's eyes went wide and then closed with a moan as Tahna's tongue teased and coaxed places no one had ever touched. Juubie shivered as Tahna rolled him onto his knees and a wet probing tongue and fingers slowly began the sexually stimulating and agonizing process of preparing Juubie to take his mate for the first time.

Juubie's voice had taken on a sultry moan as fingers moved and mimicked the act, stretching and lubricating with saliva and relaxing taut virgin muscles to accept Tahna within.

Juubie's moans were driving Tahna mad with need and his dragonheart's well of power was overflowing and wide open, fueling an internal fire and burning Tahna from the inside out. He was drunk on power, ignited into flames that already had him sweating and panting with want.

"Tahna! Now, oh please now I can't stand it anymore!" Juubie cried out, sobbing with need and Tahna got onto his knees hurriedly and positioned himself and pushed.

Juubie cried out, his voice echoing of the cliffs and his body constricted around Tahna's manhood almost painfully. His smaller body trying hard to adapt to the large intrusion while at the same time pressing into the invasion with desire and lust.

Tahna groaned, a deep throaty rasp. He saw stars behind his eyes and he was desperately trying to control himself, wanting nothing more than to claim his mate in a frenzy of movement.

"Tahna! Move! Oh Gods so good!" Juubie moaned and Tahna grunted in response and began a relentless steady pace. The slap of skin on skin, the sounds of wet penetration and wanton moans of desire filled the grotto.

"Yes, oh Gods Yes! Tahna! Harder Tahna please!" Juubie moaned and Tahna couldn't reply and just complied with force.

Juubie was moaning and whimpering so loud it echoed in the grotto and only served to drive Tahna even crazier with need. To hear Juubie's voice raised in ecstasy was music to Tahna's ears. To feel Juubie's body respond in concert to his own was rapture. To be filled with Juubie's internal well of power was like bathing in purest sunlight.

Mating was surreal when coupled with their bond as Wielder and Wellspring, Dragonhead and Dragonheart. They moved as one, they gave as one, they accepted as one. A connection so profound words would never be able to describe the euphoric sensation they experienced as they came together as one body and one soul and finally consummated their bond.

Juubie name was ripped from Tahna's throat as he crested the rise of his need and came and Juubie's echoing cry as he followed tumbling into the abyss.

They heaved for breath together, covered in sweat and Juubie's semen, sand clinging to bodies like coarse glitter catching the moonlight as they cooled and heart rates returned to normal.

Tahna broke out into joyful laughter, his voice deep and full of happiness. "I feel incredible!" He cried out for joy and rolled to look at Juubie, his eyes filled with wonder.

"Your power is like tempting a volcano god! I am burned alive and my ills gone!"

"I couldn't hold it in, I had no idea mating would create so much power in me I overflowed."

"You erupted! I am scorched!"

"I didn't hurt you did I?" Juubie asked concerned and Tahna laughed.

"Healed me you did. No illness could survive such pure power, I have never felt more alive!"

"You're right, I don't feel any illness in you at all."

"Now I know why my father is always healthy as ox! Dragonhearts purify evil humors of soul! How do you feel?"

"Wonderfully sore."

"I am sorry."

“Tahna don’t be daft. You just had a tent pole rammed up my ass of course I’m going to be torn in two. And you’d better do that again soon, it felt wonderful!” Juubie laughed and Tahna smiled.

“Oh, again is a promise. I will never tire mating you.”

“You won’t find it difficult getting me to bend over either. By the Gods I am so happy I want to cry.”

“Cry not my heart, save tears for sad times. Smiles for happy ones.” Tahna said and Juubie sighed and rolled into large arms.

“My legs are like jelly, I don’t think I’ll be able to walk back any time soon.” Juubie chuckled and then squealed as Tahna stood lifting him like he weighed nothing at all.

“Then carry you I will.” Tahna said as he marched back to their hut, carrying an effervescent and laughing Juubie all the way back to their hut. Where they washed off sand with more laughter and curled up into bed elated and overjoyed after their first mating flight and sacrifice of virginity to the moon fertility goddess as the newly copulated and consummated Dragon Pair of the Tribe.

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Juubie awoke to a bright parrot feather tickling his nose and Tahna was propped up on his elbow grinning down at him like a fool. “The sun rises on a bright new day my heart.” He said and Juubie’s sleepy smile filled Tahna’s heart.

“So it does. How did you sleep?”

“Did you not hear me snoring enough to sound like a wounded and angry were beast? I am surprised I didn’t wake you.”

“Beloved, wild were cats in a group mating caterwaul wouldn’t have woken me up last night.” Juubie said going to roll over and he winced.

“You are in pain this morning, I can feel it my heart. Forgive me.”

“It’s nothing moving around won’t cure Tahna. Just next time I’m going to make us something that will make it easier for us so it won’t hurt so much afterwards.” Juubie said sitting up stiffly with a yawn.

“I feel upset I hurt you.”

“Please don’t Tahna, I’m just stiff and it’s going to take a while for my body to adjust to you, it’s as simple as that dearest. Uncle Obie took me aside when I

was about fourteen and pretty much explained to me all that I needed to know and what to expect as a mate to a wielder. He spared no humility and basically told me what no one else could. Considering he is like me and it is in our nature to be, as he put it, 'the least attached to the proving of their masculinity in the bedroom'. I tend to fit that description pretty well. I'm still a man, but just like Obie said, I don't feel the need to prove it during intimate moments and like a woman, my legs will be the ones in the air."

"You are a far cry from a woman."

"That's not what he meant. It's just when you're dealing with a non-breeder couple one of us has to prefer taking and one giving and when dealing with Wellsprings and Wielders it's always the wellspring taking up a traditionally female role. All you hot blooded wielders are used to being in control it's in your nature to be so as much as it is in ours to open to you physically and metaphysically."

"I never thought of it like that."

"It's true. Look at Obie, Look at Gandes and look at me. We're all very similar really. Then compare yourself with Goh and Yidane. It's just basic undeniable cosmic facts that history proves time and again when dealing with bonds like ours. I can honestly and truthfully say every sexual dream I have ever had and I do mean every single one of them even before Obie gave me that little talk involved you and I and I was always the one being made love to and not the one in control. You?"

"The same. Always in control."

"See? It's biological for us to compliment each other with personal preferences. We can't be otherwise we are born compatible to each other."

"Interesting, and you are right, very true. It is much food for thought but right now is not the time, now is the time for feeding our grumbling stomachs before we walk the village." Tahna said and Juubie smiled.

"I'll start the food, you start the coffee." Juubie said and Tahna nodded with a smile and the pair set to work to start their day.

Both men inhaled breakfast with appetites fueled from their lovemaking the night before and they laughed about it as Juubie scrambled more eggs for a second helping for himself and a third for Tahna. Juubie accused him of having a hollow leg playfully and Tahna just chuckled.

"I like to eat."

“Tell me something not so obvious glutton.” Juubie teased as he finished his coffee and started brushing out his hair.

Once his thick mane of rich coffee colored hair was detangled he twisted it up in a loose knot on top of his head and just held it in place with a pair of hair sticks. Tahna sat fascinated as he watched. With his hair up like that he noticed how extremely delicate Juubie looked.

He'd been a slender boy but now he was like a graceful willow tree branch swaying in the breeze. Thin and fragile in appearance, but like the willow he resembled, deceptively so, even the roughest winds would only make the tree bend, breaking it was very difficult.

A thin graceful neck fell into gentle sloping shoulders and long, thick and dark eyelashes kissed Juubie's cheeks as he washed his face. He looked extremely androgynous. Neither completely male nor female but a nice balance between the two.

Tahna's groin twitched in response and Juubie's face shot up and he glared accusingly with a stubborn set to his jaw. “Oh no you don't Tahna! I can feel you in our bond. No getting horny on me I'm just washing my face.”

Tahna laughed. “Look not so beautiful then while doing it.” He replied planting a kiss on Juubie's shoulder as he tore his gaze away and began washing up himself.

Juubie was about to pull the sticks back out of his hair when Tahna reached up to stay his hands. “Please leave it like that. I like it much up like that. Very pretty.”

“Really? I just stuck it up out of the way to wash.”

“It looks nice like that.” Tahna said picking a large hibiscus bloom from outside and tucking it into the loose bun. “Very, very pretty.”

Juubie just smiled a light blush dusting his cheeks and a happy smile turning up his lips. “I'll leave it then.”

“Thank you.” Tahna said as he wrapped loin cloth around him and handed Juubie one of his new wraps from the chest in a matching color. As Juubie unfolded the garment he realized it was a different style than Tahna's and he wasn't quite sure how to put it on.

“It goes like this.” Tahna said noticing Juubie's difficulty and wrapping it around for him.

It was only then Juubie realized it was a style like the women and children of both genders wore mostly it was longer than Tahna's and wrapped around his neck first before going around his waist in a sarong of emerald green and white palm frond patterns.

Most garments in the south were sexless and weren't used for modesty as much as for keeping sand out of places one didn't wish it to be. Nakedness was not a taboo in the south as it was in the north. Sex itself was almost an open affair. No one cared who did what with whom or where. No one even blinked if they stumbled upon lovers trysting with each other out in public, they just carried on with their business and the lovers did too. It was status quo and a fact of life and just nature being itself in harmony with the land and the people. Women went topless as often as the men and some men opted to cover more than others. Some went completely nude at all times, it didn't matter to anyone what someone else did or did not wear.

In this case it was simple logic at work, Juubie was fair skinned and not tanned yet and covering more of his flesh was wise until he adapted to the sun and climate again so he wouldn't burn to a crisp immediately upon arrival.

It also appeared to please Tahna because he thought Juubie looked beautiful in the color and nothing more.

Tahna however did not stop there in dressing Juubie to his tastes. First came more beads out of Juubie's shell to match his wrap. Necklaces, anklets and bracelets adorned him until Tahna looked satisfied.

"I am proud and forgive me for wanting to show everyone how beautiful my mate is."

"So long as you think so I'm happy. Are you ready?"

"Almost." Tahna said pulling on his own jewelry. A shark tooth necklace and a wide beaded belt that held a rather wicked looking machete in a sheath.

Tahna offered his arm. "Now we can make our first walk together my heart." Tahna said leading the way out of the hut, proudly displaying Juubie on his arm. His chest so puffed and swollen with pride Juubie had to stifle a chuckle. Tahna reminded him of a peacock displaying his feathers.

This was however important and Juubie knew quite a bit about tribal customs. This was their first day as a united pair and it demanded displayed dignity. It was similar to the coronation of a King. Pomp and circumstance and tradition. The Dragonhead was presenting the Dragonheart to the tribe officially. As they neared the village everyone came out to show their respect to their leader. All the warriors stood with their spears at attention and all the women stood tossing

flowers into the path for the Dragonhead and Dragonheart to walk upon. Children danced behind them clapping and singing. As they reached the center of the Village Tahna paused and the warriors circled them and silence fell as Tahna held up his hands.

“Welcome to our Dragonheart Juubie. Our Clan is whole at last.” Tahna said looking happy but stern. “Make him welcome.” Tahna said and all the warriors moved in line and knelt before him and swore him protection and vowed to provide him all his needs each taking a turn to profess eternal protection and to kiss his hands with affection and respect. Juubie felt a little overwhelmed.

*::Just smile Juubie and accept their fealty, it's expected of the clan to honor you as my Dragonheart...::*

*::You could have warned me Tahna!::*

*::It is more fun this way...::* Tahna sent with an amused tone to his mental voice

*::Ass...::* Juubie sent back not so amused.

Next came the women, bringing more flowers to lay at Juubie's feet and they each in turn swore honor and respect to their dragonheart also kissing his hands as they did so.

The children came next and danced in a circle around them both singing and tossing flowers and bringing over cups of tart pomegranate wine for the Dragonhead and Dragonheart to drink from.

Once the official welcome was over Tahna held up his hands again for silence.

*::Just thank them from your heart. My heart...::* Tahna prompted and Juubie smiled.

“I vow to love and honor the tribe as your heart. I vow to offer all I am to aid and protect you all in good times and in hard times. I am home and I feel your love and welcome fill my soul with joy and I hope and pray to the gods I may return to you the love you that you give me. Thank you all for such a joyous welcome home.” Juubie said eloquently and Tahna smiled proudly down upon him as everyone cheered and clapped. The official reception over.

Tahna waited until the clapping subsided and broke his stern gaze and beamed like the newly matched youth he was. “Is our heart not the most beautiful in all the tribes?” He asked and again everyone cheered and Juubie blushed hotly.

“We take our first walk as one. I call a day of feasting and dancing in celebration afterward. My Warriors go and find us meat for our fire, My Women go and gather us fruit from our vines. Our Children gather us flowers from the gardens

for our hair. Let us rejoice!" Tahna said and an even louder cheer arose and Men hurried off in hunting groups. Women grabbed reed baskets and children scattered like leaves in the wind to go and pick flowers as Tahna once more offered his arm to Juubie and they headed out to talk the village territory perimeter and test Tahna's protections that encased their sanctuary of peace.

"That was... unexpected. You ass! No wonder you have me festooned like a queen!" Juubie scolded as they walked and Tahna chuckled.

"You know our traditions, I've told you before."

"In LETTERS, you could have reminded me this morning. I'd have had something prepared to say that didn't sound so contrived and spur of the moment."

"You do much better when you speak from the heart my love. You are our heart and I just showed you that and made you prove it to yourself that you are."

Juubie paused Tahna's words quite profound. It was obvious he was dragonhead for very good reasons, the man had hidden depths of wisdom that caught you off guard. "You're forgiven when you use logic like that against me."

"Logic works best with my heart of a steel mind I have learned this over the years that I have known you. You can over think and doubt yourself when it is not necessary to do so."

"You have me there. You know me well."

"As you know me. I have never hidden anything from you."

"I know. Well, except that big 'to do' back there."

"Ah, but I hid it not, you just didn't ask and I have told you more than once in letters about how dragonheads are welcomed. I did prepare you."

"Oh you are a stinker. You know what I meant. More TIMELY warnings."

Tahna just laughed and winked knowing full well what Juubie meant. Juubie just shook his head. "You have a mean streak Tahna."

"Yes I do. Wait here a minute there is a weak spot ahead and I sense minor trouble." Tahna said vanishing into the thick jungle growth. Juubie opened up his well and felt a brush of Tahna sipping from the power before a single small surge was felt and Tahna came back again carrying a large boar over his shoulders.

"Just this beastie poking about. We'll have a good feast tonight on him."

“By the gods he’s huge he must weigh a ton!”

“He is nice and fat. But don’t forget I am not like most men, your power comes in handy for carrying heavy burdens.” Tahna winked as they continued their walk and returned to the village with their bounty.

Three boars turned on spits on the large bonfire. Pineapples roasted in their casings, everyone was decorated with flowers and everyone lounged and relaxed on blankets and pillows in the shade of tents erected in the village center.

A long low table was set out and Juubie and Tahna sat at its center. Bowls of fruit and pitchers of chilled wine and juice covered the space of the table and were passed around and emptied and refilled dozens of times. Freshly caught and grilled flaky white fish and oranges were served communally for lunch while the dinner feast still cooked on the open fire.

Juubie had three children vying for space in his lap and more surrounded him with equally interested mothers and fathers also sitting enraptured as he told tales of the north and answered dozens of curious questions.

What did snow feel like?

Did people really live in stone houses that never moved?

Did children really go to a place called school?

Did the gods really have temples?

Were male Dragonhearts really treated so cruelly once?

Did all dragonhearts really have no rights once?

Were there really no dragons in the skies to protect them?

What was the music like?

What did they eat?

Juubie answered them all happily and even sang them all northern songs until he was parched and had to forgo singing to cool his throat.

Tahna sat silently listening to it all, a look of wonder and pride never leaving his face. The smile never fading from his lips as he poured sweet pineapple juice into Juubie’s cup and served him and honored his mate like a proud new husband.

One of the older women came out with a needle and a pot of ink. "The heart needs his markings!" She grinned and Juubie blanched.

"So he does." Tahna said and Juubie turned frantic eyes to Tahna.

"You're going to tattoo me? Now?"

Tahna laughed. *::Fool, it's not going to hurt you have me here remember? I'll block the pain.::*

*::You never mentioned tattoos!::*

*::I did.::*

*::On YOU! Not on ME!::*

*::Yours are only little ones. They won't be like mine.::*

*::You are so going to get an earful later! My mother will have heart failure when she sees me tattooed!::*

*::She won't. You'll give Muimei heart failure if you refuse your ranking markings.::*

Juubie just sighed and let the old women undo his wrap to bare his upper torso.

Four women went to work on him tapping needles dipped in dark ink with wooden sticks into his skin. Juubie just closed his eyes and felt Tahna wrap around his senses to block out the pain of the needles going into his flesh.

Two women worked on both of his hands simultaneously. On the back of each hand were the phases of the sun and the moon in a circle showing the cycle of life, death and rebirth. Following his collarbone was a thin tribal knot work patterned line that matched Tahna's indicating he was Tahna's mate. Like a necklace that lay unfastened across his chest making his already pronounced collarbone even more so.

On his back a pair of spread dragon wings in flight. Indicating he was the dragonheart of his clan. His wings matching the ones on Tahna's back.

Once the women were finished they rubbed liberal amounts of soothing aloe oils into the tattoos, sealing and protecting them and urging the skin to heal quickly.

"Do not scratch them when they start to itch as they heal. Just rub more oil on them." Tahna instructed as soft gauze was wrapped around them and they pulled Juubie's wrap back up over his chest.

"I'm still angry at you Tahna. This you could have warned me of better."

"You're not angry."

"Oh yes, I am. I like tattoos on you, not on me."

"They suit you. They show up nicely on your fair skin."

"Don't try to patronize me with compliments, they won't work."

"But they are."

Juubie just glared at the smug look on Tahna's face and a young woman sniggered.

"Tahna, your mate will have you sleeping in the sand with the crabs if you persist. Even if I agree your heart is most lovely with his markings."

"See Juubie?"

Juubie just sighed defeated and turned to his juice failing miserably at adapting but succeeding in just accepting a losing a battle. The deed was already done and tattoos never washed off.

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As the afternoon and evening wore on, so did Juubie's energy. He felt raw and tired from the ends of his hair to the tips of his toes. He was getting highly uncomfortable sitting on his abused posterior, his hands hurt and throbbed from the tattoos, His neck ached and he learned the hard way not to lean against anything with his back which was on fire.

He just wanted to cry, but he bit his lip and smiled and pretended nothing was wrong. Tahna however knew better.

"Sleep if you are tired my heart. You will offend no one."

"If I could lay down Tahna. I hurt all over." Juubie whispered and Tahna now looked concerned.

"You shouldn't be hurting, I have blocks on you."

"Tell that to my skin." Juubie countered and Tahna immediately began unwrapping the gauze and he hissed and then roared angrily.

“What is this? What did you use for his markings?” Tahna demanded seeing angry red infection puckering sensitive skin.

“The same as on you Dragonhead. Octopus ink.” One of the women who had tattooed Juubie said, recoiling just as much as Tahna when she saw the reaction the ink was having on Juubie’s skin.

She immediately brought out more oil to sooth the skin and Juubie did whimper in very real pain as she touched his skin.

“Get him a pain draught and cool rags for the fire in his skin!” Tahna ordered and people rushed to comply.

“How old was the ink?” Tahna asked.

“A few weeks, it should not be doing this to him.” She replied as the pain medicine was delivered and Juubie drank it quickly with fingers that hurt even holding his cup.

“It might be the needles and not the ink Tahna. Were they heated in the fire to sterilize them first?” Juubie asked.

“No Dragonheart, they were freshly picked and dried nettle needles.” Muimei answered

“Oh god that’s it! Nettles make me break out in a rash! No wonder I hurt so badly, I’m allergic to them. I’ll need to make a compress to remove the sting. Pure aloe with Calamine for the itch and rash and eucalyptus for the pain and to numb the skin.” Juubie said and the old woman nodded and sent a younger woman to bring Juubie what he needed to make his own ointment.

“Dragonheart are you a medicine man too?” She asked and Juubie shook his head.

“No, not really. I just know a few things about herbs.” Juubie said and Tahna snorted.

“Too modest. Your medicine already healed me and now seems will heal yourself. Forgive me my heart, I did not know you suffered so or I would have had them use steel.” Tahna said looking heartbroken.

“It’s not anyone’s fault Tahna. It was an accident I’ll live it’s not fatal.”

“You should not be hurt at all, I failed you and I am sorry.”

“Stop blaming yourself Tahna you’ll piss me off.” Juubie said as the young woman returned with the ingredients Juubie asked for. He instructed her how to combine them in the bowl and once mixed Tahna and Muimei slathered the cooling ointment all over his tattoos.

Juubie sighed in audible relief and he had them wrap him in bandages soaked in the ointment first and then had them wrap dry ones on top of those. More Pillows were brought over so Juubie could lay back on his side in relative comfort and it was Tahna’s turn to let Juubie’s head rest in his lap.

“I am so sorry my heart.”

“Tahna please don’t. Really beloved it’s not anyone’s fault. I’ll be alright.”

“Dragonheart can we get you anything?” Muimei asked looking just as dejected as Tahna did.

“I’m fine. Please don’t worry over me so, this will pass as soon as the ointment begins working on the sting. The Calamine will heal the reaction to the sting, the aloe will keep the skin moist and the eucalyptus is already working on numbing the pain I am already much better. Please, everyone just carry on, this is still a celebration. My happiness is not affected from just a bit of a skin rash.” Juubie said smiling through his pain and the woman leaned over to kiss both his cheeks.

“You will always carry my heart with you and I will honor you until my end days I will. Never a more gracious dragonheart I have ever vowed my honor to before. I will never leave your side.” She said laying her hand to Juubie’s cheek fondly and looking up at Tahna.

“You have always said he was so, seeing it for myself I can see why you have loved him since you were children.”

“Juubie is the meaning of heart, aye.” Tahna said smiling down at Juubie who smiled back.

“Don’t make me cry Tahna.”

“Never.” Tahna replied smoothing Juubie’s hair from his brow, “Rest a while beloved.” He said and Juubie nodded and shut his eyes.

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## **“Dragonhead and Dragonheart”**

*A Wielder and Wellspring Story*

*Author: D. Sanders*

### **Act V - Adaptation and Adoration**

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Juubie half dozed listening to the sounds of laughter, music and frivolity surround him like a comforting cocoon of peace. Tahna’s fingers gently resting on his cheek, his thumb lightly stroking Juubie’s flesh absently as he carried on a conversation with one of his warriors. Pausing occasionally to turn his attention to Juubie and Juubie just smiled. “I’m not sleeping beloved. I’m fine.”

“I’m just making sure that you are.” Tahna replied softly going back to his conversation.

By the time dinner was ready and the boars were being taken off the spits and carved Juubie was feeling much more himself the calamine and aloe had relieved most of the allergic reaction and the pain draught and Tahna’s increased pain blocks were helping. Juubie sat up feeling refreshed and hungry as he and Tahna were served first from the boar Tahna had provided for the feast.

One of the women literally heaping the meat on Juubie’s leaf plate in front of him. “Oh my word! That’s more than enough!” Juubie said, realizing he’d have to stop Muimei himself.

“You need to eat Dragonheart. I can see daylight through you.” She said and Juubie chuckled.

“I’m not that skinny!” Juubie protested good naturedly and Tahna smiled.

“To us you are my Heart.”

“I have a little stomach, that’s not my fault I was born that way. If I tried to eat all that I’d explode. I don’t have a hollow leg like you do.” Juubie said transferring most of what Muimei piled onto his leaf-plate onto Tahna’s.

“I’ll teach you how to eat like a native.”

“And have me bloated and fat and unhealthy. I don’t have a constitution like you, nor am I built like a blacksmith’s anvil like all of you are. I swear even some of the kids here make me feel small. I’ll say for certain, southerners are all sturdy creatures. You’ll all have to get used to the puny northerner who gets full on what you’d deem a light snack.” Juubie said and Tahna chuckled.

“But I’ll add pounds on you that are healthy Juubie. Seeing ribs is not healthy.”

“I’ll gain that back, you’re only seeing those because I lost weight being apart from you. I’ll admit I am too skinny right now I didn’t used to be, that’s recent and won’t take long to cure.”

“Were you ill? I thought you said you only felt my ills through our bond.”

“Not like you no. I was just feeling your illness that’s true. However, for a long time before that the separation on our bond was difficult and I just couldn’t eat anything that didn’t sit like a bad lump in my stomach before I lost it to a privy. Especially the last six months away from you. Those were sheer torture. I wanted to just die there at the end.”

Tahna started in shock. “You never told me it was that bad for you.”

“I didn’t want to worry you Tahna. I knew if I was feeling it, you were too. I didn’t think it needed to be stated and confirmed. I just wanted to tell you I loved you, not make you upset with worry over matters you could do nothing about on top of your own problems I’m sure were equal.”

“Not to that extent. I was just always so tired. I wanted sleep all the time and even then I never felt rested. I found it very hard to gain power from the land and what I did gain gave me little benefit. It was why I got sick, I had nothing left in me to fight it off with. It never affected my appetite until I got ill.”

“Somehow that does not surprise me. We both seemed to react differently. I wasn’t sick but I felt it. All your symptoms I felt, but I didn’t actually have myself. My chest hurt like I’d been coughing for weeks, but I never actually coughed once. I ached from head to toe, even my skin hurt at times. I just didn’t feel like doing anything. I just sat there in my room staring off into space wishing I was here with you.”

“I can understand why your father could not bring you, however it does make me angry he could not have found another to bring you. I will confess something to you I have not told you before. I wrote to him a few months ago without your knowledge. Before I got sick, I asked him Dragonhead to Dragonhead if he would send you with another Dragonhead for protection. I too did not want you traveling alone, but it was becoming dangerous for us both to be apart. I told him I understood that as your father I knew he’d want to be the one to bring you to me but waiting was now no longer something we could do without pain. I was very worried.”

“What did he say?” Juubie asked wondering why his father had never mentioned the letter before.

“He said he was sorry, but there was no one near you and if one did come he would send you right away. He sounded very upset in his letter. I do not think he

wanted to see you hurting I really do not. Loves you very much he does. However, I do not think he tried hard enough to honor you as his son. I also wrote to Goh and Yidane asking if they were near and Goh was far north as Kings Own on duty and Yidane was suffering a broken leg due to a fall on ice. He was with Goh in the north, They both said they would have gone for you however if they could have. I, like your father, could not come. Like him I was the only one and could not be spared so I do understand. Unlike your father, however, we do not get wandering Dragonheads as often as the northern tribes do. I was praying everyday to the gods one would come and be able to safely bring you home.”

“They did answer your prayers. The Wise Ones came. We must not forget to go up and thank them properly. I promised them we’d go and give them a good scouring and oiling.”

“I will bring them all our leftover feast in gratitude tomorrow as well. Wise Red loves boar she does.”

“I know, she told me. We talked a lot on the way here. It was her idea to come get me.”

“She acts like my mother at times.”

“She treated me like her baby too. Species matters not it seems. Dragon or Human, mothers will always be mothers.”

“Very true.” Tahna said as they stalled their conversation to eat. Tahna noticed Juubie having a difficult time using his hands due to all the bandaging so he gently stayed Juubie’s hands with his own and just smiled and cut up Juubie’s meat for him and finger fed him himself.

Juubie was grateful for the help but felt a little silly eating from Tahna’s fingers in front of everybody. They were getting adoring looks and smiles from people who found it romantic and amusing. Juubie found it hard to find it romantic considering it was just because his hands looked like he was wearing oversized white mittens with just the tips of his fingers poking out.

Tahna’s face however proved he was finding it rather romantic himself and Juubie melted into dark almond shaped eyes that twinkled with love and affection. He’d never get tired looking into those eyes that clearly loved him unconditionally.

However, Juubie had a playful streak and the next bite Tahna passed between Juubie’s lips, Juubie caught the large finger between his teeth and nibbled and worried it with his teeth with a feral grin before he closed his lips and sucked and licked juice off Tahna’s fingers. As predicted Tahna shuddered visibly.

“Do that not unless you be wanting me to mate you right here on table!” Tahna groaned and Juubie grinned.

“Something come ‘Up’ Tahna?”

“Were-beast! You know well it has when you do something like that.”

“Now we’re even. Suffer your loins big man for what you put me through today.”

“Foul evil beast living in your spirit Juubie.”

“Oh Aye.” Juubie chuckled smiling with a wink and Tahna just shook his head resigned to a life with a mate who would ever tease him it seemed.

Muimei was sitting beside Juubie and she chuckled to herself amused. Even though Juubie was male it seemed he’d mastered a generally female secret on how to keep their mates on their toes and make them stumble and stammer with a good old fashioned tease to their groins. Tahna would be sitting down for a while after that little display everyone noticed.

Juubie turned to her and winked and she laughed. “Careful dragonheart. He just might take you on table. Even Inutet cannot wrestle and win against Tahna. You have fight over before it start.”

“Muimei, I already lost that battle yesterday. Not that I put up much of a fight.” Juubie grinned and Muimei laughed again.

“Be crazy in head if you did, your mate most handsome man and strongest warrior in all the tribes. Last gathering of clans many dragonhearts wish he take them to his hearth as mate. He refuses always. Never even look or allow them to wish fruitlessly for his attentions. He says many times he already bonded to you and most did not want to believe him. Next gathering they will at last see Tahna always speaking truth. Many unmated dragonhearts full of false hope have hearts be broken.”

“Oh dear.” Juubie said worried he wasn’t going to be a welcome addition to a clan gathering and Tahna just rubbed the backs of his fingers against Juubie’s cheek.

“Worry not my Heart. Always the other Dragonhead’s know I am bonded and accept for many years you will be coming. It was just young and I mean very young girls who have dreams of fancy that I am telling untruths. Much like you used to say in your letters the opposite and you kept pushing other dragonhearts on me.”

"I just didn't want it to be true. No, that's not it. I did want it, desperately. I just wanted to think it was my over active teenage imagination. I was afraid the distance would hurt us if it was true. I always knew in my heart it was, I just feared it. I was hoping one day you'd write me telling me about your new dragonheart and while I would have been heartbroken and devastated to hear it, I would have known then I wasn't crazy for thinking I'd bonded at five years old."

"I know. Crazy you were not. We did bond then. I can even tell you the minute we did. I remember it clearly and I bet you do too."

"Looking back on it now I do. Then I didn't realize what it meant. We had just arrived and I was running down the beach and ran right into you."

"You knocked me off my feet looking not where you were going." Tahna chuckled and Juubie laughed.

"You were squatting down behind the sand dune I didn't see you until I was right on top of you. After I got the sand out of my mouth and stopped choking I remember looking up and right into your eyes. It was like all the breath was knocked out of my body again. You have the most amazing eyes. I remember thinking they looked like black pearls and I'd never seen eyes shaped like yours before. You reminded me of a predator, you never blinked."

"That was my first thought too. I thought you were part dragon with eyes green like jewels and so big and round and then they looked so very scared and I remember feeling very bad I scared you. I could feel you were scared and I didn't know why I could see all your thoughts in my head. So I thought back to you that I was a friend like I would to a dragon and your fear was gone and then I felt your surprise."

"Because I didn't know I could mind-speak yet. In the north Wellsprings and Wielders don't start using their gifts until they are older. For Wielder's they aren't allowed to try to manipulate power until they are eight. For Wellsprings, because we don't consciously control the power other than push it out on instinct. We aren't allowed to be touched or used directly by wielder's until we are ten and even then it's limited to just using what we push out into the land. Any of-age wielder caught using a child wellspring is severely punished and his powers sealed. Underage just scolded. Wellsprings aren't officially of age until they are thirteen or hit puberty whichever comes first. So I had absolutely no education about my gifts and you caught me off guard."

"No, we bonded. Your power shot through me when you fell on me. I connected to it immediately like chasing sunbeams. It caught us both off guard. In the south, we start learning our gifts the moment we are no longer suckling on mother. I killed my first were-cat at four with my father to protect me in case I failed and I was talking with dragons while still learning to talk to my parents. I didn't realize I

had bonded then, but suspected. I knew for sure when I was twelve and I had my first very good dream of you.”

Juubie blushed. “You beat me there. I was fourteen. Up until then I always just thought about you as the best friend I’d ever had. I told everyone who would listen about you. Tahnay this and Tahnay that. I think people were sick of hearing me talk about you after a while. Every letter you sent just lit up my whole day with excitement and I was floating on the clouds with happiness and I couldn’t wait to write you back and wear your beads and show them off to everybody. I was obsessed with you. I see now it was for clearly obvious reasons. My mother said they all knew then we’d bonded by watching us, but they had decided to let me figure it out on my own. I certainly figured out something at fourteen that was for sure. Then I just felt heartsick and guilty for fantasizing about mating with you and not telling you I was.”

“I didn’t tell you either my heart. I tried suggesting it more than once, hoping you’d figure out I was courting you with gifts as customary to do here.”

“I was about sixteen when I read a book on southern customs and rituals and just what specific beads meant. Wooden, stone or glass for friendship, Coral for luck and protection, mother of pearl and abalone for health, gems for wealth, Jade for fertility and pearls for love. You had just sent me jade and pearls and I dropped the book in shock.”

Tahna grinned. “After that your letters were far more revealing on how you felt as I’d hoped. I knew my heart would understand my messages eventually, very smart you are. I knew you would seek knowledge of our ways by either asking me or someone else directly or study on your own.”

“I’m glad my siblings didn’t catch on then! Oh god they would have given me hell. I was sitting at the table, WEARING your beads reading that book. Jana asked me what was wrong and oh by the gods I lied through my teeth. I was not about to tell my ten year old sister I was suddenly sitting not two feet from her with my heart about to burst out of my chest it was beating so hard and in my lap the biggest raging hard on I’d ever had to accompany the butterflies in my chest!”

Tahna laughed heartily. “Made you that happy to learn I loved you?”

“Tahna you have NO idea. I had to run to the privy and I cried so hard with joy I made myself sick and I made such a mess in that privy I was mortified and cleaned it spotless before I went and found my mother and told her I thought I was bonded to you. She wasn’t surprised to hear it and that’s when she told me she’d suspected it for years.”

“But you didn’t tell me that right away. You did not confess to me outright plainly and not just in suggestion until you were almost eighteen summers.”

“Because I thought at first I was reading more into your letters and beads than I should have been. You were right when you accused me of over thinking things. I thought myself into a right stupid state. Doubting everything and every emotion until I finally just said to myself that I’d never know the truth if I’m not truthful to you. So I wrote you that very sappy love letter.”

“A letter I read so many times I can quote it. You made me a very happy man that day. I was afraid of pushing you to open up too much, I knew I was bonded to you, I always felt you even so far away and I could tell that you were unsure if you were or not. I felt your confusion and tried sending my feelings to you along our bond to comfort you. It was very hard waiting for you to begin to tell me your heart and open to our bond and stop blocking what you felt. After that letter I never hid words from you by hiding them just in the presents I sent.”

“No you didn’t. And I realized I had been feeling you all along too and when I embraced the bond is when all hell broke loose.”

“Aye. Those last three years were very, very hard. Because our bond was stretched too thin for too many years and when we opened it fully and it could not be consummated it began to weaken us, the pull hurt very much.”

“I know beloved. Most Seventeen year old wellsprings are already having children, eighteen raising them, nineteen having more, at twenty a well established family. Granted I’m not female and the baby making is a moot point, but the act of making them is my point. I was already twenty, still a virgin and so heartsick I can’t tell you how many times I contemplated disobeying you both and running away on my own. I was terrified we were never going to be together and it was worth the risk to me to get to you. However, I knew if I ran away you’d be mad and making you angry with me was NOT worth the risk. It was a horrible unsolvable situation.”

“I would have been very angry and very worried had you done that. I raged over you over just silly things. When you’d tell me people called you selfish for wanting to come to me I used to get so mad I’d break things I really did not want broken and didn’t realize I’d done it until it was already in pieces. That was just over someone saying something that really didn’t hurt you, just things being said by people who knew you not as well as I did. Harmless. I do not wish to know what sort of rage I’d go into if you were indeed threatened.”

“I don’t want to see it either. I hear bond rage is frightening and you are far too big to be going about blowing up things in a berserk frenzy. I vow to be a good boy and not stray far from you Tahna.”

“Of that I have no fear and never have my heart. I knew once you came home you would never leave me again.” Tahna said leaning over to kiss Juubie deeply.

The kiss did not break until the clapping and whistling began. Their conversation had drawn several listeners and the kiss had the entire tribe as an audience and Juubie just smiled brightly at them all.

“That’s all you get in public!” Juubie winked and Muimei laughed.

“Unless you both decide to use grotto again.” She said and Juubie blushed so red his skin looked sunburned.

Tahna laughed so hard he choked and Muimei had to slap his back to help him catch his breath.

“Oh Gods! Did you see us?” Juubie asked afraid of the answer.

“Quite a few did and most heard you. Beautiful union to see come into being. You were glowing like moonshine. The Dragon Pair’s power can be seen by all when you mate each other. Like the aurora in the skies at night in winter.”

“Really?” Tahna asked never knowing those ungifted could see what he and Juubie could. Furthermore, that they created enough joint power to make it visible in the first place. No wonder he was cured in health if that was the case. Muimei nodded.

Juubie just shook his head and sighed. Yet another northern modesty he’d have to learn to let go of or else he’d be blushing red constantly for the rest of his natural life. He’d have to accept the fact that as the dragonheart and now living permanently as part of a tribe in the south, his sexual life wouldn’t be very private unless he and Tahna only made love in their hut and knowing Tahna, that wasn’t likely going to happen. He was used to the south and Juubie was fairly positive when Tahna got in the mood he wasn’t going to care where they were before he had Juubie bent over and moaning.

Juubie would have to adapt and embrace the customs of his new home or else. However, knowing the customs and actually adapting to them was going to take time and his own customs of keeping sex in a bedroom or private sanctuaries and walking around modestly covered at all times were going to be hard to break.

Juubie looked over at Tahna and smiled. Then again, he had Tahna and the man was irresistible and Juubie was not about to complain about his extremely handsome mate or tell the man ‘no’, not when he loved him so much.

He’d adapt, eventually.

Tahna winked and returned the smile as drums began to play and Tahna stood suddenly with all the other warriors and he joined them in a dance that had

Juubie's eyes fixated on Tahna and unable to tear them away as the man moved like a cat in a very fast, very erotic and very athletic dance.

He was going to find it VERY easy to adapt. He was already mentally bent over in offering and half tempted to jump the man in front of everyone he was so turned on watching Tahna dance.

Very, Very easy if Tahna kept dancing like that.

"Your mate has wanted to dance this for you for many years." Muimei said softly as she watched Juubie watch Tahna.

"He's so... so..."

"...Very much in love with you." Muimei finished Juubie's sentence.

"Yeah." Juubie sighed melting into the table, his chin resting on his folded arms as he watched. His eyes filled with adoration for Tahna and his loins very much aching with want.

*::I love you Tahna. I want you so much right now I can hardly stand it.::* Juubie sent and Tahna smiled as he danced.

*::You are pleased?::*

*::Oh yes and I'm going to show you how much in front of everyone if you're not careful.::*

*::This dance is meant to please you. I have always wanted to dance it for you.::*

*::Beloved, you are more than pleasing me and when this dance is over you had better take me somewhere to dance for me more in private.::*

Tahna just smiled at him and nodded once and Juubie smiled back, hoping the dance ended soon, no matter how good Tahna looked dancing it for him.

The drums ended abruptly and Tahna marched over to Juubie and Juubie stood up so fast he nearly knocked over the table.

Juubie wasn't the only mate quickly responding to their lovers and literally being carried off physically.

The first dark shadows became welcome retreats and the convenient large boulder looked just about perfect. "Put me down!" Juubie hissed and Tahna complied and stumbled and gripped the boulder to keep on his feet when Juubie did something that made his knees go weak immediately.

Tahna's loin cloth was yanked off and he was groaning with pleasure as Juubie proved with his eager mouth just how VERY PLEASED he'd been with Tahna's dance.

He then stood and leaned over the boulder, lifting his wrap over his hips carefully, avoiding all his bandages. "There's aloe at your feet Tahna. Use that and hurry I want you bad!"

Tahna was sweating already and couldn't break off a piece of the plant fast enough and he liberally coated himself and Juubie and without any more preamble took his mate who was demanding to be taken.

"Gods yes!" Juubie moaned using the boulder to support him and keep his new tattoos free from contact while he lost himself to the moment.

"Sure I am not hurting?" Tahna asked concerned but overjoyed that the aloe had made such a vast difference for ease in joining to Juubie and Juubie hissed in response.

"No, oh so good! Dance for me!" Juubie said and Tahna gyrated his hips as he thrust.

Juubie's deep moan indicated the dance was more than pleasing and Tahna was driven by his own heartbeat pounding in his ears like drums and he danced and mated to the beat and lost himself to his heart.

Juubie was pressing into him with every thrust moving his own hips in a dance of his own where he clung to the boulder panting and moaning.

Such a sudden and rhythmically violent coupling saw them both shuddering in release well before they wished to end the moment and they stumbled back to the celebration, sweaty, disheveled and glowing happily going straight for something to drink as they settled back down at the table again and into their pillows.

The other couples filtered back to the party after their own private dances and the celebration resumed and lasted well into the night before everyone sought their beds to sleep off wine and full bellies and more languid lovemaking.

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Juubie awoke to the sounds of the surf and a bird chirping merrily from the large hibiscus plant by their hut doorway. Tahna was snoring lightly beside him still deeply asleep and tired. Which didn't surprise Juubie much considering the man had proven his stamina the night before with dancing and mating until almost

dawn. Juubie sat up carefully and stiffly. The use of the aloe had been a much needed addition to their lovemaking and it's healing properties as well as it's lubricating properties had insured a morning free from pain and it was just a little soreness to contend with, very manageable. It was the tattoos this morning that were biting him most with pain.

Juubie carefully crawled out of their bed pillows and out from Tahna's protective body language and positioning. Even in his sleep, the man totally blocked Juubie from the entrance of the hut and anything coming through the door would have had to go through Tahna first to get to Juubie.

It was touching and Juubie just smiled at the mountain in his bed as he crawled over him and made his way to where Tahna kept his medicinal supplies on the shelf.

Juubie was quietly trying to make more ointment with hands that did not want to work this morning when he felt large gentle hands reach over and cover his own. "Let me make it Juubie. Suffer not in silence when I am more than capable of doing it for you."

"I'm just stiff and you were tired."

"I can go back to sleep later, you need attention more." Tahna said taking the bowl from Juubie's hands and mixed the compound before setting it aside to help Juubie unwrap his bandages.

They were sticking to the skin and tattoo scabs and made Juubie hiss until Tahna wetted them with warm water so the dried blood would soften and they fell free from the skin easily. "How do I look?" Juubie asked and Tahna smiled.

"The angry reaction is gone, your ointment worked. It is just the typical scabs that will heal very quickly now."

"My ointment didn't mess up the markings did it?"

"No, by the gods these will be beautiful when they heal. Muimei is the most talented of the artists. She has done most of mine and she did your wings on your back. You look as if you could really fly with them my heart." Tahna said as he gently massaged more soothing ointment on the tattoos.

As he worked Tahna explained the importance. "These are more than just markings on your flesh my heart. They are your protections. The most important are the wings. They will tell all who see you that you are a dragonheart and even those not of our tribe are to show you respect. Only dragonheads and dragonhearts wear the symbolic wings on their backs. Four segmented sections

for male dragon wings denote the dragonhead. Three segmented sections for female dragon wings denote the dragonheart.”

“I noticed that on the wise ones.”

“Aye. The male’s wings must be stronger to support his heavier weight and allow him to fight while on the wing. For Dragons, all Males are always born Dragonheads and Females always born dragonhearts. Our markings represent honor to the dragons themselves.” Tahna said moving to Juubie’s hands.

“These markings are your right to wear as a dragonheart. No other bears these, these are your rank. You will notice I do not have markings on my hands. These are symbols of what the dragonheart means to the tribe. Life, death and rebirth. You are the soul of the tribe and heartbeat of the clan. The power of the gods and the land flows through your hands alone. As dragonhead I may only touch the power, you my heart, contain it and purify it with your body. The gods bless you with these gifts that you bless us all with.” Tahna said as he lovingly caressed Juubie’s hands with cooling aloe.

Tahna smiled as his ointment coated fingers lightly traced the markings on Juubie’s collarbone. “This means the most to me. This is my marking, the one I earned when I became Dragonhead. Each pattern is individual to the dragonhead and only two people will ever bear this mark. I as dragonhead and you as my heart. It is much like the rings northerners share with each other when they choose each other to pair. This shows the tribes which dragonhead they must fear if you are harmed. It tells them Tahna is your mate and it is Tahna who will kill them if they fail to show you respect.” Tahna said and Juubie shivered under Tahna’s fingers.

“So I’m branded as yours in other words.”

“Aye.”

“Wielders, all of you bloody possessive bastards. Papa is always hanging onto Mama when he’s home. Goh can’t go five minutes without touching Obie. Yidane panics if Gandes leaves the room to visit the privy and he’s out of his line of sight.”

“Blame the gods for making us so. My father and grandfather are the same. All Dragonheads are and I am no different. Just as I can say the same for Dragonhearts. My Mother is never far from my Father and craves the attention he gives her. Obie I have noticed desires touch often, he needs it to feel secure. Gandes equally panics when not beside Yidane and you are no different Juubie.”

“No I’m not. I cannot deny I have only ever had one desire that has driven me crazy all my life. To be near you and with you. I don’t need beads or flowers or

any of your beautiful gifts. I only need you. I have always been utterly obsessed with you.” Juubie said smiling and Tahna rested his brow against Juubie’s with a returned smile.

“I know. Have me you do my heart. My love, my soul and my life belong to you. I have ever been so.”

“I know. I feel very content. It’s hard to put into words how you make me feel. Before I always felt out of place and lacking something I couldn’t name. When I’d get a letter from you, for brief moment I was no longer sitting in my favorite chair and I was here, with you and I felt balanced. Then I’d finish reading the letter and return to feeling lost again. For years I didn’t realize the truth and then when I did it made the unbalance in my life so much more prominent. I ached to be here. I need you like I need air to breathe. I need to feel your touch, hear your voice, and see you with my own eyes. I fear closing my eyes for a moment only to open them again and you be gone.”

“That makes you a heart like the others Juubie. Just as I crave to possess you.”

“I crave to be possessed. In non-bonds this behavior would be considered very unhealthy.”

“It is for those who do not bond as we do. Men who are overly possessive tend to push away their mates and suffocate them and those overly needy can drive their mates mad. We have more power thus have far more needs and weaknesses. Together we are a strong force but as individuals are very dependant on each other and you are my strength and my weakness combined. Your love feeds me power and the fear of losing you drains me and would kill me if lost. Which makes me even more possessive of you as a consequence. If harm comes to you, I will die.”

“Aye. I know. I do not wish to talk about losing you Tahna it will make me cry.”

“Me too.” Tahna said moving to wrap clean gauze around Juubie’s markings again.

Both men jumped startled when a large box suddenly materialized not three feet across the room and Juubie cheered. “Care package!” He cried going to remove the letter affixed to the outside first and he read it out load for Tahna’s benefit.

*Dear Tahna and Juubie,*

*Your father and I are so happy to hear you arrived so quickly and safely. How is Tahna feeling? I hope he’s doing better, but I’m sure he is, he has your light with him and you make remedies better than I do and I’m positive he’s in very*

*capable hands. My son has ever made me proud of him and I am sure he will always continue to do so.*

*I do remember Tahna's father vividly, I remember thinking he was the largest man I'd ever seen and if Tahna looks like him now as you say it is easy to picture how my son by bonding looks today. He must be very handsome indeed and Juubie your jaw must ache from grinning, I know my son.*

Juubie laughed aloud heartily. "Aye mama!"

*When Jana read your letter she turned into the most lovesick and romantic girl you'd ever seen, Suddenly she wants to rush south in hopes of catching her own wielder like yours. She must have had me describe what southern men looked like a dozen times or more. I've half a mind to turn her loose on you so you may suffer her romantic flights of fancy, she's driving me crazy.*

Here Tahna laughed "Your sister is amusing."

"She's fifteen and is now fixated on being swept away by her wielder. Sound familiar?"

"Acts like her big brother, does she look like him too?"

"She's much prettier."

"I find that hard to believe."

"Because you're biased." Juubie smiled leaning over to kiss Tahna before he resumed reading the letter.

*Renju hasn't stopped talking about the dragons since they came. He's fascinated and I can guarantee when your father deems him old enough and he passes the Wielder testing exams the first trip his feet are going to take is to visit you. But not to pay visit to his brother but get another look at the wise ones.*

*Half the town is wanting to take a southern holiday right along with him, you caused quite the sensation with your dramatic departure. There's a bard in town who had arrived just before the commotion and I swear he had your father and I cornered for hours asking all about you and Tahna. From how you two met, right up until the wise ones came to carry you off.*

*I was sitting here darning socks when Jana came in singing and I think I almost fainted. You've never heard such a sickening romantic ballad ever in your life. The bard wrote a song about you two and everyone is singing it. He makes it sound like one of those old tales of Prince Perdain trapped in the temple awaiting rescue from his handsome wielder Tarnack.*

*He calls you Poor Wellspring Juubie the Fair like you did nothing but sit and pine and simper and whimper all the time. He doesn't know you very well, I informed him that had you not been ordered to stay put because of the dangers of a wellspring traveling alone, your own two feet would have taken matters into their own hands more than once. I had to remind him you were no meek little girl of seven but a man of twenty who was more than capable of handling himself with dignity.*

*However, I suppose it's more romantic to paint you in song as a trapped and beautiful wellspring rescued by Dragons to take you to your warrior in the south.*

*Don't be surprised if you find this bard on your own doorstep so he can add the final verse to his epic about you two. You'll be famous in song, you know how people love tear jerking ballads of love and romance. They'll all be flocking to the south to see Juubie the Fair and his Dragonhead Lord Tahna.*

"The gods forbid!" Juubie groaned and Tahna chuckled.

"But he has your beauty correct at least."

"Oh shush, you're not helping Tahna. How embarrassing. You know as soon as Goh hears it he will tease us both mercilessly over it."

"There is that." Tahna chuckled

*Nothing else changes much in Garth as you know, we're a small village and life goes on. I've sent all you asked for in your last letter, I needed to clean out the kitchen cupboards anyway. I hope I sent enough, if you need more don't hesitate to ask love.*

*Your father says to tell you he loves you and he's very happy you are where you belong and as soon as we can, we'll come to see you. It's just hard for him being the only active wielder as you know. If another decides to settle in Garth you can rest assured your father will split duties with him, he's so tired and he needs this trip almost as much as you did. Almost sixteen years without a rest can drain any man and add to it his guilt over you and he's soul weary.*

*That's all love, write again soon and tell us all how you're both doing. We love you.*

*Love Always,  
Mama*

Juubie folded the letter back up and smiled and then eagerly opened the box.

“What is all that? What did you ask for?” Tahna asked perplexed at the variety of steel bowls in the box.

“I asked for easier ways to feed you my big man. These are what I am used to cooking with and not that tiny little clay pot. If you liked what I managed in that little thing, just you wait until you taste what I can create in proper northern pots and pans.”

“I am thinking I must be creative in my thanking of you for honoring my stomach.”

“Beloved, just you wait.” Juubie winked stacking the pots carefully in the corner and then removing his silverware and dishes.

“These are for me, I can’t abide eating with my fingers and off flimsy leaves. sorry.”

“Do not be. We all have different customs and I will honor yours as much as you do to honor mine my heart.”

Juubie just smiled and took the book of herbs from the box last and stacked it with his others. Before he selected a nice frying pan and grinned.

“Now then, a real breakfast in a real fry pan and I am in the mood to teach you what pancakes are.” Juubie said settling about fixing breakfast.

“Pancakes?” Tahna quirked an eyebrow and Juubie just grinned and grabbed a bowl and began mixing batter. He set that aside and in a separate bowl he crushed pineapple and sugar together and heated it on the fire until it became runny and thick like syrup. He set it aside to cool and tossed chopped bananas into it and then set to work frying up the batter into thin cakes he stacked on a plate and then covered in the syrup and handed it to Tahna who sat curiously watching like a child.

Juubie anxiously awaited the review, which was immediate the way Tahna’s eyes closed with a look of ecstasy on his face. The next thing he knew Tahna was up on his feet, plate in hand and calling at the top of his lungs for the tribe. The first to arrive was Muimei and Tahna just shoved a bite in her mouth.

“Taste! Northern Pancake! My mate cooks best in whole village!” Tahna called it and everyone in turn was fed a taste and were eager to agree with Tahna’s biased but true review.

Soon the hut was full of women mixing at Juubie’s instructions and learning how to make the magic northern pancakes and syrup none of them had ever tasted before. On the wonderful pots and pans from the north. Each woman asking if they could make trade with crafts from the south with Juubie’s mother for pots

and pans of their own. He promised he'd write to her and ask or better yet, ask Goh about helping in establishing some sort of trade route to the south for items like these. He was sure the exotic fruit and perfumes alone would fetch quite a good price in northern markets in trade for cookware and other conveniences from the north easy to carry around if needed.

The men were sitting outside all around the door in the sand and eating faster than the women could cook, the children were thrilled over the sweet breakfast as they toted the food between the cooks and the men and were eating off their father's plates with smiles.

Some women made syrup of pineapples like Juubie had, others of berries, bananas and orange marmalade and the men were trying them all with great relish.

Tahna was packing them away faster than Juubie could cook them. "I had no idea you'd like them THIS much." Juubie chuckled and Tahna smiled.

"My heart you honor me. Never in my life taste such wonder!"

"It's just flour, eggs, butter, sugar and fruit."

"It's made by you."

Juubie blushed and smiled and once Tahna couldn't eat another bite, Juubie fixed his own with the other women who ate chattering happily over the impromptu gathering and meal. The children abandoning their father's empty plates and coming in to their mothers to eat more just for the taste and not because any of them were still hungry. Their fathers had fed them more than enough, but all children adored sweets and Juubie didn't know a single child who didn't like eating pancakes for breakfast.

He had two in his lap that he fed while he ate and Tahna was smiling at the children eating off Juubie's northern fork.

Juubie looked alive and happy and the children made him positively glow as he laughed with them and told them stories while they ate.

He and Juubie would never have their own, but all the village children were theirs in a way, the children were always raised communally and Tahna thought the sight of Juubie surrounded with children very pleasing and the children seemed to love Juubie as much as Tahna did. Tahna was more than content with his life and his northern Dragonheart.

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## **“Dragonhead and Dragonheart”**

*A Wielder and Wellspring Story*

*Author: D. Sanders*

### **Act VI - Trials of Worthiness**

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Life settled quickly into a simple routine. Every morning after they ate breakfast together Tahna and Juubie would walk the perimeter of the territory, making sure all Tahna's protections were in tact and working. Then Juubie would be taken back to the village for safety, the jungle was a dangerous place and Juubie was not a warrior and would never be one. He would never leave the village unescorted by the dragonhead.

The dragonheart would never hold a spear in battle, the heart's duty was in teaching the children, tending the sick and providing power to the dragonhead. His safety was crucial and he did not need to be with Tahna in order to provide him power, their bond was strong and established and Tahna could tap into him from anywhere within their territory if needed. He rarely needed to directly, Juubie's body was constantly filtering power awake or asleep and instinctively fed it back into the land into power nodes that Tahna used.

The only time Tahna needed direct contact to his heart was when he was fighting more aggressively against a rogue power flux or a creature changed were feral or the occasional storm that blew in and Tahna would create a dome of protection over the village so they all could weather the storm's fury without damage to their homes.

After their morning walk and Juubie returned to the village the warriors would gather into hunting parties and go out for the day to bring back meat for the cold larder. Some would go off into the jungle, others would go out to sea on boats to fish. The young women went into the fields and gathered fruits and vegetables while the older women watched the littlest of children and either weaved clothes or new baskets and began cooking the communal meals for mid-day and dinner.

Juubie stayed with the older woman in the village itself and gathered the older children for a few hours every day in the large meeting hut at low tables. He'd already been teaching in the north and immediately began teaching the children of his tribe. Reading, writing, art, arithmetic, and history, whatever lesson Juubie decided on that morning is what he taught.

He made the classroom a game for the children to keep it interesting while they learned and it also kept the older children occupied while everyone else was working and the infants and toddlers napping.

Once the women returned from the fields, the children were dismissed from lessons to go help with their chores and Juubie would join the women. Either

grinding grains, stacking provisions into the store houses, cleaning and gutting fish, tending the cook fires or whatever task just needed an extra set of hands.

He also made sure everyone was healthy and if someone was ill, Juubie would make sure they rested comfortably and were tended properly. He was very grateful for his herb manual, he used it often.

The men would come back at mid-day with their morning kills and eat before they started on the more labor intensive tasks within the village. Fixing huts that needed mending, carrying heavy burdens, cleaning and butchering the meat for the cold house and whatever else needed to be done that day.

Every full moon Juubie performed the fertility dance that Muimei had taught him. It wasn't so much a dance as a ritual. All the women who wanted children would gather on their knees before him and Juubie would wear a crown of white plumeria in his hair and place one on each of the women's heads. He'd ask the moon goddess for blessing for them and paint each brow with a white circle from his thumb and lay a white handprint on each belly. Before the women left with their mates and hope for conception.

The first woman that became pregnant after his ritual had Juubie grinning for days afterwards. He knew it was just a symbolic ritual, so did everyone, but it felt good just the same and Juubie couldn't wait for the babe to arrive.

She did nine months later and it was Juubie who cut the cord from her small belly and wrapped her in warm cloth. Saying a prayer for health and strength over the infant and trying not to cry like a fool with joy over the beautiful newborn. Which he gently laid in her mother's arms with a kiss for both mother and daughter before he excused himself from her hut.

The first death was the hardest for Juubie, who did weep openly over the old warrior, Muimei's mate for almost fifty years as he lit the funeral pyre and said a prayer for a safe journey to the heavens before he scattered the ashes along the shore and into the sea saying prayers for rebirth. He'd died of nothing more than old age, but it was still difficult to say goodbye and Tahna comforted Juubie in their hut that night as Juubie sobbed himself to sleep.

The north seemed a million miles away anymore, a lifetime ago spent in another world. Juubie settled into the tribe as if he'd been born into it and his fair skin had turned into a healthy brown covered in darker freckles that Tahna found irresistible. His tattoos long healed and prominently visible on his fairer complexion. Those too Tahna found highly stimulating and Juubie was left breathless on more than one occasion by his dragonhead.

Letters went back and forth both to his parents and his uncles. Goh was thrilled with Juubie's suggestion of open a trade with the south and he and Obie were

planning a diplomatic vacation south to present the crown's official invitation for open trade at the next gathering of the clans.

It was high time the southern regions of Holst benefited from northern advances and commerce and vice versa. With the Wielders and Dragonheads in charge of the trade route it was guaranteed to be fair and items could be transported back and forth from the capitol of Pernath to each individual tribe Dragonhead. Each tribe would be allowed to select their preferred trade good because each tribe would have different skills in which to barter.

Tahna's tribe had vast fertile lands that supplied more pineapples and sugarcane than the tribe could eat themselves. Tahna already regularly sent bushels of pineapples and sugar to the other dragonheads, in exchange for items his tribe did not have. His father's lands were rich in papaya and cotton fields. His father's weaver's made the best fabric and often sent bolts of it in trade for sugar and pineapples. They were already trading amongst themselves it would be easy for the tribes to send to the capitol as well in exchange for goods. It was simple expanding of trade to the north.

Juubie was given full credit for the idea by Goh and King Gerdar sent him a personal thank you letter. Juubie replied immediately and sent along with it a bushel of Pineapples that had the King writing back in sincere gratitude for the gift. The Queen apparently loved them as much as Juubie did and hadn't had one since she was a young girl when she'd visited the south with her Father's Dune and Parna. Juubie extended a personal invitation that if they ever wanted to come south again for a visit, his tribe would protect them and shelter them for as long as they wished to stay.

That letter got a personal reply from the Queen in response saying if she could pry Gerdar away from the council she'd have him on the back of the next available horse heading south. She was a delightful woman and her letter read more like a letter from his mother and not from Queen Amandine herself.

The first year seemed to fly by before either Juubie or Tahna noticed the time. They were so immersed in day to day life and each other they almost missed celebrating their first anniversary of their bonding.

It seemed they'd just celebrated their bonding day when Goh and Obie along with Gandes and Yidane arrived six months later. The gathering of the clans would be in six months and Goh and Obie wanted a good long vacation first and to get reacquainted with the south and their customs again before heading with Tahna's tribe to the gathering.

Yidane was walking with a slight limp due to his broken leg from just under two years before and the warm climate was going to do his health good.

Juubie saw the group coming on their horses down the steep path that lead out of the jungle and Juubie raced across the sand to greet them.

He leapt into Goh's arms laughing for a firm hug and Goh stepped back and held him at arms length for inspection. "What's with all the artwork on you?" He asked and Juubie laughed.

"I'm dragonheart now, I'm not the pasty white little northern boy anymore." Juubie replied and Obie laughed.

"Have you told your mother you're covered in tattoos?" He asked and Juubie shook his head.

"Are you kidding? Of course not!" Juubie replied laughing as Gandes came over and inspected them.

"Very pretty though. I always thought Yidane would look nice with a tattoo." He said and Yidane's eyes widened with surprise.

"Really?"

"With your broad chest for a canvas? Oh yes." Gandes purred and Yidane swallowed hard.

"Oh man, don't tell me that in public Gandes. Not unless you want a buggering with an audience."

"You are in the south." Juubie said with a wink that had Goh laughing so hard he choked.

Obie just grinned and shook his head.

Once Goh regained his breath Juubie lead them over to the village. The men were still out for the morning and the woman and children greeted the traveler's with flower leis around their necks and food.

They were sitting in the shade chattering when Tahna returned and four pairs of eyes widened. "HO! WELCOME MY FRIENDS! I felt you arrive!" Tahna hailed setting the large buck he'd had slung across his broad shoulders down and coming over to greet his friends.

"By the GODS, you are NOT little Tahna!" Obie gasped and Tahna laughed.

"I am. It is nice to see you again." Tahna said as Obie craned his neck up with his jaw hanging somewhere within the vicinity of his chest.

Juubie smiled and crawled under Tahna's arm. "See? I told you all in my letters he was a mountain."

"Mountain? He could wrestle a dragon and win! Bloody hell I feel puny and I'm not!" Yidane said and Tahna laughed.

Goh was still digesting the shock before he grinned. "Who knew that cute little chubby kid trailing after my nephew like a lovesick puppy would turn out so nice? I know I wrote you many times, but I always had that kid you were in my head. I feel suddenly quite old."

"You're only forty-three, hardly old." Obie replied and Tahna smiled.

"Quite true. Quite true and you'll feel twenty again before you leave my village. Which is your home always." Tahna said sincerely.

Tahna excused himself for a moment to carry over the buck to his other returning warriors to butcher and Gandes whistled through his teeth.

"He just picked that up like it weighed nothing at all." He said and Juubie laughed.

"Tahna is an ox. However, he does cheat a little. Why break your back when a little power helps to lift? I'm lifting it if you want to get technical about it." Juubie said and Goh laughed.

"Very true. How are you Juubie, really? No troubles adapting?"

"Oh no, I love it here. There are times I wish I had mama's oven to bake in now and again and a nice porcelain bathing tub to soak in other than the grotto. Nevertheless, other than those little conveniences I'd not trade a moment of my time here. It's hard work, but when everyone is doing the work together it's much easier. We all have our duties to take care of and Tahna really delegates responsibilities well. Everyone does what they are best at and everyone is happy and the work gets done without fuss. It's simple and peaceful and I feel wonderful." Juubie said all bright smiles and then he grinned wickedly. "Not to mention I have one damn handsome wielder who spoils me rotten."

"I don't want details. My imagination is already providing me enough. I don't want to know. It was hard enough giving you a sex talk when you were a teenager. I don't think I prepared you enough for handling something like that." Obie said and Juubie laughed.

"Ah, yes. He is a big boy." Juubie waggled his eyebrows and Obie shuddered.

"I said no details!" Obie replied and Goh was choking again.

Gandes visibly blanched and shivered he hadn't thought about mating something that large either and looking at Tahna's size in relation to Juubie's all Gandes could picture in his mind looked like it really hurt and he was cursing Obie internally for bringing the subject up in the first place.

"Goodness you both look horrified. Do I look torn in two to either of you? I'm very happy and coping quite nicely thank you. You both have over active imaginations!" Juubie said and rolling his eyes.

"Hey, we're all men and women are right when they accuse us of thinking with our crotches." Goh chuckled as Tahna returned.

"I must have missed a joke." He said and Juubie laughed.

"Uncle Obie here is having size issues dearest. Would you like Tahna to show you?" Juubie said moving to pretend to lift up Tahna's loin cloth.

"OH GODS NO! YOU ROTTEN BOY!" Obie cried embarrassed and Tahna just laughed figuring out what he'd missed rather quickly after that.

Juubie just laughed with good natured mirth. "Come on, let's get you all settled. Tahna and Inutet and the others built you both huts next to ours since you're all going to be here a good long while, they are more comfortable than the guest huts and Tahna has some ideas for you both we should discuss." Juubie said leading the way with Tahna who helped carry their heavy packs and lead their horses over to his men so they could be watered and sheltered in safety.

Once the couples were unpacked and settled they joined Juubie and Tahna in their hut around the fire. "So what did you want to discuss?" Goh asked and Tahna smiled as he passed around clay cups and pomegranate juice.

"Dragonheads and Wielders. We are one and the same and this is not my idea but the wise ones suggested this and I think it is a very good idea." Tahna began as he filled cups.

"As you know, we are very ritualistic in the south. We try very hard to live in harmony with the gods and nature and our brothers in the sky. It is why for so long we have remained very closed off to the north and for some dragonheads they see a very distinct lack of respect for our customs at times from the north. Which is as you know not the case but it can appear so. The wise one suggested that you would gain more respect with the elder Dragonheads if you yourselves went as Dragonheads to the gathering of tribes."

"But aren't we? I mean we are Wielders Yidane and I."

“Yes, but you have never taken the trial of worthiness. You just test each other in the north, peer to peer, father to son to gain your ranking. You have never faced a dragon one on one in a test of knowledge, strength and skills. In the south our father teaches us and then we are given the trial to prove what we have learned and are worthy to become dragonhead of our own tribe. The wise ones have volunteered to give you both the trial to earn your markings and become true dragonheads of the south.”

“Whoa, really?” Goh asked looking shocked.

“Aye.”

“What’s involved? I mean I’m not twenty anymore and if it involves running up and down a mountain I need to get in better shape first.” Goh said with a self depreciating chuckle and Tahna smiled.

“Strength and endurance is only one aspect of the test and it is not by running or lifting. But how you use your power to handle a situation, everything is based off your knowledge of how to use all the land makes available to you. It tests your quick thinking, your skill, your cunning and imagination. You are not to use your dragonheart and rely solely on the land itself because there may be times when your dragonheart is wounded and you would not risk him to save yourself.”

“Very true. I’m game to at least make the best damn try at it I can. The worst I can do is fail and embarrass myself for eternity right?” Goh said and Tahna smiled.

“Only you and the dragon would know the truth.”

“I’m with Goh, I’ll give it my best.” Yidane said and Tahna nodded.

“Then it’s settled. Rest this week from your journey and dawn of the seventh day you’ll both go up the mountain to be met by your opponents. You’ll each be taken to trial separately and then brought back here at dusk.” Tahna said and both men nodded.

Conversation turned to more mundane chatter when Goh began humming a song grinning evilly. “What is that horrible tune?” Juubie asked and Goh’s smile turned positively wicked.

“The Ballad of Wellspring Juubie the Fair and Lord Dragonhead Tahnapay.”

“Oh god! I forgot about that! Tell me it’s not as bad as Mama wrote in her letters!” Juubie said and Goh winked.

“Worse! You have every single teenage wellspring dreaming of dragons coming to whisk them away to the south. Every unmatched wielder pissed off because he’s just an ORDINARY wielder and not some exotic rouge from the south who can send dragons to escort his wellspring to his side.”

“I am no Lord. Why do they call me a Lord?” Tahna asked and Goh shrugged.

“Because in a way you are Tahna. You govern your tribe like a lord governs his lands up north. It’s a title northerners are familiar with to associate with what you actually do. You do rule your people as the Dragonhead. The north can get complicated with titles.” Goh said and the explanation was good enough for Tahna, who really didn’t care one way or the other.

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Dawn of the Seventh Day arrived and Tahna lead Yidane and Goh up the mountain, both dressed in nothing more than a simple loin cloth and a single machete at their sides.

Obie and Gandes were to wait with Juubie in the village until dusk.

At the top of the steep trail stood two massive dragons, one a bright emerald green with deep amber golden eyes and another male a brilliant shimmering bronze with sapphires for eyes.

Both Goh and Yidane stopped and bowed deeply with respect and both Dragons dipped their heads in return gestures of respect.

*::Kings Own, Goh, Follow.::* The Green stated and turned and Goh Followed.

*::Wielder Yidane of the High North Western Sea, Follow Me.::* The Bronze indicated and Yidane followed. Tahna returned home to wait with the others until dusk.

Goh followed the Dragon to a Cave and then the dragon turned. *::Sit and we will talk first. You come well passed the age we normally give these trials. I would like to talk plainly to you first.::*

“I will gladly tell you all you wish Wise one.”

*::I already know you Goh. I have seen many great deeds fall from your hands. When Dune and Parna came many years ago they spent many days with my sister heart and she foretold many tales. You among them.::*

“I have been told that Wise One.”

*::She did not tell all. Sit and I will tell you more.::*

Goh, startled, sat and gave his complete attention to the dragon.

*::You have already proved your worthiness time and again. The boy who would not let his brother heart suffer his persecution alone, the youth of pure heart who served his uncle King and became the youngest King's Own in the History of our Land. The man who has the oracle eye, who dreamed of his Dragonheart and faithfully came to him and loved and honored him for many years. Who wept when he had to cast sentence on his brother dragonhead, who laughed with the child who needed joy, who even though he is losing his eyes fights for what he believes. Goh, your sight plagues you. When will you tell your heart the truth?::*

"When it comes time Wise One, I had hoped otherwise."

*::False hope King's Own. Your eyes cloud and in five turnings of the seasons they will see no more. Nevertheless, do not think because you lose one sense you have not others. Your mind is Dragonwise and you have such gifts of tongue that persuade even the most reluctant to see reason. Even now you know you need not your eyes to protect and to stay true to your calling as Dragonhead. You serve the people in more ways than of fighting that which the young can do in your stead. You have wisdom gained from experience, you have a pure heart that has ever been impervious to corruption and you have a gentle hand that guides and shapes the future. I have one question to ask you in your trial of worthiness. What do you hope to achieve in your life Kings Own?::*

"That is a difficult Question wise one. It changes always. Had you asked me that when I was eighteen I would have said finding my Dream, my Heart Obie. At twenty seven I would have said helping Gerdar gain the peace treaty with the Northern Trade Alliance embargo. At thirty four I would have said building the bridge at Ternat Bay to connect the inlet to the west. At forty three, open trade with the southern tribes. The last being one I have not achieved yet. There is always something more I can do, I have no intention of stopping until I take my last breath. I am not satisfied with complacency. I have been given gifts from the gods that I intend on using for their will until they call me home. I look not on them as achievements, I look on them as my duty."

*::And that is what makes you worthy King's Own. Always strive for one more, push for greater things and not for pride or glory but for honor and duty. You have passed your trial King's Own, Dragonhead of the South. Now I tell you your path. What my Sister Heart did not reveal, your eyes will prevent you from duties where you put yourself and your heart at physical risk, but they will never hinder you in what is to come. You and your heart will stay in the south. You will be the link between the north and the south. You know both customs and honor them both. You have great skills in negotiating between people who refuse to compromise. You are the voice of the King as King's Own and of the tribes as*

*Dragonhead. You and you alone can handle this change and guide it smoothly to fruition that will keep both sides appeased. You have also earned your rest from travels. The south will give you many years of good health to come and your eyes though gone will never be a burden to those of your tribe or to your King who will ever rely on you as his ambassador to the south. You will stay with Tahna and Juubie and make your home here. You and your heart will find much peace and in three turnings of the seasons find more reason to stay firmly planted in the home you make here. Not yet born is the child who will come to need you both. The child you have always wished for Goh. She will come, daughter of a Wielder unmatched and unaware he left his lover with child and a young tribeswoman who will fade giving life to your daughter. This is your future Goh, what you make of it is in your own hands.::* The Green said and Goh just smiled.

“I plan on making a good damn go of it. A Daughter? Obie will cry when I tell him.”

*::I’m sure he will Dragonhead. He loves you and desires a family with you.::*

“We both desire that and have for years now. Thank you for telling me this.”

*::You are welcome. Now come, I will give you your pattern marking as Dragonhead. You will take this to Muimei so she may give you your marks.::* The dragon said going over to a piece of driftwood and with his claw he carved an intricate pattern in the wood.

Goh took the wood and bowed, this was an obvious dismissal. He walked out of the cave to see an old woman sitting on a rock with a needle and a pot of ink.

“Sit down New Dragonhead. I will give you your marks.” She smiled and Goh complied.

“I forgot about this part. Obie will faint when he sees me all tattooed.” Goh said and Muimei chuckled.

“Ah, but he gets his tomorrow as your heart.”

“Obie will definitely faint. Perhaps you should get him while he’s passed out. He doesn’t care for needles much.” Goh said and Muimei laughed.

“He will live.” She said and went to work tattooing Goh’s markings on his chest and putting his dragonhead wings on his back and banding both upper biceps with the warrior symbols of protector and provider.

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Yidane followed the bronze dragon farther up the path to a cave entrance and followed the beast inside. He turned and sat and cocked his head and a whirling blue eye fixed on Yidane.

*::Please sit Wielder Yidane. Your leg pains you greatly.::*

“I shattered it a couple of years ago, it healed badly and I am not twenty anymore.”

*::Very true and you come to trial well passed the age we usually give these trials. I will share an insight with you and their purpose and why you come already having passed.::* The dragon said and Yidane was shocked but made himself comfortable and listened.

*::The purpose of the trial is to test the young who have had no life experience to draw from. We test them to see how they use what they have learned and how they would apply their knowledge when faced with dangers or puzzles. For in real life, those dangers and puzzles could cost a precious life if the Dragonhead hesitates and falters. He must be able to think quickly, adapt swiftly and stay calm in situations where the flock would panic without his guidance. We make the young face what they fear most and then learn to recognize that fear in others. He is the one who must show no fear, the one who must protect those who do fear. If he shows fear, those looking to him for safety loose faith and doubt him and troubles arise. We teach not in the trial that it is wrong to fear, it is only that it is wrong to allow fear to rule you. Those who can face their fears and conquer them are worthy.::* The dragon began settling comfortably himself.

*::Many fears you have faced and conquered. The loss of loved ones to harsh territory in the north when still a child. The same child who though terrified and untrained used his gifts to protect and shelter others. Who stood strong in his fear and would not let it rule him. The fear of never finding your heart, seeking fruitlessly, leaving your home on the sea to come in search. The fear you felt when you found him and he suffered, trapped in his own fear and pain. The fear you faced when you held him and broke through the fear that trapped his mind. The fear you faced when in battle he came to danger and the bonding rage you managed to quell and keep yourself sane to save him. That is a strong gift Yidane. It takes a powerful man to control the blind rage and not let it consume him.::*

“I had to, Gandes needed me.”

*::Yes, you had to. Why?::*

“Because I could not allow myself to lose my mind when I was the one he and so many others depended on. It wasn’t just Gandes trapped in that cave-in, but the whole village who had gone to that cave for shelter against the rouge node and

their whole livestock had been changed into were feral beasts. I was the only wielder within miles. I was the only one capable of saving them and I would not have been able to do it had I let my fear turn me into a beast as well.”

*::And that is why you are Dragonhead. You control your destiny and do not let it control you. Saved them you did and at great injury to yourself. Ribs and arm broken. Many weeks healing you spent while still seeing to your duties bedridden. Your heart I think called you to rest many times.::*

“Gandes called me many things during that time. I tend to over work when I should be resting. Gandes has on more than one occasion slipped sleeping draughts into my wine to get me to heed him properly. I am ever being scolded by my Wellspring.”

*::Because the heart knows you best and even now he scolds you over your last injury.::*

“My leg? Yes, he worries about it but I cannot forsake my duties because I will have a leg now that will always pain me. You deal with what does not kill you and move forward. Gandes however would have me retired and him feeding me grapes off a vine if I let him. It is a balance I have with my heart. He wants me to do too little and I want to do too much and we meet at a compromise in the middle.” Yidane said and the dragon snorted in very definite draconic laughter.

*::Sounds like my heart, all the same. Species matters not.::* He said and Yidane smiled and nodded.

*::Now then, we call you here not to take trials you have already passed many times over. Well call you for other reasons. Goh is being given his path and now I give you yours. Great and wondrous changes come and will only succeed when men who trust, love and honor each other work together to see it through. For many years in your youth you sailed fine merchant ships and fishing vessels. You know the sea and you know trade. Here on this beach there will come the first southern port of trade. Goh and Obie will make this their tribe village. Ambassadors to the south and you and Gandes will be most important. You understand what Goh does not. Goh is the diplomat and negotiator. You are the one who knows the ships and the goods and how to manage a port city. You will become the first Dragonhead Port Master. Goh will rely on your knowledge and wisdom greatly. Many from the north will come to make up your tribe, your workers and your sailors. They report to you and you to Goh. Come, Ride on me and I will show you where your port must be built. Safe harbor.::* The dragon said and stunned but excited Yidane carefully crawled onto the dragon’s back and just a few short miles down the beach from Tahna’s tribe lay the most beautiful natural harbor Yidane had ever seen.

“That reef will need a good lighthouse for the ships to come around, but they can port in beautiful still waters there!” Yidane called out excitement gripping him.

*::Yes, deep still waters from the natural breakwater reef. It is far enough away from Tahna’s village to not disrupt them but close enough for this to be the main port of trade for the goods to be distributed to the insular tribes. You must set to work immediately, the gathering of the council will agree to Goh’s proposals. You must be ready to begin trade soon. Tahna’s Warriors will aide you in the building of the pier and then men from the north will follow on the first ship. Your injuries that prevent you from traveling and fighting will not hinder you here. Your greatest strengths of mind and skill will serve you well here in your new tribe land port.::*

“And Gandes will stop harping at me!”

*::That too Dragonhead! That Too!::* The Dragon sent amused as they returned to the cliff and cave and were met by an older tribeswoman.

*::Now, I give to you your markings Dragonhead.::* The dragon said drawing with his claw in the dirt beside the woman an intricate pattern.

“Gandes did mention he thought I’d look good in a tattoo, I think he’ll approve of that beautiful design.”

*::You flatter Dragonhead. You earned this long ago. Muimei will give them to you now and to Gandes tomorrow.::* The dragon sent and Yidane laughed.

“If you can tie him down long enough. I don’t think he’s expecting his own.”

*::He is your heart. If he cannot tell from looking at Juubie he will bear his own as your dragonheart, then you will have much fun returning the teasing he gives to you.::*

“Oh now that is worth the pain of a dozen tattoos alone.” Yidane laughed sitting down in front of Muimei who winked and went to work, giving Yidane his own markings. The Bronze dragon vanished silently down the path.

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Everyone sat around the fire on the beach waiting and Goh was the first to return well before dusk, his upper body and arms wrapped in white gauze and he was smiling. Obie leapt to his feet and raced across the beach.

“Let me see! Are you hurt? What happened?” He said excitedly, his voice scared and going to gently lift the bandages. Goh chuckled.

"I'm fine Obie. Calm down, your man just got his tattoos as Dragonhead."

"You passed!" Obie said relieved and then his eyes widened. "Tattoos? You got Tattooed?"

"Aye beloved. It's customary. Careful now, they're barking on my skin."

"Oh let me see! Sit down!" Obie said carefully steering Goh to the fire and everyone clustered around him.

"Oh Goh, they're beautiful!" Obie gasped.

"They are fine strong markings. Muimei's hand is still the best." Tahna said approvingly and Juubie passed Obie a pot of aloe lotion from inside his hut.

"Keep them moist for the next few days with this, then let the air at them so the scabs can dry and fall off. It takes a good week or two to heal completely." Juubie said and Obie took the pot and settled at Goh's side looking very proud.

"Can you tell us what happened?" Gandes asked still looking worried about Yidane.

"I will when Yidane returns, there is much to discuss. Very much. Huge changes are on the horizon." Goh said as they waited.

Just as the sky began to turn a lazy orange and purple as dusk settled. Yidane came limping up the beach also covered in gauze and Gandes was immediately at his side offering support. "Your leg is killing you, you've been on your feet too long Yidane."

"I'm fine Gandes, you couldn't burst my spirits with a feral polecat gnawing on my tailbone right now." Yidane said smiling and draping his arm over Gandes' shoulders as he settled at the fire with the others with a sigh, glad to be off his aching leg.

"I have to see!" Gandes said excitedly, moving to gently expose Yidane's markings. "By the gods, I knew you would look so good in tattoos. When you heal my love, beware my affectionate art appreciation."

"Beloved, I'm counting on it." Yidane winked as he turned to Goh. "You want to go first or shall I? I think you and I had similar experiences up there."

"Enlightening ones. Yes. I'll start and then I'm sure you'll pick up where I leave off." Goh said with a smile and cleared his throat.

“First. Obie, we’ll need to send a letter to my father and have them send us our keepsakes. You and I are here permanently.”

“WHAT? Are you serious?” Obie asked looking stunned.

“Aye. I’ve been charged with a very important task here. You and I are now the official ambassadors to the south. We are to remain as liaisons between both North and South and to keep the peace between two very drastically different cultures. If you thought we were busy before traveling around beloved. We’ve only just begun. We’re building a new trade city from scratch and it’s up to you and I to make sure people don’t offend each other and keep the peace. You know politics and Lords and guild masters one misstep and you have to start all over again.”

“Don’t I just. We do have plenty of work ahead of us then, this will take years.” Obie said and Goh nodded.

“Aye it will, but what an adventure, we’re seeing a whole new world opening and Holst expanding right before our eyes.”

“Precisely. When you write Grantham, better ask him to send our things too. Gandes and I are staying right along with you.” Yidane said and Gandes dropped his juice cup and stared.

“I thought as much. I can even guess what you’ve been instructed to do here. I take it our sailor and merchant fisherman has a new port of call?”

“Exactly. You may know politics and can dance with a graceful shrewd tongue, but you know nothing about sailing and ships and merchant guild laws and trade or how to build the port itself. You’re looking at the new southern port master. I’m your right hand man brother. I’ll keep the cargo moving and the accounting records accurate and deal with whatever else tends to go wrong on a daily basis when dealing with the fishes and you get to toss out chum for the sharks.”

“Nice analogy but accurate. Leaders are hard enough to deal with without me having to also deal with their men, sailors, accountants and trying to keep stock and make sure what they said was in the cargo hold shipments actually were. I’ve heard far too many horror stories of ships records that said the cargo was gold and it turned out to be turnips and stones when you open the boxes.”

“Precisely. Men are men and someone will always try to cheat out another. We are going to be very busy men for a very, very long time.” Yidane said and Goh nodded.

“That’s so true, but thankfully we’re not also having to try to keep our horses from spooking on mountain trails and laying cold in a barn to keep warm anymore. I can’t think of a better climate to be working in.” Goh said and Yidane laughed.

“My leg is already feeling better just thinking about it.” Yidane replied and Gandes let out an audible sigh.

“Thank the GODS! I am so weary worrying over you Yidane. Finally you’ll sit down occasionally.”

“Dearest, sitting comes after. I’ve got to get to work right away. The wise one ordered me to begin building the port immediately. He said Goh’s proposals to the gathering will be accepted and we have to be prepared to immediately begin trade. He flew me over to the site we’re supposed to make our port and Tahna he said you’d have your men help.”

“Absolutely. We will all pitch in to help build, my back is as strong as the next.”

“Tahna your back is stronger than ten men. Thank you. The site is about two miles north on the beach here. Far enough away from your tribe so you won’t be disturbed by what will become a rather busy port eventually. We’ll have to set up definite boundaries so wandering Sailors don’t come disturbing the peace.”

“That’s assured. Not to mention we can’t have northern men wandering into the jungle it’s far too dangerous for common folk to venture. This isn’t a land you can waltz around in like a country picnic sojourn. The non-were beasties are dangerous enough and a boar or panther can pounce you before you knew what hit you. Yes, we have to make sure that who comes to port, stays in port. However, we’ll deal with that after we actually begin building it and I give you full control Yidane. You know best and I will abide by whatever you decide.” Goh said and Yidane nodded.

“The first things we must build are the pier moorings. The boats will need a place to dock and unload. And at least one good sturdy warehouse to start. We can expand from there once we get some permanent residents down here.”

“Our tribe. Yes the wise ones mentioned that. Very prudent they adapt to the lifestyle here. We are the southern port tribe. Let’s make sure we balance north and south right off the bat. We have to walk a very fine line, when in the south, live like a southerner and run the port like a northern one. Harmony is vital and I don’t want to see a dirty port marring this land. We have the chance to do this right Yidane.”

“My thoughts exactly, this land is pure and untainted and I intend to keep it that way. What I hated most where I came from was the filth. Not in my port tribe!” Yidane said and Goh laughed.

“You fastidious bastard.”

“Of course. I’ll fine men who dirty my port. Hurt their private purses and they are more apt to keep clean and respect the rules. I will say the one thing that we will have to adapt to in the south are the buildings themselves. We will need more sturdy structures than the huts, but we can build a wooden city that will weather the elements better while at the same time still retain a southern flavor. Juubie that’s where I will need you I think and you’re marvelous charcoal pencil. Can you draw me some ideas? You know northern buildings and you also know the beauty of the south. Can you combine them for me?”

“I will certainly do my best. I think this is all wonderful. Tahna and I will be close enough to visit you but far enough away that our tribe will remain as we are now. I think this will work wonderfully.”

“I too think this is exciting and to know my people will remain as they are now also sets my mind at ease. Too much change too quickly and it can fall apart.”

“Tahna you are wise. That’s exactly true. We must contain the port to the port and it must not expand beyond the territory we claim as the southern port tribe. Just like tribes here, we do not cross boundaries and disrespect our brother tribes.”

“Already you talk like a born dragonhead. I am most happy to neighbor you. We will be brother clans and my clan will ever come to your aide when needed.” Tahna said, a wide smile splitting his face.

“As ours will to you.” Goh replied and as the sun set and the moon rose they talked and discussed plans well into the night. Each member of the group contributing ideas and every one of them eager to begin.

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That night as Obie tended Goh’s tattoos before bed he sighed. “There is more Goh. Talk to me beloved. You’re troubled. It’s your eyes isn’t it?” Obie asked going straight to the heart of matters like he always did.

“I could never hide anything from you dearest. Yes. I figured you already knew.”

“When have you ever been able to hide anything from me? I’ve noticed for years how tired your eyes get and how you have to squint anymore to read. You’re going blind aren’t you?” Obie asked tenderly, setting the pot aside and wrapping loving arms around Goh’s middle where he sat behind Goh on their bed.

“Yes. Ah damn it I was hoping not but yes.” Goh sighed, frustration and grief warring with his pride.

“How long beloved?”

“Five years.”

“I will ever be your eyes beloved. You know that.”

“I do dearest and it’s not that that makes me sad. I don’t care if I never read another book, it’s knowing I will lose the sight of your face that kills me.” Goh said finally breaking down in tears and Obie wrapped around him in comfort.

“Goh, I’ve been with you twenty-two years. I love you more today than I did back when we first bonded. I have seen you do amazing things, I have never felt more loved or more proud of you in all my life. Do you really think after all these years together you will never see me again? With the mind that you have that can remember the smallest details? I think not my love. Close your eyes and tell me what you see?”

“I see the most beautiful man in the world to me. I always have.”

“You see me as I was twenty years ago, I know you do. I have wrinkles starting around my eyes now, and there is gray in my hair and I know when you look at me, you never see them do you?”

“Your beauty never fades.”

“Only to you Goh. Just as I still see the young man I fell in love with so long ago. Do you really need your eyes to see me? I don’t, so I know you don’t either. You will be old and gray one day as will I and I will ever see you as that handsome young man who appeared on the temple roof and changed my life forever.”

“How is it you always know what to say to make me feel better?” Goh asked taking Obie’s hands from his waist and lifting them to his lips to kiss.

“Because I know you and I love you and I will always remind you of your strengths when you doubt them.”

“You bless my life Obie. Let’s not dwell on matters we cannot change. I have more happier tidings to tell you too.” Goh said turning to face Obie and he laid a gentle, affectionate hand to Obie’s cheek.

“You bless my life more than I can say and we will have more to bless us. For years I know how much you wanted to raise a child from the adoption registry and how we could not because of our duties. The wise one told me today that in

three years you and I will be parents at last. We'll have a daughter to raise together."

"Goh, are you serious?" Obie asked, his eyes lighting up like stars and shimmering with sudden tears.

"Aye beloved. The circumstances are sad. The wise one told me that we will have a wielder spreading his seed down here and leaving and the mother will sadly not survive the birth. The girl will need us and I already love her."

Obie couldn't reply, his emotions manifesting in tears and Goh held him close. "Don't feel bad for feeling happy Obie. You are not happy over the death of the mother, you are happy because you will give one child your heart. A child I have longed to raise with you."

"We'll be a family that's all that matters. I always thought you'd be such a wonderful father and there were so many times I wished I was a woman so I could make you one."

"I know. We put our own desires aside in favor of duty for many years Obie. It's long passed the time we put aside our wandering feet and made a home of our own together. We can still do our duties and make our desires reality at the same time. I want to see you brown in the sun, your hair long again and our daughter in your arms. And I will at least once before my eyes abandon me. That memory I know I will ever carry."

"I love you Goh."

"I love you too Obie. Always." Goh said as they shared a kiss, their lips meeting in familiar comfort of a long love affair still beating strong after so many years.

They loved in a dance whose steps were ever familiar and yet ever changing as they renewed again their never fading passion for each other and fell asleep as always in each other's gentle embrace.

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Yidane grunted and groaned as deceptively strong and gentle hands massaged pungent smelling liniment into his aching leg. "Gandes, you always know the right spot." He sighed and Gandes smiled as he wiped his hands of excess liniment on a towel.

"Because I know you beloved." Gandes said moving to tend to Yidane's tattoos. His light fingers coating newly marked skin with a soft sigh. "You are so damn handsome and I am feeling sixteen again looking at you. Wonderfully shocked that all this big man before me is all mine."

Yidane chuckled. "Not so big as Tahna. By the Gods balls he makes me feel like a child."

"You're not that much smaller if truth be told. Both you and Goh are exceptionally tall men for the north. It's a change for you two to feel average like the rest of us mere mortals. Welcome to the world of the wellspring who ever have to crane their necks to meet eyes." Gandes teased and Yidane smiled.

"I was so afraid I was going to break you that first time I loved you." Yidane said and Gandes chuckled as he smoothed aloe along Yidane's chest.

"I must admit, the first time I saw you in all your glory and I realized where you wanted to put that large blessing you'd kept hidden in your trousers I was scared too. However you certainly proved otherwise over the years. I'll never forget the first time you made love to me."

"Nor will I. You scorched me then and every time after. You're as beautiful today as you were then. There is not a single gray in your hair, your skin is still smooth as glass and your eyes. By the gods your eyes never cease to captivate me." Yidane said reaching up to trace a finger along Gandes' facial features.

Gandes' closed his eyes and leaned into the touch. "Be careful Yidane or else you will not be getting sleep any time soon if you keep wooing me with words."

"I will woo you until I have no breath left in my body. I love you."

"I love you too. Now stop it, you're making me melt."

"That is the idea." Yidane purred and as usual Gandes responded intimately. His stormy grey blue eyes closed as he leaned forward and brushed tender lips against Yidane. However he leaned back purposefully and halting any further progression.

"You are a wickedly tempting man Yidane. You know every one of my weaknesses and exploit them. However not tonight, you hurt and I didn't just spend a half hour massaging that kink in your leg for you to go about making it catch on you again. I also know when you are hiding something from me. Spill it." Gandes said and Yidane laughed and just shook his head.

"Keeping secrets from you is like trying to keep kittens out of cream."

"So why do you even bother trying?" Gandes asked and Yidane shrugged.

"One day I'll succeed."

“You won’t and you’re stalling.”

“Because I don’t think you’re going to like it much.”

Gandes just quirked an eyebrow and crossed his arms over his chest waiting.

“What do you think of Juubie’s tattoos?”

“They’re beautiful, very graceful. Wait just a minute here! No, absolutely not! You are not telling me what I think you are!” Gandes said in shock and Yidane nodded.

“Welcome to the south my beautiful wellspring. Or should I say dragonheart? It’s expected that you too wear markings as my mate.”

“Oh gods. You’re kidding me.”

“I’m not I’m afraid. They’ll look beautiful on you, you have such pale skin. They’ll show up nicely on you.”

“Obie too?”

“Obie too.”

“He’s going to faint, he hates needles. I hate needles for that matter. Did it hurt?”

“Aye it did, but I won’t let it hurt you Gandes. I’ll put pain blocks on you I promise.”

“We’d better ask Juubie for more aloe then I suppose. My goodness, I hope my mother never, ever decides to pay us a visit. She’d faint from shock. Then after she woke up, she’d give us all hell.”

“I know. Nevertheless, we have to, it’s all about honor and respect down here beloved. We’re the balance and really they do little harm and I too am thinking you’d look lovely in them.”

“You’d better, they don’t wash off.”

“But you get to wear my mark and my ring and you know how I get over you Gandes.”

“Bullheaded possessive?”

“Aye. And you love it.”

"I do. Brand me I care not when you love me as you do." Gandes said smiling and moving to crawl into bed with Yidane.

"Always beloved."

"Goodnight Dearest." Gandes said curling up snug and warm against Yidane who leaned over to kiss his brow.

"Goodnight beloved." Yidane replied settling down for the night.

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Obie did not look happy as he sat there, his eyes shut tight and muttering curses at Goh as Muimei and her women tattooed the two new dragonhearts. Goh had layered several pain blocks on Obie, but just the thought of needles and ink being hammered into his skin was enough to make him anxious. He couldn't look and just swallowed his pride and his fear and kept his eyes shut until it was over. If he didn't actually have to look at the needles he'd manage.

Gandes was a little better, but then he didn't have Obie's fear of needles. Obie's fears were valid even if irrational, he'd fallen into a horrible thorn patch several years earlier and ever since sharp needle-like objects gave him the shivers. Goh just kept talking to him, giving him something to focus on while Gandes just sat quietly wanting it over quickly.

Soon enough four men sat draped in gauze as Juubie mixed up more aloe ointment for them all. "It'll heal in no time at all, you'll see." He said as he worked, his own tattoos showing prominently on his bare torso.

## **“Dragonhead and Dragonheart”**

*A Wielder and Wellspring Story*

*Author: D. Sanders*

### **Act VII - The Gathering of Tribes**

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Work began immediately on the port. Definite territory boundaries were established between Tahna's tribe lands and the new Southern Trade Port Tribe's. Stone statues of the Gods marked the crossing and Goh erected a barrier on them. Tahna's people could pass freely in and out, any native could. However, the barrier was keyed to recognize strangers to the land and unless they were a wielder able to handle the south, they'd not be able to pass without native or wielder escort.

This would ensure Tahna's tribe remained unmolested by unwelcome guests wandering where they shouldn't be.

Yidane had Juubie sketching plans as he dictated. Several possible layouts of pier and port and they all decided as a group which one they favored then set to work.

Gerdar transported vast amounts of lumber and tools magically, one box at a time. There was no sense in decimating the southern jungle which would only cause the southern tribes offense and show disrespect to their land. Wielder's worked almost around the clock transporting the initial building blocks and soon Tahna's warriors, the women and even the children were hard at work getting the pier built.

It took two solid months of hard labor, but soon enough the first three large ship moorings and a large gangway leading to the beach was completed. Enough to get started and once more laborers arrived from the north the pier could be expanded upon. The first ship was already on it's way, Gerdar and Grantham hand selecting the first southern port tribe members. Good honest men and their families who had applied for the positions and went through intensive interviews and credential verifications to deem them fit and able.

After the pier was finished, they began building the first of many warehouses and sectioning off the area where the homes would be situated away from the working areas of the port.

The men when they arrived would live in temporary tents until they could build their own homes based on Juubie's designs and sketches. The first two homes being built at once. Two small houses sat side by side on the small rise overlooking the port. From the outside they looked very much like the huts the locals used, but inside, northern comforts had been incorporated. Separate living and sleeping areas and bathing rooms with two small out privies hidden behind the main houses that took advantage of a rather large fissure in the rock that

dropped fifty feet into an inlet and cave system beneath the ridge and off the ocean that swept through at high tide and then back out to sea again. It was a natural flushing system that would come in very handy in keeping human waste to a minimum. No one wanted to pollute the land or the seashore around the port, there was a strong enough current and riptide that washed through the inlet that any waste would be pulled well out to sea at high tide.

There was also the advantage of a natural hot spring up on their chosen home site and around it they built a bathing house they'd share together. The bathing house connected their two homes and private entrances were built one on either side that opened up into their homes directly. They put a vent in the roof to allow the steam out, but it could be closed if they wanted to turn the room temporarily into a steam bath. It was a very distinct southern luxury not found in the north.

The south was full of hot springs and Tahna's village had a very large series of them and it was Tahna who showed the northern wielders how to make the best use of the clear and hot mineral waters how to make the simple rooftop steam house venting system.

Yidane knew he'd be abusing the steam house in the years to come, it did wonders on the joints in his leg. The spring was large enough to fit all four of them at once if they wished. They rolled boulders into the water to make places to sit comfortably and clay pots sat around the rim holding soaps and perfumes the locals made. The spring was ever flowing and the small stream that fell from it lead to the fissure behind the houses and the constant sound of running water trickling down rocks was very tranquil and kept the water constantly clear and fresh.

Farther up the rise were more springs, hot and cold alike and the cold springs had a series of water ways built from them to direct the water down toward the port and into the housing areas into a trough system.

From there pipes would lead into the homes themselves for running fresh cool water for cooking and drinking or the occasional cold bath to cool off from a hot day. There was a traditional large ceramic claw foot tub with a drain that lead to the hot spring outlet stream put into the bathing house that had a cold pipe leading to it and in the kitchens of both homes had proper tap sinks for drinking, cooking and washing.

It was a total harmonious blend of north meeting south. Juubie was in awe of the creativity and ingenuity they'd all had a hand in making and Tahna was already making plans to incorporate this style of living into his own tribe. It would make life much easier on his people and was very easily accomplished.

By the end of the third month the first ship arrived carrying the first wave of the new Southern Port tribe members. Twenty-five sturdy young men, their wives or

their equally male and sturdy mates and their children arrived all ready to get to work immediately.

First Yidane lined them all up for inspection with Goh at his side and Yidane collected examined each set of papers they each carried indicating their former trade, skills, and recommendations from the King and Lord Grantham.

Goh gave Yidane his lead, these would be the men and women working directly under his management and they needed to be aware it was Yidane they reported to here in the south when it came to work.

“Right, first welcome everyone to your new home. I know the King and Lord Grantham gave you all instructions on what would be expected of you down here and I want to stress the importance. You are not in the north anymore and down here there are strict laws of behavior and codes of conduct to be followed. We are breaking new ground and it is imperative we do so with the utmost respect to our brother tribes. You are now part of the Southern Trade Port Tribe. Goh is your primary Dragonhead and it’s his duty to make sure we as workers and warriors are provided for and things run smoothly higher up the ladder. I am your dragonhead port master. You will all report directly to me and any issues you have I’ll take to Goh for you. We’re going to be very busy everyone and every tribe member is expected to pull his or her own weight.” Yidane began walking the pier and looking everyone directly in the eyes, deadly serious.

“Furthermore, we’ve set up territory markers. You’ll see stone statues at all edges of our territory. Do not cross them. You trespass on brother tribes if you do and you are not to cross without invitation. They are also there for your safety. Once again I stress to you, especially the children here, that this is not the north. You are in wild country here and if you cross the boundaries you not only risk offending brother neighbor tribes but you risk your very lives.” Yidane said stopping and Tahna walked over with a Panther on a very sturdy leash. Everyone gasped at the beautiful black and very large feline.

“Dragonhead Tahna is our neighbor to the south and he is here to show you just one of the beasts that lay beyond the barriers.” Yidane said and Tahna nodded.

“Dragonhead Yidane is correct. This is just one of the animals that share our lands. She is as deadly as she is sleek and beautiful. This one wandered into my tribe when she was but a harmless cub wounded by a boar so she has become used to humans and lives in my tribe with one of my warriors who spared her life and has bonded to her and she hunts with him. Do not be fooled by her seeming docile nature, she is far from tame. She lives with us but is more than capable of killing you if she chose to. I bring her so you may see what she looks like. Now imagine it is dark and there is much cover to hide in. You would be her prey before you ever saw her. She can take down a were-feral boar with one bite. I have seen her do so many times. There are many like her in the jungle. Many

more were-feral changed and they hunt us when we are foolish. The barriers are established by your dragonheads to keep the beasts out of your homes. Cross into theirs and risk death. Children I beg you heed your elders, do not cross and make your parents weep of loss.” Tahna said handing the leash back to his warrior who fed her with a large chunk of raw meat, and the children got a good look at her fierce fangs as she tore into her meat.

That was more than enough demonstration, she was no house cat.

“Now that we’ve established where you cannot go, where you can go is anywhere within the safety of our territory. Within you may roam without fear. Goh and I will ever make sure this port is safe for you all. Welcome to the south and all its glories and customs. Customs I know some will have difficulty adjusting to at first but believe me when I say it’s possible to balance yourselves in short order. The air is ever warm and clean, the food and water fresh and plentiful, the people ever welcoming and honoring. Respect is key to survival. Respect your fellows and everything else falls into place here. Dragonheart Juubie has a unique perspective on adapting to southern ways and I now ask him to share his wisdom with you.” Yidane said and Juubie smiled as he walked forward.

“First I bid you all welcome and hope none of you had to listen to that horrible ballad I hear is being sung about me up north.” He began and got laughter in reply.

“Gah, I know it’s a horrible song. I’m sorry you had to listen to it. Nevertheless, it is fairly true, if flowered into a sickening epic. I did indeed grow up in the north, as you can see by my appearance. I had the joy of coming here in my youth where I met and bonded to my Dragonhead Tahna before I returned home. I grew up in Garth, northwest of Pernath. We were a farming community, our main crops being corn and wheat. We were also a small community and without mincing words, very prudish. Life in the south is vastly different where morals are concerned. As you all know in the north, there are certain modesties of flesh that you are not going to find in the south. People live in very natural ways here. To the natives your body is just that and nothing more. You can cover it if you wish to, you can wear nothing but your skin if you wish to. There is no taboo on nakedness down here, your body is as natural as the tree in the forest, the sand on the beach or the coconut hanging in the palm tree. No one will bat an eyelash at you down here if you stood there stark naked with them to carry on a conversation about the good hunt that morning or the storm that happened last week. Don’t be shocked by men and women walking around here uncovered. Just accept they will and they’ll expect you to as well if you’re so inclined.” Juubie began smiling at some of the blushing faces.

“I know what you’re all thinking, I was walking around red as an apple those first few weeks. It takes getting used to. Secondly, and here you will certainly be

blushing red constantly if you don't adapt quickly. Mating is also something there is no taboo on here. Once again, it's perfectly natural to mate with your lover whenever and wherever you desire to and I do stress the wherever. If you happen upon two people mating, you carry on with your business. It's none of your business what they are doing unless they invite you to join them. Otherwise you ignore it, smile and carry on. Respect their right to love each other and they will respect your right to be where they are. Again, they see it as natural behavior, like your neighbors dog that always seemed to like that fence post of yours or those cats you hear caterwauling all night long in the alley behind your house." Juubie said and got more laughter.

"I make a joke about it to stress my point. It is natural behavior and just we in the north over the years suppressed it and it will take time to undo reservations at being just human and living life freely. Just be true to yourselves and you honor yourself as well as your fellow tribesmen." Juubie said and Goh took his turn to speak.

"We've given you all a bare bones crash course in just a few aspects of life here. You'll get used to the ways down here in time. The last point I wish to make is also very crucial. The dragons, always and I do mean ALWAYS show respect to the dragons. If one comes to you, you will bow and lower your head in respect and you will stop what you are doing until the dragon leaves or indicates you may continue. They do come to the beach often to swim and they live all along the cliffs. You are not to go into their nesting grounds, ever, unless they invite you to do so. If you offend them, expect to lose your life and become a meal to their offspring. Dragons are all wielders and wellsprings, and I do mean all of them. If they decide to befriend you, rest assured you will have a friend and powerful ally for life. Anger them and you forfeit your life. It's as simple as that. Evil does not exist in a dragon, they are naturally immune to corruption because they are nature at its finest and most pure. If they sense evil in you, you won't have to offend them, they'll kill you outright. So be warned, they know and they always know and will judge you immediately because they can see the future and will not allow you to bring evil to their lands." Goh said and everyone nodded gravely.

Goh smiled and nodded at Yidane. "I think the basics are covered, I give the floor back to you." He said and Yidane nodded.

"Right! Now then up the path there is the area we've sectioned off for our living areas. Equal plots of land have been marked and the plumping already established. Go ahead up and choose the site you wish to build on and then take your tents and set them up. You'll begin on your homes tomorrow. Just set up your tents for tonight and then come back to the beach. Brother Tahna's tribe has bid you all welcome and ask you come back to the beach so they may treat you all to a welcoming feast in celebration of the new tribe." Yidane said and people cheered and grabbed belongings and headed up the path to choose where they wanted to build their homes.

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The beach was alive with a roaring bonfire and people ate and talked, danced and sang and exchanged tales and made new friends. The children were all running up and down the beach together, white and dark red skin bared openly as they splashed and cavorted in the warm surf.

The children would find it the easiest to adapt quickly and they already were. Several groups of like age children formed and the early bonds of lasting friendships were being made. Their parents sitting and watching the play and talking together, finding common bonds with tales of children being children.

Young mothers passed around babies and young fathers sat proudly discussing his own children's virtues. The older men and women also congregating together and telling different tales of trades and skills and sharing the native cinnamon spirits and getting happily drunk while telling tales that got more outrageous the more people imbibed in joy and good spirits.

It was a rough start in the morning and several heads were nursing hangovers as work began on the houses based on Juubie's designs and people were assigned to teams of five men each. They'd all pitch in to help build each other's homes so they went up more quickly and within the month all the homes were finished and people were settled. Work then resumed on the port itself.

Yidane had gone through all the paperwork and began assigning men their permanent posts and positions. His head accountant and clerk, his warehouse supervisor, his port crew and laborers. The women too came with strong credentials. Cooks and seamstresses, teachers, two certified apothecary healers, one extremely talented cabinet maker and carpenter whose father had taught her a typically male trade skill and Yidane quickly utilized her as his chief builder to oversee the building of the port itself and she was a hard but fair taskmaster. She was quick to praise the ingenuity of design and was eager to build a trade city that was as beautiful as it was functional. Nothing but perfection pleased her and thus she pleased Yidane to no end.

Finally the Gathering was upon them and it was a good journey through the jungle and would take a good two weeks on foot to reach the gathering site considering the whole tribe went including the children.

The new tribe would stay behind to continue building and Yidane and Gandes would also stay to protect them. Only Goh and Obie would accompany Tahna's tribe to the gathering, after all they still didn't have official permission yet and the less the others knew about the already established port, the better. This was a very diplomatic move and Goh was banking on the dragon's foresight but still wouldn't count his chickens before they were hatched. It took just one false move

and one assumption too many to offend and then they'd have a useless port and wasted labor.

Yidane vowed to check on Tahna's protections around his village daily while his tribe was gone, he'd make sure Tahna's new tribe came back to homes and fields in tact. Tahna thanked him and very early one day everyone set out through the jungle. Tahna and Juubie leading the way for protection with Goh and Obie pulling up the rear of the procession for added safety. The warriors flanked the women and children, many of the smaller children strapped securely to their father's backs as they all walked silently through wild territory until sunset and then a secure camp was made for the night, only to repeat the silent trek the next day.

On about the tenth day of the journey, Goh was rubbing Obie's aching feet as they sat by their campfire and they both watched as Tahna and Juubie went from family to family making sure everyone was well and free from strain before either of them took rest themselves.

"Juubie really has adapted to life here. He was always an industrious sort by nature, but damn he's making me tired just watching him. I wish he'd sit down for two minutes together." Obie commented and Goh laughed.

"He can't. He's all these people have for aches and pains and spiritual needs. However, watch Tahna. He's keeping an eye on Juubie. I've noticed too, watch and see when Tahna decides Juubie has done enough he makes him rest. Tahna never takes his eyes off Juubie. He always has one on his task and one on Juubie. They have a remarkable bond, very strong. But then again, they've been bonded for a very long time. Granted it's only been consummated just over two years, but in total they've got a seventeen year bond cemented between them. They're as rock solid together as you and I are at this point. Juubie can't take a piss without Tahna knowing about it and vice versa." Goh said popping Obie's toes for him and Obie grunted and sighed with relief.

"Very much like us then. I sometimes know things you wish I didn't."

"Because you nag worse than Mama you bastard."

"But you love me."

"Aye, I do. Give me your other foot. Our boots were not made for this sort of terrain."

"I feel like I'm falling apart and watching Tahna and Juubie walk this in those flimsy little sandals adds to making me feel sixty and not forty."

“You exaggerate as always.” Goh said tweaking a toe as Juubie walked over and squatted and handed Goh some cream out of his hip pouch.

“Here, use this on him, it’ll warm the muscles in the arches of his feet and give me your boots, I’m going to have Tahna saw the heels off with his machete. You need a flatter foot, that’s what giving your feet aches. They need to be able to conform to the uneven ground. Thinner soles are the key, the heels are throwing off your body’s natural alignment and making you ache. I’ll take care of it.” Juubie said collecting both Goh and Obie’s boots and then handing them to Tahna to shave off the hard leather heels.

“When did he grow up? Wasn’t it just yesterday he was shitting on you with stinky nappies?” Obie asked, stunned once again at how capable and sure Juubie had become as an adult.

“It sure feels like it, he just waltzed over here and gave us both orders to obey him without batting an eye and we just followed right along without question. He sure has grown up and he’s proving he’s a damn fine dragonheart. I’ve got to write his Papa and Mama, they should be proud of Juubie. He’s a good kid.”

“He’s a sweetheart, Have you noticed the kids? They hang on every word Juubie utters, they positively adore him.”

“The whole tribe does. There’s not a single person here bringing belongings with them to change tribes at the gathering. Not one of them wants to leave Tahna and Juubie’s village. Juubie has every warrior ready to charge a Panther in his defense and every woman treating him like either a favorite brother or son and the children all call him father Juubie and act like his own children. Juubie and Tahna won’t ever have to adopt children of their own, they have a dozen or more clinging to them daily already.” Goh said with a chuckle and Obie smiled.

“But they will, you can see it already. They both love the children so much I’d bet my favorite horse eventually they’re going to have a brood of children of their own. And not off the adoption registry either, it’ll be whichever child needs them gifted or not.”

“I don’t take sucker bets. I’d not be surprised to see them coming back with one from the gathering. Tahna was telling me the tribes will change to keep bloodlines from getting inbred and any children who have lost their parents will be adopted by other clan members. Specifically childless couples who cannot have their own. There are women who cannot bear too, just like Juubie will not be able to, this is their chance to gain the child they so desperately want and the tribes know that child will be raised and loved as well if not better than if it had true blood parents. It’s a very good system they have working down here. Everyone is happy and everyone is treated equally and fairly.”

“The north could learn a thing or two.”

“That’s what you and I are here for Obie. We’re King’s Own. People listen to us and you and I have spent years forging that trust. It’s about time that we take the trust we’ve earned and put it to good use. We’re at the gateway of enlightenment here and I intend on not only opening that gate, but blowing it wide open.”

“You always do like a grand entrance.”

“But of course. I never claimed I wasn’t a dandy on top of everything else now did I?” Goh said and Obie chuckled.

“Peacock you are, what are you going to do without your fancy frills and waistcoats down here?”

“Beloved, I’m intending on creating a whole new North meets South Fashion trend on top of every thing else. The silks down here are divine and I am going to parade around with my cock wrapped in brilliant silk short pants, my skin brown and tan, and I absolutely love the head turbans. Add a nice northern open vest in the silks and I’m going to enjoy myself.”

“And show off your lovely tattoos while you’re at it.”

“Naturally. We have to beloved, they need to be seen and you’re dead sexy with them I’d like to remind you again for the record.”

“I’m glad you think so. I know your tongue thinks so you wonderful horny bastard. The south is so good for your libido, thank the gods.” Obie chuckled with a wink taking his foot back and wiggling his toes and Goh waggled his eyebrows with a grin just as Juubie came back with their altered footwear.

“You two are way too easy to read. I always know when you two have been talking about sex, you get ornery with each other.” Juubie said tossing the boots beside Obie and squatting with a grin.

“You are just too damn perceptive. But guilty as charged.” Goh said and Juubie smiled.

“I’m a wellspring, we’re born perceptive. Right Obie?”

“Of course and like you don’t get ornery with Tahna? Think again. I notice too.”

“Obie, everyone notices down here. Tahna advertises his intentions for the world to see. Everyone knows when I’m about to have my legs in the air. It’s never a secret.” Juubie laughed as Tahna finished his tasks and came over to join them by the fire.

He sighed as he sat down and Juubie was immediately at his shoulders massaging massive back muscles that had carried a rather large child most of the day after he twisted his foot.

“Thank you. Amutet wiggles much but is feeling better my back will be spared his fidgeting tomorrow.” Tahna said, his eyes crinkling with good natured mirth and Juubie smiled as he worked.

“Amutet has what my mother would have called ants in his pants. Aye. He’s restless and wild. He’s getting harder and harder to keep still in my classes, he wants to be out hunting with his father.”

“He’ll make a good warrior one day when he grows up. First to charge he will be, his father is most proud as he should be. Amutet wants to work hard and make his father proud, he is a good son.” Tahna said closing his eyes with a sigh as Juubie worked his back to relax him.

“That he is. He may be restless, but he’s a good boy.” Juubie replied rubbing the warming liniment into Tahna’s back.

Once he finished, Tahna took the small pot of ointment and made Juubie sit. “Now sit my heart. You are done working for others today. Give me your legs, they are tired too.” Tahna said massaging calve muscles with the ointment.

“See I told you Obie. Juubie is only allowed so far before Tahna cracks that whip.”

“So you did!” Obie said laughing and Juubie grinned.

“Like you two don’t do the same? Hardly. Oh god Tahna that’s nice.”

“Thank you my heart. Rubbing your beautiful legs is never a chore.”

“And you can just keep rubbing and ignore your other urges my handsome. I am too bloody tired to be bending over for you at the moment.”

“I am too tired to as well. Never fear my heart ignore it I shall.”

“We just had this conversation didn’t we?” Obie asked and Goh nodded.

“Aye. Damn duties. We’d all be horrible rutting pigs in mud with our overactive and needy bonds if we didn’t have to actually work.”

“Very true.” Juubie agreed, laying back and relaxing as Tahna rubbed his sore legs.

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Juubie stood looking down at the large gathering site in awe. Tahna had tried to tell him what it was like, but actually seeing something no northerner ever had before was something else entirely. It was breathtaking and humbling. They came to the site on a high ridge that overlooked the valley. A waterfall so grand and majestic tumbled into the valley painting rainbows across the sky and was the backdrop to a vast gathering of people.

Approximately thirty tribes in all and each tribe made up of an average of fifty family units. Some larger, some smaller and overall probably five thousand or more natives congregated in colorful tents dotted all along the valley like colorful flowers in a field. Drums were being played and people danced and relatives reunited and the whole valley was full of peace and love.

Goh and Obie stood beside Juubie with equally humbling and awestruck looks upon their faces. "Welcome to the Gathering of Tribes. This is the heart of our people." Tahna said taking Juubie's hand in his proudly as he began the long walk down the cliff's natural stairs. A recognizable elder Dragonhead came racing over with his Dragonheart when they noticed Tahna's tribe walking down the pathway. Juubie smiled as they neared, he remembered Tahna's parents and Tahna's plump, exceedingly lovely and cheerful faced mother was running with arms open wide.

Tahna embraced her and lifted her off her feet with a bear of a hug and a huge smile on his face. "Mother, I have missed you." He said softly as he set her down and she wiped her eyes.

"As I have missed you my firstborn." She said then turned to Juubie and she laid her hands on his cheeks and kissed both cheeks and his brow lovingly.

"So many years parted, so long we yearn for you to come home again to your head and our hearts. Juubie, so lovely my son of my heart."

"I am so happy to be home at last. You look exactly as I remember you, I still think you are the most beautiful woman I've ever seen." Juubie said and meant it, she was exotically beautiful and she smiled and pinched his cheeks.

"And always know how to compliment to make even old mothers blush. Such a good boy!" She laughed as Tahna's father gave his son a hearty hug and firm backslapping. He then turned to face Juubie, and a large smile split his face and there was Tahna as he would look in twenty years. There was no denying who Tahna's father was and Juubie was swept off his feet and spun around with joy.

He was laughing gaily as Tahna's father welcomed him with a dizzying rough and playful welcome. "Too long you gone boy! Make us all worry much. Does the north not feed their young? I can toss you like pebble!" Tahnoapatet asked as he set Juubie back down again and Tahna's mother snorted.

"Tahno!" She scolded and he laughed.

"It's alright, Tahna is always trying to feed me until I burst. I'm afraid I'm just little." He said and Tahna's mother Aoinapay just patted his cheek.

"Tahno and Tahna think much with gut. Northern hearts always small as you." She said turning to Obie.

"As you are no bigger Obie Heart. You long time gone too are you well my old friend?"

"I am very well Aoi. Just as Juubie is correct in stating your beauty never fades." Obie said embracing her warmly.

"Both of you will be making me have much vain pride and here I am thinking Northern Hearts always prettiest. No one has hair here like sunshine as you Obie, I always think most lovely and Juubie with eyes like Dragon's. We can just keep telling each other how nice we like to look at each other and we all smile much." She said and took both their hands as Tahno was enthusiastically greeting Goh and then the whole tribe moved as one to pitch tents along side where Tahno and Aoi's tribe was camped.

Two identical Twelve year old girls came racing out of the crowd and Tahna had one in each arm twirling them around as a third child of around ten leapt onto his back and Tahna was buried under a pile of his siblings laughing.

Juubie watched and ached a little, missing his own siblings but he didn't have long to turn maudlin as the trio turned their affections on him and he got to meet Tahna's much younger siblings for the first time.

Nana and Abba were the Twins and Tetikun was Tahna's youngest brother who appeared to idolize his big brother. At the same age Tahna had already taken the trial of worthiness and passed.

"Father says I can take trial after gathering and next gathering I make my own tribe!" He told Tahna who smiled and ruffed his hair.

"Father tells me it is so, I hear many good things about you my brother. Fine warrior already. You make me proud I share blood with you." Tahna said and Tetikun's whole world lit up to hear that.

"I make Father proud like you!" He said and Tahna nodded.

"You already have my brother." Tahna said smiling at Juubie. Both he and Tahna of course already knew the reason the child hadn't taken the trial yet. Tahno felt it was too soon for a ten year old to have his own tribe and had he passed like they all knew he would, he'd have been given his own tribe this gathering. Tahna decided to delay the test until after so Tetikun would be a little older, fifteen was young enough. Even if Tahna had been just thirteen, it was timing and nothing more. It was easier to delay Tetikun's trial than it had been Tahna's. Tahno would still have both his sons at his own hut if given his choice. He was a very proud father and his children were the center of his universe.

Like Tahna, the moment he set foot back in his tribe's camp, Tahno was swarmed with children and he doted on them all, his own just more so. Tahna greatly took after his father as he too always had the tribe's children riding his back playfully or learning skills of the hunt from Tahna's capable hands.

Juubie had both twin's admiring his hair and the pearl sticks that held it up in a bun on top of his head. Tahna had liked the style so much he'd made the pearl and bone hair sticks for Juubie as a gift and Juubie wore them always just as the coral still graced his slender neck.

"Brother Juubie so pretty. Did brother make you the hair beads?" Nana asked and Juubie nodded.

"He did. Your brother is a very talented bead maker and I think if you ask him, he just might have something for each of you in his pack." Juubie said with a wink and both girls turned to Tahna who chuckled and dug in his pack for gifts he'd made for his mother and sisters. Hair sticks like Juubie's in colorful glass and mother of pearl beads in a rainbow of colors and Juubie showed all three how he twisted up his hair and used the sticks none of them had before.

For Tetikun, he's made a necklace of a boar tusk and wooden beads and for his father a new beaded machete belt.

More tribes arrived that day and it was merry chaos as everyone settled and made camp. The gathering didn't officially start until the following morning when all the dragonheads and dragonhearts met at the center of the gathering and declared the official start of a month long celebration.

All the dragonheads would meet in council daily to discuss the tribes, their needs, their woes, their suggestions for better Trade and this was Where Goh would be, making friends with all the heads of the tribes and declaring himself Dragonhead of the Southern Trade Port Tribe and asking to be accepted onto the council as an equal.

It would go to a vote and he already knew he had Tahno and Tahna's votes which helped since they were both so well respected and it would be Tahna that presented Goh's request for him and offer his official support and backing to the other Dragonhead's.

As evening fell, some dire news arrived. One of the tribes arrived looking beaten and lost and without either their dragonhead or dragonheart. Every resident Dragonhead raced to aide them and every dragonheart was called to tend wounds and comfort terrified and frightened tribe members.

Juubie was caught up tending an elderly woman when he'd learned what happened. Apparently three nights earlier, a were feral panther had somehow already been inside the campsite when the Dragonhead set up the barrier. It had been hiding and waiting and since it was within the barrier, the dragonhead hadn't felt a disturbance until it was too late. The panther attacked the Dragonheart first, killing her with a swift bite to the neck, which brought down the dragonhead in rage and bond severing death agony. Like a candle being snuffed in the wind and the warriors had barely managed to kill the beast and four of them lay dead with their leaders. The others had fled in terror, never resting and without protection the last three days of the journey. Fifteen members in total had been lost and everyone was soul weary.

It was a very late night as information was learned and all the dragonhearts, Juubie included sang prayers for the god's mercy on the lost souls and asking for rebirth. Tahna was with the other dragonheads in emergency council discussing the event and it was very late when Tahna and Tahno returned to camp.

Aoi and Juubie were sitting by the fire with Goh and Obie, waiting for news as the dragonheads returned and Tahna was holding something very close to his chest, wrapped in a bright blue silk blanket.

He looked sad, but his eyes happy as he knelt in front of Juubie and carefully handed him the burden he carried.

It was then Juubie realized it was a small infant, barely a few weeks old. "What? Who is this?" Juubie asked and Tahna smiled.

"Our son my heart." Tahna said and Juubie's eyes widened in shock. He could feel the infant's instant connection to his wellspring of power, he was suckling power like he would suckle from his mother, he was a wielder.

“What? What do you mean our son?” Juubie asked in utter shock.

“His parents were the ones we lost. He was their first born and they much young themselves and the council has asked us to raise him as our own. We are the only childless Dragonhead and Heart and he will need a dragonhead and heart to raise him into his gifts. The council thought we would be best as his parents and I accepted. I knew you would not object.” Tahna said and Juubie began to cry as he inspected the child in his arms. A bandage on his chest.

“Oh gods, what happened to him?” Juubie asked moving to inspect the wound and seeing four large marks of claws down on his chest.”

“Almost lost as his mother, She was nursing him at the time of the attack. His father died with his body protecting him. He was much loved.”

“He will always be loved.” Juubie said still in tears as he immediately settled the child on his legs and made sure the wound was attended properly. Aoi and Obie passing him his medicines and salves as his hands shook with joy as he tended his new son.

“Oh so beautiful.” Juubie cooed, wrapping the bandages back carefully as he leaned over to kiss the baby gently. Juubie lifted the infant up to his shoulder so he could sleep against it for comfort. “Ah god Tahna.” Juubie was weeping and Tahna just wrapped arms around them both smiling.

“I know, much unexpected sadness followed by much joy for us. I am much in shock as you to be knowing I now have a fine son to raise with you.”

“What is his name?” Juubie asked gently rubbing the infant’s back in comfort.

“It is up to us to name him as our own. He had not yet been given his name, he does not gain it until his first moon of life. He will be one moon in seven days I am told. He was born three weeks ago today.” Tahna said and Juubie knowing the custom to wait until a full moon cycle to name the baby to the gods nodded.

“What do you want to call him?” Juubie asked moving the babe from his shoulder to his arms so both he and Tahna could look at his sleeping face.

“Tanju. It is also custom we name the first with our names together. I want to name him Tanju.”

“Then Tanju he will be.” Juubie said smiling, his face alive with wonder and joy. Goh reached over and took Obie’s hand. The scene was making him misty eyed and Obie squeezed.

“You big soft bugger, if you cry you’ll make me cry.” Obie sniffed and Goh chuckled and wiped his damned leaky eyes.

“Too late. You were right, they are leaving here parents not five hours after we arrived.” Goh whispered and Obie smiled.

“Aye.” Was all he said leaning his head on Goh’s shoulder to watch Tahna and Juubie bond with their new son and Aoi and Tahna beam proudly over their first grandchild.

Aoi got up and vanished for a few minutes only to return her arms laden with items.

“Baby needs much attention and without breast milk much hungry. Here, I have what you need.” She said laying out the items she’d gone out to collect. First a bottle that she immediately filled with milk from one of the resident goats, warm from the udder.

“In my pouch is a white powder. It’s herbs for health. Yayoi cannot nurse either and I have her mix that in with the goats milk for the baby. Tanju will need it too, he needs more than the goat can provide.” Juubie said going into his healing mindset as dragonheart and Aoi nodded and stirred in some of the powder until it dissolved.

“You make good medicines Son Juubie. I use many of what you make in my tribe now. Your knowledge most wise, all dragonhearts think as I do. You most respected among us all. Tanju could not have better heart to call father.” Aoi said passing Juubie the bottle.

“Thank you. However, I think I’d prefer Papa. That’s what I called mine and besides we’ll have to keep Tahna and I straight and I certainly cannot be called mama can I?” Juubie said smiling, going to feed the baby he’d yet to let go of.

“Not unless you suddenly grow breasts my heart.” Tahna chuckled running a very large finger over the baby’s cheek as he nursed off the bottle content. “He is very strong, his father was too. I knew him only a little, he was newly dragonhead last gathering but during warrior games I almost lost to him more than once.” Tahna said and Juubie smiled.

“We will tell Tanju of his real parents when he’s older and can understand and know they loved him. He deserves to know that.” Juubie said and Tahna nodded emphatically.

“Aye. I agree much on that. It will make him stronger to know his father was a good strong dragonhead and his mother fine dragonheart. He will know gods smile on him to have two sets of parents who love him.” Tahna said and Juubie

sighed. Transferring the baby to his now cloth covered shoulder to burp him and he was glad of the cloth, he was used to infants puking on him from his own tribe, and all newborns threw up more than they kept inside it seemed they swallowed so much air eating.

Juubie just chuckled and then turned to the other items Aoi had collected. A cozy sling for Juubie to wear so he could carry the baby with him constantly but still have his arms free. It could be worn either on the front or the back depending on where the baby needed to be in relation to what Juubie was doing.

There were also diapers and blankets and a colorful string bead rattle. Which Juubie picked up to absently entertain the baby as the adults talked and admired him.

That night, Juubie layered soft blankets into a reed basket and made a makeshift bassinet in their tent and he and Tahna hovered over it as they watched the newborn sleep.

“Are you happy my heart?” Tahna asked and Juubie’s eyes told him more than words could that he was.

“I am Tahna. I know we talked about this before and I knew you’d make the proposal at council we wanted to be considered adoptive parents, I just didn’t expect it so soon, even before you made the proposal.”

“Me either Juubie. I did not expect this nor that they would come to us first. It is sad to lose a dragonhead and heart and we are young and cannot have our own. Had I been the council elders, I would have chosen us too, it is both good for us and good for Tanju.”

“Yes. Ah god I hope I am a good Papa. I’m so afraid I’m going to screw up.” Juubie said and Tahna smiled and leaned over to kiss Juubie deeply.

“You won’t. Mother was right, you are best Dragonheart in all the tribes. Very wise, very patient and very loving. He could not have better after his mother to raise him. I love you my Heart.”

“I love you too. I can’t wait to write Mama and Papa and tell them.” Juubie grinned and Tahna chuckled.

“Aye. They will most likely be like my parents and much joy to be being made grandparents when be thinking we not give them any.”

“Very true.” Juubie laughed softly as he and Tahna settled into bed themselves. They’d have to be up early and Juubie knew he’d not get much sleep that night, babies were notorious for never giving parents any decent sleep.

Sure enough, three times that night Juubie was up feeding, changing and rocking a newborn and he looked very tired at dawn when he slung the baby on his chest and joined the gathering of Dragonheads and Dragonhearts in front of the waterfall to officially call the gathering to order.

Everyone cheered, startling Tanju and Juubie just smiled and patted him to calm him down as he wailed. The eldest Dragonhead turning and smiling.

“Good lungs.” He said with a wink and Juubie chuckled.

“He has indeed. I shant be sleeping much this gathering.” Juubie replied and the elderly heart beside her head winked.

“No you will not. Babies make rest not easy on parents. I had seven strong sons and two good daughter hearts and slept not much either.” She said and Juubie smiled as all the hearts began returning to their tribe camps and the dragonheads left to commence council talks.

Juubie sat with Aoi and Muimei in the shade as Juubie’s tribeswomen all took turns coming over to see the new baby and congratulate Juubie.

Muimei had him in her lap playing with his toes. “He so handsome. I look forward watching him grow I do.” She said and Juubie just smiled, he couldn’t have been happier.

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Tahna approached the council with Goh at his side. “Elders and fellow Dragonheads. I wish to make formal request of the council before we begin. I would like to ask that Dragonhead Goh be counted as one of the council with us. He has come to the south with much wisdom and much benefit to our tribes. I ask that you recognize him as Dragonhead of Southern Trade Port Tribe and hear his proposals.” Tahna began and a large shadow fell over them as a huge Dragon flew in suddenly and landed.

He was ancient looking, his Red scales gleaming in the sunlight like flame, his golden eyes filled with wisdom of many years.

All the council stood and then got to their knees in his presence.

*::I second Tahna’s request and bid you all to take heed and accept. All the dragons of the south stand as one with Dragonwise Goh, King’s Own of the North and Dragonhead of the South. He brings nothing but good fortune with*

*him.::* The dragon mind spoke to them all and Goh was stunned, he hadn't expected this.

"Most ancient of all the Wise Ones. We hear, heed and Obey. Welcome Brother Goh to our Council and may your Tribe always be favored by the Gods." The eldest of the Dragonheads said and Goh nodded.

"Thank you, I vow to always offer aide to my brother tribes and honor you all until my End Days." Goh said formally and then he turned to the Dragon.

"Wise One, you humble and honor me and I vow ever to Honor you, the Gods grace upon all Dragons for all eternity I pray."

*::You honor us all brother. Greatest of Men you stand. Dragons always see you coming and Dragons will remember you for all time. Soul once a Dragon, rebirth as human, evil cannot claim you, dragon blood still in your veins.::* The Dragon said and then did something no Dragon had ever done to a human, he didn't merely dip his head in respect, he bowed. His head resting at Goh's feet, indicating severe and revered Respect. Goh was flabbergasted and speechless and was for the first time in his life, lost for words.

He bowed back and The Dragon lifted his head, standing as equals. He nodded once to Goh and was gone as and airborne as quickly as he had come.

The entire council was awestruck and it was Tahna who first knelt at Goh's feet. "Brother Goh, long have I known and respected you and your wisdom. I have often considered you wise as dragons, and now I see for good reasons. I am honored to call you brother and vow always to stand by your side, Dragonhead Goh of Dragon Soul." Tahna said and the entire council followed suit.

Goh thanked them all and returned the vows and was given lead to speak first at council as was now his right. He had not only been given tribal council membership, but with the confirmation from the dragons that Goh possessed a Dragon Soul he was the Council Elder and out ranked them all in one breath. As in the North as King's Own he outranked other Wielders, now as Dragonhead of Dragon Soul in the South he outranked the other Dragonheads. His head swam with the import of such heavy titles and responsibilities. He carried a heavy burden suddenly and it was going to indeed take a lifetime of careful work to balance them all on his suddenly heavy shoulders.

Goh was given the center seat at the lower tribal tables set out, the eldest council leader smiling with true heartfelt joy as he relinquished his seat. "To live to see a true Dragon Soul reborn is a wonder. Elder Goh"

"I am honored Elder Undape. I beg your wisdom and guidance and ask you remain to my right and enlighten me with your wisdom."

“It is my honor.” Undape said as seats shifted to accommodate Goh and rankings readjusted without complaint or bruised pride. That was a notable difference between north and south. In the north he’d have also had to battle bruised egos. Not however in the south, men respected each other and dragons above all others. Goh was in essence a dragon in human form to them.

Council began and Goh told everyone of his new Tribe and immediately asked everyone to begin considering what Trade they wished to specialize in so everyone had fair trade and were not going to compete with each other needlessly.

Everyone seemed truly excited and discussions lasted all day. Tahna taking notes for Goh at Obie’s request. Since Obie would not be in attendance at council sessions to take notes for Goh, he’d begged Tahna quietly to do it for him. Goh’s eyes weren’t as good as they used to be and when he was in the middle of a debate or speech the taking of his own notes was not an option he had and he relied on the notes Obie always took for him.

Tahna promised and he wrote down all that was discussed and would give the notes to Goh after the council called a halt for the day.

Goh was eternally grateful that evening as he sat with Obie by the fire and Obie read to him all of Tahna’s notes. Goh’s eyes just couldn’t read by fire light anymore. “He takes notes almost as good as you do.”

“Almost. I have better handwriting. I Still cannot believe what happened here today.” Obie grinned and Goh chuckled.

“You and me both Obie. I’m stunned, well and truly feeling out of my league here. I hope I don’t screw up, it’s a long way to fall off this pedestal. Dragon once or not, these wings on my back do not actually fly.” Goh said feeling fatigued and Obie just leaned over and kissed him.

“You’re still just my Goh and I know you won’t fall, but if you do you know I’ll catch you beloved.”

“Aye dearest. I won’t fear it with you by my side. I love you.”

“I love you too. Shall I read on?”

“Please.” Goh said shutting his tired eyes and listening as he pondered his next course of action.

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Tahna was eager to get back to Juubie and their son and share the days events with him. As he walked back to his camp a young woman of around eighteen stepped into his path, this was the same thirteen year old Dragonheart from the previous gathering that had been most insistent on his attentions. "Dragonhead Tahna, you look very well this gathering. I am most happy to see you again." She began and Tahna smiled and nodded.

"Thank you Puipei. I am most well. I hope you too are feeling joy." He said and regretted it as she linked her arm through his. She hadn't changed at all it seemed.

"Much joy to be seeing you again. Long have I wished to lay eyes on you again my dragonhead." She purred stressing the 'my' and Tahna stepped back and gently but purposefully removed her arm from his.

"I am much glad to be seeing everyone again. Please Puipei, I have told you before this is not to be. You disrespect my dragonheart. I am sorry I cannot be what you wish me to be, I am bonded and my mate, as you well know, is now with us. He is tending our son as we speak. I cannot bond with you and you know this Puipei. Bonds are not chosen and I am much in love with my Juubie." Tahna said and he did not like the anger in her eyes.

"He cannot give you son of your own flesh. Saddens me you have none."

"I am finished talking Puipei. Anger me you do with your words. Good day." Tahna said turning and storming off and Puipei's mother grabbed her arm.

"Foolish girl! Always I tell you not to bother Dragonhead Tahna! You disobey me last gathering and now insult Dragonheart Juubie. I teach you better respect! Shame me you do!" she hissed and the girl ripped her arm free.

"I am better than one who cannot provide Tahna a family! You see, he will choose me!" Puipei said storming off and her mother sighed knowing this was going to be fruitless and no matter how she tried, Puipei never listened to her or her father. Always willful and selfish the girl would shame them all if she did not change.

Tahna was feeling irritated until he laid eyes on Juubie sitting in front of their tent cooing at their son. Tahna's irritation melted away and he smiled as he came over to join them. "Welcome back dearest. I hear big things happened today." Juubie said and Tahna nodded and told him about the days events while he let the baby chew on and play with his finger.

"What have you done today?" Tahna asked and Juubie grinned.

“Let’s see, two very nasty diaper changes. Four not so nasty ones. Several feedings because your new son is a healthy eater too it seems. Three skinned knees from the kids getting into mischief over on the rocks. Inutet and the others came back with a good hunt, two bucks and a boar. All the provisions you sent on ahead are safe and sound and put away. I had five visitors from other Dragonhearts and they are all lovely ladies and we talked about boring medicines and such while Tanju napped and a very pretty girl by the name of Puipei came by with her mother much earlier today but didn’t stay long. One minute she was here while I was giving her mother my recipe for muscle ache cream and the next she was gone.” Juubie said and Tahna shivered.

“Puipei, she is the one I told you of, the one who thinks I can break my bond to you and refuses to believe bonds are not chosen. I wish not to speak ill of anyone, like her I do not. Very disrespectful to you and angers me much.”

“Oh. No wonder she didn’t seem very friendly. She hates my guts.”

“More than likely. She is not happy with you no.”

“Beloved, I know girls like her. They are in the north too. She wants you and I can’t say I don’t blame her there, you are one awfully handsome brute.”

“You joke? Not angry?”

“Why should I be Tahna? I know perfectly well you’re not going to be unfaithful to me. We’re bonded, she just doesn’t understand how bonds work. She will when she bonds to her own mate. She’s just immature and hoping still to nab you for herself. I pity her actually. She’s going to set herself up for nothing but heartache chasing after you and hate me more and more because I have what she wants. It happens all the time beloved with all people gifted or not and nothing you or I or anyone says will change her feelings about you. She’s just jealous and she can hate me all she likes to if it makes her feel better. I know you love me and I am most happy.” Juubie said and Tahna smiled.

“I am always happy now. I have my heart and our son and could not ask for better. Praised you were in council today. Goh mentioned the trade between north and south was your idea. They all think you most Dragonwise. All the dragonheads also praise your letters to their hearts I send. Your wisdom shared with others freely is most appreciated. I wanted to burst with pride over you.”

“Really?”

“Aye. We will have more visitors tonight. Many wish to meet you face to face. Elder Undape and Elder Heart Yune will be coming to share our meal tonight and meet you properly.”

“Yune is such a wonderful lady in her letters. I can’t wait. I should wash up first though, I’m covered in baby slobber. Mind your son while I wash up?” Juubie said handing the baby to Tahna who gladly accepted Tanju to mind while Juubie went inside their tent to clean up a little.

Juubie went to pick up a bowl to fill with water and a scorpion crawled out of the bowl and he let out a short shout of fright while he yanked his hand back and scurried away from the deadly creature.

“What is it?” Tahna asked bursting in with Tanju and Juubie just grabbed the baby and headed out the tent.

“Scorpion, there by the bowl. Kill it Tahna!” Juubie said his mind in terror thinking about Tanju and if that beast had been in his basket and had stung him he’d have died.

Tahna used very little power to kill the scorpion and he came out worried. “Did it sting you?” He asked and Juubie shook his head.

“No. Oh god I was in there with the baby most of the day! Please make sure there are not anymore Tahna please. They could kill Tanju!” Juubie was frantic and Tahna tore apart their tent and made sure it was free of all vermin down to the last stray ant then layered a barrier on their tent.

“I have sealed our tent, no more will come in. You’re safe my heart.” Tahna said not used to seeing Juubie flustered with fear.

“I’m not worried about me Tahna. Tanju is already weak healing from his injuries right now. He’s so fragile. I don’t want to lose our son.” Juubie said clutching the baby close to his heart and Tahna pulled Juubie into his arms and held them both.

“I will protect you both, never fear my heart. Now give me Tanju, it is over and you can calm my heart.” Tahna said and Juubie nodded and returned to wash while Tahna sat on their bed and held their son while Juubie bathed.

Tahna however was worried and hiding it. There should not have been a scorpion in their tent. They did not live in this area. They lived on the very southern beaches. The scorpion had either been in someone’s provisions that had been transferred ahead or purposefully brought and placed in their tent. Tahna hoped his later suspicion was inaccurate, because if it was the only tribe that Scorpion could have come from was Pumataton’s tribe. Puipei’s father. Which meant Puipei was more dangerous than Tahna wanted to believe.

If she had done this, it went beyond jealousy and Tahna was going to watch her like a hawk to make sure Juubie and their son did not come to harm.

## **“Dragonhead and Dragonheart”**

*A Wielder and Wellspring Story*

*Author: D. Sanders*

### **Act VIII - Acts of Jealousy**

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Tahna's tribe welcomed the visiting Elders with drums and their hunt that day. Undape and Yune were all smiles and brought with them gifts for Tahna and Juubie from their tribe lands. Undape's tribe specialized in the making of the cinnamon spirits and other spices. For Tahna, Undape brought him a large bottle of the said spirits and handed it to him with a wink and Yune brought Juubie a vast variety of spices. They were token gifts just as Tahna would be gifting the other leaders the fruits of his tribe in return. Tahna had sent on ahead of his tribe several crates of pineapples and refined sugar cane and Juubie had spent weeks making several bottles full of pineapple syrup and on each bottle instructions how to make pancakes to pour the syrup on top of since Tahna believed everyone would love Juubie's pancakes as much as he did.

Yune seemed intrigued as she read the bottle instructions with a smile as she sat beside Juubie at their low table to share the dinner meal. “Always full of wonder Juubie. First you send us wondrous new ways of making medicines for our people. You bring in the north to trade with us to make us more fruitful and richer and now show us kindness with such gifts. A blessing to us you are and I am honored to stand beside you as a fellow dragonheart and hope I may learn from you as I pray I am able to benefit you.”

“Thank you Yune. I am humbled. I love all our people and I only try my best to honor you all as you have all welcomed and honored me.” Juubie said and Yune just took his hand and kissed it.

“Spoken like a true heart. You must have your mate very happy with you. For many years Tahna would tell us of you and long to have you with him. It does my spirit good to see you here at last. When first Tahna became dragonhead two gatherings ago he announced his bond to you to the other Dragonheads. Then when he returned last gathering, no longer a child and a man passed the age he should have his heart as his side many here young and foolish tried to tempt him. Tahna was most handsome and strongest of the young warriors. However, always he say his heart was with you and honored you. Undape was very pleased with Tahna who shows respect and honor always. Now we smile for you both, seeing how happy you are together and knowing the dragons themselves came to bring you home shows just how good a dragonheart you are for our people. They would not interfere if they had not seen your good soul.” Yune said and Juubie smiled.

“We are very happy. These past two years have been wonderful and I would not trade a moment of my time with Tahna or our tribe. We are even more blessed now with our son and I am so scared I will not be good enough.” Juubie said

turning to the infant asleep in his sling against Juubie's chest and Yune just smiled and laid an old hand to the infants cheek.

"He is already bonded to you. Suckles from your power he does. He will grow strong with your light. We are all scared when young and our first born comes. It is natural to be so. Just love him and he will be fine." Yune said and Juubie nodded.

"I love him very much already. I feel him constantly drinking from my well and he grows stronger every day. How long do babies generally feed from our wells?" Juubie asked and Yune chuckled.

"It depends on the baby. My first born almost three before he learned to take just what he needed from the land and not his mother. My second born almost immediately found he could sup from the land. It is hard to say, they learn on their own eventually. Until then, they do bond with the heart for all their needs and it feels very nice does it not?" She asked and Juubie smiled.

"It does. So different than Tahna. Tahna is like a kiss and then gone again and just our bond remains until he needs power and he kisses my well again. Tanju is constantly drinking, I feel for the first time a little of what it must mean to be a woman I suppose. Because it is like I am nursing him even though I am not able."

"You are. Think not just because you are not a woman you have not the heart gifts that make you one with the goddesses who give us our gifts. I have only known two male hearts in my lifetime. The first Dragonheart Queza, he was already old when I was young and first mated to Undape. However, I saw in him all that I had and also the qualities of a head too. You are very much the same. You have god balance in you. You have the power of a male warrior in harmony with the goddesses gifts of mother soul. You are both, even if your body is male, your soul is female. You, are most blessed in that you understand all our people because you, unlike I embody us all."

"I never thought of it like that. I'm humbled."

Yune just smiled. "That is also what makes you a fine heart. Unselfish and giving. I pray I have many years to see you do many wonderful things for our people." She said just and Tanju woke up and demanded feeding. Conversation paused a moment while Juubie set about tending his sons needs.

Undape and Tahna were talking and when the baby began crying Tahna's attention was diverted for a moment until he realized it was just a typical cry and was ended when Juubie placed the bottle in demanding lips. Undape Chuckled.

"You will soon learn which cry means food and which one means dirty bottom and which one means you need worry." Undape said and Tahna smiled.

“My heart seems to already know.” Tahna said and Undape smiled.

“Because he is a heart and they all know. We heads are no different from our warrior men and we all spend much time fretting needlessly when they cry. My first had me very off balance for a long time. He cried, I worried and my heart scold me much not to hover.” Undape said and Tahna laughed.

“It will take getting used to, Tanju is very weak still but I see much improvement of health since yesterday. I can feel him drinking from my heart’s well and he grows stronger.”

“Aye. I will share with you what I know that you do not. As you know his mother was my last born and she wrote to her mother in fear. He would not bond to her, I think he knew that we would lose her and young Endra. It does my heart much joy to see he has bonded to your heart. It proves he is with the parents meant to be his. I knew in my heart when I asked you to take him as your own it was the gods guidance of my thoughts. I am most happy my grandson has you as his father.” Undape said and Tahna smiled.

“You honor me Elder. I love him much and I will do all I can to raise him as own father would have. Endra was a good man and I will honor him and Yundape always. I do hope you will ever be in his life, he is your blood and He should have all that love him in his life.”

“Aye, that would give me much joy too. A child can never have too many that love him.” Undape said pouring out two cups of spirits. “Drink to health and family. May we all be blessed.” Undape said holding up his cup and Tahna returned the gesture and they drank deeply.

Yune snorted. “We will be carrying our heads to bed I am thinking.”

“Yune, it’s more rolling them to bed. I couldn’t lift Tahna if I tried.” Juubie said and Yune laughed.

“Aye. We have much big men we do. Even rolling them hard when dead weight and drunken off spirits.”

“A night sleeping in the dirt would serve them right then.” Juubie said with a wink and Yune laughed again.

“Ah, true! Love you much Juubie of funny truth!” She said as they watched their mates get more deeply inebriated with every cup.

That night, after Yune helped a staggering Yune back to their own camp Juubie was a living crutch to his own mate who leaned on him heavily grinning like a fool. "Love you my heart."

"Yeah, yeah don't get amorous on me Tahna you're drunk as a skunk." Juubie said holding his mate up with one hand and holding the baby in the sling with the other. Tahna fell into their bed the moment they walked into their tent and Juubie carefully got the baby down into his basket before he moved to go take Tahna's sandals off.

"Tahna stop fidgeting you big bear. Give me your shoes or you'll dirty our blankets you oaf." Juubie scolded and Tahna just smiled lazily and let Juubie undress him for bed.

When Juubie got to the loin cloth he sighed. "You're a happy drunk. I see."

"Love you. Come mate me my heart."

"You're drunk Tahna." Juubie scolded and then didn't know what hit him as he was suddenly crushed in large arms and was being kissed within an inch of his young life.

"So beautiful." Tahna breathed, his breath smelling heavily of cinnamon.

"Tahna, get off me you booger. Oh, that's nice." Juubie said and then melted when Tahna's lips found that sensitive spot behind Juubie's ear that always made Juubie melt and cease being stubborn.

Juubie's resistance always failed when Tahna kissed his neck and it wasn't long before Juubie was on his stomach beneath Tahna and being mated by a heavily grunting man who kept muttering his love repeatedly as Juubie gripped blankets and bit his lip from moaning too loudly and waking the baby. Tahna, even drunk, was an amazing lover and Juubie's body never took long to respond to Tahna's. Even when Juubie tried resisting he always failed.

Not that he fought very hard, being loved by Tahna felt wonderful. Even if Tahna passed out, still inside him moments after he came. Juubie just chuckled and grunted as he rolled Tahna off his back. "You're too damn heavy to fall asleep on top of me while still inside me, you loveable bastard." Juubie teased, pulling the blanket up over his snoring husband and checking the baby a final time before he curled up beside Tahna to sleep.

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Tahna was nursing a horrible hangover that morning and Juubie was not about to give him peace over it. "My head feels like Were beast inside clawing way out." He moaned and Juubie snorted.

"Serves you right Tahna for drinking so much. Drink your coffee and quit bellyaching." Juubie said as he sat there feeding the baby.

"I mated you last night didn't I?"

"You wouldn't take no for an answer, you get very horny when you're drunk." Juubie said and Tahna lifted and apologetic look to Juubie.

"I am sorry."

Juubie couldn't scold him anymore, not when he looked so pathetic. "Beloved, believe me I'm not complaining. For what it's worth you did manage to make me come twice before you decided you were finished pounding me into the floor. You're wonderful." Juubie said and Tahna smiled.

"Love you I do. I just wish I could remember last night. Seeing you come is most beautiful sight to me. You make such beautiful faces."

"Oh stop it. You wouldn't have seen my face anyway last night. You had me all bent over with my ass in the air for you like a dog in heat."

"Did I?"

"Oh yes. Now enough my big man. You'll be late to council if you don't finish your breakfast and coffee." Juubie said leaning over to kiss Tahna. "Maybe tonight you can love me again and I'll show you the faces you missed." Juubie purred and Tahna smiled.

"I will be much looking forward to it." Tahna replied, his deep voice soft with intent as he gulped down his coffee and kissed Juubie and Tanju good morning and headed to council.

Juubie had Tanju in his basket in the shade as he settled outside their tent to work on making more additives for Tanju's milk. The rustle of leaves caught his attention and he looked up to see Puipei standing there, a very obviously false smile on her lips. He'd have noticed her eyes did not hold a smile even if he hadn't known that she was after Tahna. However, Juubie hid his wariness of her and returned her smile.

"Good morning Puipei, can I help you with anything?" He asked as he continued to work.

"I come to ask question if I may?" She said and Juubie indicated she should sit with him.

"Of course I am ever willing to answer questions you may have." He said settling aside his mortar and pestle where he had been grinding the herbs and giving her his attention.

She paused first to look into the basket at the baby before she settled across from Juubie. "Not of his blood. Does it not pain you that you cannot be giving Tahna son of his blood?" She asked and now Juubie could see why Tahna who liked everybody did not like her.

"No it does not. We love him as if he were our blood. I am not ashamed to be a man and Tahna loves me as I am. I would only feel pain if I were not secure in our bond. We are most happy with each other and our son."

"It pains me. Tahna greatest of all the warriors he should have his own son. Happy I am not to see his blood will not flow in others. His gifts passed on not."

"I am sorry you feel that way. However, you must accept Tahna and I were born non-breeders. We prefer each other and our bond should be proof of that even for you. You have and have seen other non-breeders in the tribes. Male and female alike and you cannot change what they are born to be and you wouldn't even try. Tahna and I are no different than others like us. Even if it had not been me, Tahna would have bonded to another male dragonheart. The gods dictate bonds between us. I am blessed to be the one meant for Tahna."

"Tahna is not like other men. I believe not he would be unable to choose his own mate. I think you bewitch him with northern ways. Make him turn his back on south and good southern dragonhearts like him."

Juubie was stunned at her bluntness and even more so at her prejudice that he had never seen displayed from a southerner but many times in northerners. "I am sorry you feel that way. There is probably nothing I can say that will make you believe otherwise. However, there is no bewitching, no turning of backs to the south. There is only love in our bond and love for all those of both the north and the south. I understand you love Tahna but also understand that so do I and he is my mate and I am his and there is no changing this, regardless of what you desire."

"I desire Tahna and to give him children of his blood. I am better mate for him. Southern girl breed strong dragonheads for him! No small and ugly white northern heart with no womb as you!" She said angrily her eyes flashing with hatred.

Muimei who had been listening the conversation from behind a boulder where she had been working on a new reed basket stood angrily and walked over. She had heard enough. "You girl shame yourself! Disrespect all of us with your words! Leave our heart you shameful girl!" Muimei said stalking over and literally slapping the girl hard.

Juubie's hand shot up and stayed Muimei's hand. "Stop. Please. No fighting I beg you. Pupei, I ask you to please leave and no longer upset my tribeswoman. Your words distress her." Juubie said and Pupei stood and stormed off and Juubie sighed.

"Juubie, I am so sorry. Her mother is a good woman and that child shames her so!" Muimei said and Juubie nodded.

"Aye. I know her mother I met her yesterday. It is not the mother's fault nor the father's. She loves Tahna and her jealousy of me blinds her. Nothing anyone can say will change her heart."

"She has none! I will tell mother! Juubie forgive you may as you always do, but she breaks tribe honor and her father and mother should know and she should be punished." Muimei said and Juubie sighed.

"I agree her parents should know and if you wish to tell them you may. But please also tell them I wish not her punished too harshly, I am not offended." Juubie said and Muimei took his hands and kissed them.

"Even when should be offended you are not. Always and always I honor you as my heart." Muimei said hurrying off to inform Pupei's mother of her dishonorable words against the Dragonheart of her clan.

Juubie turned back to his work with a sigh. He'd never in his life been called ugly before. He knew her words were fueled by jealousy, but it didn't sting any less to think that some southerners thought northerners ugly. It was true he was much smaller, much paler and no where near as exotic as the natives and it put him in a doubtful mood as he worked. Would Tanju think his Papa ugly too? Did Tahna only think he was beautiful because of their bond? It was silly to dwell on but he dwelled on it just the same as he silently worked and cared for Tanju.

Pupei did not go far she stood in the shadows glaring at Juubie, hatred and anger filling her breast. She should be Tahna's mate and that babe in the basket hers! She had tried the day before to kill Juubie and failed, the scorpion she'd left in his bathing things had left him unmolested. She knew if Juubie was dead, Tahna would turn to her for comfort and take her as his dragonheart instead of the ugly northerner.

She watched Juubie feed the infant and set him back in his basket and return to work, his back to her the dragon wings mocking her. Those should be on her skin as Tahna's mate. The markings on Juubie's chest should be hers to bear.

She was blinded with hate, she desired nothing more than to see the ugly northerner take his last breath. She had spied on them all yesterday and the night before and the memory of the sight of Tahna mating him made her rage with anger.

From her hip pouch she pulled out a small reed pipe and carefully unwrapped a single blow dart. Dipped in scorpion venom and used by the warriors in the hunt. She should not have the warriors tools in her hands, but she knew just one sting and Juubie would fall and Tahna would be hers.

She brought the pipe to her lips and blew and Juubie never felt the fine needle penetrate the back of his neck. His hands however faltered and he began to shake as the toxin entered his body.

Juubie suddenly felt very ill, violently ill and his hands trembled uncontrollably and his vision began to cloud.

Tahna shoved out of his seat at council so quickly he toppled the table over as he leapt over it in a rage of fright. "JUUBIE! JUUBIE!" He called out running, the other dragonheads recognizing the urgency and sudden frenzy of blood red power that erupted out of Tahna as his bond was threatened.

The entire population turned as one as Tahna went racing though the camps, running as fast as his feet would take him. "JUUBIE!" Tahna screamed as he found Juubie laying and convulsing on the ground in front of their tent, the baby wailing with fear and Juubie's eyes frozen wide open as he shook and he foamed at the mouth.

Tahna grabbed him and held him, power searching for what was wrong with his mate.

Goh was right beside Tahna in moments. "Hold on Tahna, don't go nuts on us! Fight it off man you have to stay calm!" He said as Juubie's head flopped forward and Goh shouted.

"He's got a dart in his neck! We need anti-toxin immediately!" Goh said carefully removing the dart and then leaning forward to suck on the puncture, trying to draw out the toxin. He spit out the vile tasting poison just as Undape knelt beside them and took up the dart.

"This is Pumataton's Tribe colors! Who has done this?" Undape demanded as Pumataton quickly came over.

"I know not elder, but I will find out. I have called my heart, she will bring the cure." Pumataton said, his eyes dangerously furious as he took the dart.

"Hurry, fading he is! Hurry!" Tahna sobbed frantically trying not to let his rage control him, fear gripping his bond in a strangle hold.

"Just hold on Tahna, keep it together friend." Goh said softly as Pumataton's mate arrived and immediately jabbed a needle into Juubie's arm.

"Give him a few minutes, poison strong but we come in time his blood still flows and not stilled. Live he will." She said and almost immediately the convulsions stopped and Juubie's breathing became less labored. "Take him inside, hot bath on skin let him sweat poison out of body. Dragonhearts will all tend him, find who would do this!" she said as Muimei stepped forward.

"Find the girl. Find the girl and find the one who do this. Told you I did what she said I have. Your dart in my dragonheart." Muimei said sadly but firmly and Habamei nodded.

"Puma, find Pupei." Habamei said and Pumataton stood his eyes pained.

"Tahna, I beg forgiveness. I will find her." Pumataton said and Tahna just nodded, clutching Juubie's hand and clinging onto their bond for all he was worth. He would not let it escape, Juubie needed him to hold him to keep his soul in his body while he healed.

Obie picked up the crying infant. "I'll take care of Tanju, just worry about Juubie Tahna." Obie said quietly taking the baby to his tent to mind while all the other Dragonhearts carried Juubie inside his tent to care for him and help him sweat out the poison.

Tahna sat close watching the women work, he felt heartsick as Muimei came to comfort him. "Tell me, what was said."

"No, you are too close to bond rage madness Tahna."

"Deny me not Muimei, I must know. I am crazy in mind right now. Not knowing hurts more." He said and Muimei nodded and spoke, all the other dragonhearts listening as they tended Juubie.

"She came this morning and asked Juubie if she could talk. He give her yes to speak and what I hear make me shamed to be southern born. She accuse Juubie of bewitching you, told him he worthless as mate to you for not giving you blood son. Call him ugly and more. I slap her and Juubie make me stop giving punishment for disrespect. He order me not to fight and even forgive and

apologize to her he did for making her have bad feelings. Such insults I never hear and Juubie most wonderful in heart to forgive. He even asked me to make sure her fine parents know he not offended so she not have punishment. I know not she would do such things when I go find her mother. Else I would have stayed and protected my heart better.” Muimei said in tears and Tahna sighed.

“We know not if it is she who did this. I pray not.” Tahna said turning to Juubie his eyes filled with agony. “Heart forgive too much you do!” Tahna said and Yune came over and took Tahna’s hand.

“He forgives because that is his heart Tahna. Just keep your bond strong with him and he will come back to you. Juubie of dragon soul he is to be so free of evil.” Yune said as Goh came into the tent.

“Tahna, she’s here. Pumataton has asked you to come out please.” Goh said looking deadly serious and ultimately sad. Tahna nodded and walked over and the defiant look on Pupei’s face screamed her guilt and his rage grew and it took every ounce of his will power not to strike her smirk off her face.

“Dragonhead Tahna. Forgive.” Pumataton said holding out his daughter’s hip pouch showing the blow dart pipe poking out. “I am shamed my blood causes you grief.” He added and Tahna took the pouch and threw it at Pupei’s feet.

“Tell me why you do this and Shame your people!” Tahna demanded of her and she smiled. She had the audacity to smile.

“Freeing you I am of bad things.” She said prettily and Tahna was disgusted.

“Making bad things you do. Kill my heart almost you do, Kill me too would have done had my bond to him not been strong. You also put scorpion in my tent yesterday too yes?”

“To purge you of ugly northern heart with no womb for your blood sons! I give you fine sons! I show you I better than evil ugly north heart who fool you. I wear your markings and make better heart. I south heart, you need not north witch.”

“ENOUGH! I hear no more of this!” Pumataton screamed striking her hard and stunning her face. Her father had never stuck her before.

“Shame me! Shame Mother! Shame whole tribe! My blood in you foul! I teach you not to be this way! I turn you from my hut, I cast you out of our tribe. Betray us you do and I offer you no more protection. I give you to Dragonhead Tahna for punishment!” Her father said and Pupei’s eyes turned frantic.

“Father!”

“Father no longer to you.” Pumataton said turning his back on her weeping with agony and despair and much shame. The other Dragonhead’s following suit, shunning her officially. No one would accept her, she was outcast. Only Tahna still faced her his eyes hard and cold.

“Juubie would weep if I kill you. So kill you I will not. But you are outcast, no more welcome in any tribe. You must leave the gathering at once and make your own way. If gods forgive you then they will guide you safely. If they do not then nature will give you your punishment.”

“Tahna! Please! My love I only...” she pleaded and Tahna roared.

“Silence! Speak not to me, you are dead to me.” Tahna said turning his back on her like the others.

All those standing witness came forward, warriors of all the tribes flanking her with their spears and then pressing forward. Making her walk and they herded her to the edge of the gathering grounds and then formed a protective line. She would not be allowed to cross back within the safety of the gathering grounds and then they all turned their backs on her in silence.

Tahna sighed and laid a hand on Pumataton’s shoulder. “Blame you I do not my brother.”

“Thank you my brother. I am most sorry and sad.”

“I know. As am I.” Tahna said turning to go back inside his hut to watch over Juubie. Obie came in later with Tanju and let Tahna hold his son for comfort while they waited for Juubie to wake up.

It was a very long night and Tahna was fatigued and soul weary as he rocked his fussy son.

“He’s hungry Tahna.” Came Juubie’s exhausted voice and Tahna let out a whimper of joy as he came closer.

“Juubie, my heart!’ Tahna cried with relief as Juubie opened his eyes.

“I’m feeling awful and I’m sure you’ll tell me what happened. But please feed your son first, he’s hungry and I can feel it and I’m too weak to sit up and feed him myself.” Juubie said and Tahna obeyed fixing a bottle and feeding his son.

Once the baby stopped fussing Juubie sighed. “Much better. Now tell me why I feel like my whole body is on fire.”

“Puipei shot you with dart. Scorpion poison. We very nearly lost you.” Tahna said fighting tears.

“Well, that would explain why I feel so bad and why it came on so quickly. I am sorry.”

“Apologize not my heart! You have no need to take responsibility for her actions. I hear she say much more too before. You too kind to her.” Tahna said angrily.

“Don’t get angry, you’ll upset Tanju. There’s no need to get angry over words. She was jealous.”

“She more so, she evil and no more will be allowed to harm. Cast out she has been. Harm no others she will not.”

“You didn’t!” Juubie was shocked they’d actually cast her out of the tribes. It was a death sentence and a brutal one.

“Aye. Shame all of tribes and all cast her out.”

“Her poor parents, they must be heartbroken.” Juubie said now upset himself and Tahna smoothed his hair from his brow.

“Aye. Father most hurt but also first to turn her out. My heart she tried to kill you. This not simple jealousy. But murder tried.”

“I know. I’m just sorry I caused such upset with others.”

“Only to her. Others here love you as I do.”

“The ugly white northern boy?”

“What makes you think ugly? Juubie you not my heart. Most beautiful you are. Think not her words true. You not ugly.”

“Thank you Tahna. I’m tired do you mind if I go back to sleep?” Juubie asked quietly and Tahna set the baby in his basket and leaned over to kiss Juubie.

“Only if promise you stop thinking you ugly. I feel your doubt.”

“I’m being silly Tahna. Ignore me beloved.”

“No, not ever ignore one I love most. Promise you dwell not on stupid words only meant to hurt you.”

“I promise.”

“Then now I let you sleep my love. Rest well most precious heart.” Tahna said moving to hold Juubie as he fell back asleep.

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Council was cancelled the next day so Tahna could stay with his heart who was still very weak but recovering. All of the Dragonheads came to pay their respects and inquire on the health of the Dragonheart.

Tahna sat just outside the tent flap with the baby to allow Juubie undisturbed rest and talked quietly with the other dragonheads as they came with their hearts to make sure Juubie was healing.

The hearts all went inside the tent to physically check on Juubie while the men respected Juubie’s privacy and let him rest unmolested.

Pumataton was an early arrival that morning with a red-eyed Habamei on his arm. They both looked as soul weary as Tahna felt and they knelt with Tahna together.

“Can we offer any more aide Brother Tahna?” Pumataton asked and Tahna shook his head.

“No, Juubie spoke last night and our bond is much healthier today, he will be fine fear not.” Tahna said, playing absently with his son’s feet where he lay kicking happily in Tahna’s lap.

“Babe no longer distressed. Proof heart healing. Oh Tahna forgive us.” Habamei said and Tahna just took her hand.

“Nothing to forgive you for. I am not blind I have seen how you try many times to correct her ways. Juubie would never blame you and Neither will I. Juubie most upset we cast her out, he very sorry and his first thought was of the two of you.”

“Your heart most kind.” Pumataton said and Tahna smiled.

“Aye. Juubie always think of others first and if he has bad habits it is being too forgiving of others sometimes. He will let you walk on his back over hot coals and apologize if stray spark snap and burn you. He will let you take his last meal and say he is sorry it is not more. I am most blessed.” Tahna said and Pumataton nodded.

“This I have seen of him already and hear many more good things from others.” Pumataton said as Tanju took that opportunity to pass noxious and audible gas. Tahna chuckled.

“His bottom most foul this morning. Excuse me.” Tahna said moving to get up and Habamei held out her arms.

“Allow me? I’d much love to see your son.” She said and Tahna grateful for the reprieve of changing a nasty diaper handed him over. A show of trust and that he would never harbor ill will against the parents. To hand over his infant child was proof.

Habamei laid the child down on his back and deftly changed the diaper and then inspected the bandages around his chest.

“He will scar but healing most well. Juubie most talented of all the hearts when it comes to healing medicines. Your son very near death when he came and now I see strong baby in very short time.”

“Juubie has been suckling him power since he came to us, his light purges bad spirits. I was most ill when Dragons bring Juubie home to me. Healed me with medicine and light in just a few days, burned me free of ills with pure power.”

“His power is most strong. We can all feel him even when he is not near. The whole land strong with his light, easy to see Dragon Soul reborn in one such as your heart. No other like him since Queza.” Pumataton said and Tahna smiled.

“Tell Juubie not he dragon soul, he will not believe you. He will merely say he just strong because he so short and gods making up for his lack of size. My love jokes much.” Tahna said and Pumataton laughed.

“Laughter also good for spirits.” Habamei said picking up the now clean and changed baby and tickling his pudgy chin as she handed him back to Tahna.

“His naming ceremony comes soon. Have you chosen his name?” Habamei asked and Tahna nodded.

“Tanju.” Tahna said proudly, looking very much a prideful new father over his strong son. Tanju just hiccupped and his little arms and legs kicked randomly as he lay on his back in the valley of Tahna’s thighs. His black full head of hair sticking straight up and his little fists balled as he made gurgling baby noises.

“Lively he is, you must not sleep much.” Pumataton said and Tahna smiled sheepishly.

“I sleep fine. Juubie is one who wakes first to tend him he lets me sleep. I sleep little last night, afraid to sleep and not hear him cry. I sleep very deep.”

“You will grow used to it. I was same with my firstborn. Poor Haba up always while I snore.”

“Until I kick you and make you change our son and let me sleep for change.” Haba grinned and Puma nodded.

“Tahna?” came Juubie’s weak voice from inside and Tahna gently laid the baby in his basket as he went inside.

“Beloved?” Tahna asked coming over to Juubie’s side.

“I’m so thirsty and I can’t reach my cup, I’m sorry, will you help me?” Juubie asked and Tahna’s heart ached.

“Why sorry? Who tend me when I ill? Of course I help one I love.” Tahna said reaching for the water and then lifting Juubie up to help him drink before settling him back down again.

Habamei poked her head inside. “May I come in and check on you dragonheart?” She asked and Juubie turned his face and smiled kindly at her, her heart aching for him and wondering how he could be so forgiving of her when her child nearly killed him.

“Please, do come in I’m sorry I am not better company.” Juubie said and Habamei came in and laid a cool hand against his brow.

“You very close to meeting gods on spirit journey. More concerned with health than with small talk.” Habamei smiled and wetted a rag to lay on Juubie’s brow.

“Sweat enough now you have. Time you cool again too warm. How much do you hurt?” She asked and Juubie sighed.

“Even my hair hurts this morning. I cannot feel my toes or fingers.” Juubie answered truthfully and Habamei picked up his hands and began rubbing briskly.

“Tahna help, get blood moving in hands and feet restore feeling.” Habamei ordered and Tahna mimicked what Habamei was doing to Juubie’s hands on his feet.

“Better? Tingle yet?” She asked and Juubie nodded.

“A little yes.”

“Good, then you not lost feeling in them a very good thing. Poison work very fast and make blood run slow. We must get moving again. Can you drink more? Drink much and help it will too.”

She moved to support Juubie and help him sit up while Tahna helped hold the cup for Juubie to drink from. He could not sit up for long without getting dizzy and so they laid him back down and Haba took up a cool rag.

“I wash the sick from skin with good soap will cool you and help ache.” She said and she washed everything from his hair to in-between his toes and Juubie felt much better clean and cool. She pulled just a light sheet over him and fixed his pillows.

“Now sleep more. Few days and you be well again. I check on you later and bring you light meal, no meat for a few days sit bad in stomach. Just juice and stewed fruits.”

Juubie knew she was correct and wouldn't argue, he wasn't hungry yet anyway he yawned once before slipping quickly back to sleep. Tahna and Haba left him to rest and rejoined Pumataton and Tanju outside. Pumataton making ridiculous faces at the baby in the basket beside him as he waited keeping the child entertained while his head-father was busy tending his heart-father.

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By the second morning Juubie was sitting up on his own and desperately wanting his hands on Tanju. It had been far too many days since he'd had tactile contact and once Tahna settled the baby in Juubie's arms Juubie looked content to sit there all day with him.

“I missed him, thank you Tahna.”

“Thank me not, Tanju missing you too. Looking much better today my heart.” Tahna said as Juubie leaned back against his stack of pillows with the baby tucked in his arms against his bare chest and Tanju turned and clamped down on a nipple and Juubie jumped.

“Ouch. Listen here Tanju, suck all you want you're not getting anything out of that. Tahna hand me the bottle will you? It appears your son is hungry again.” Juubie chuckled and Tahna complied, amused.

“Just fed him I did. “ Tahna said and Juubie tried to get the baby to take the bottle and he refused it, he wasn't hungry and the minute Juubie took the bottle away the baby turned back to the nipple again.

“We need to get him a pacifier. He's not hungry he's just wanting to nurse on something.” Juubie said and just sighed and let the baby chew on him as he sat there.

“That not bother you?”

“Well until we get him a pacifier I’d rather have him content than crying. It feels rather odd yes but he’s not hurting anything. I just never expected to be his chew toy.” Juubie said and Tahna smiled.

“Would you strike me if I said I think looks nice?”

“No, kinda feels nice if I’m being honest. He’s very happy, he’s taking a lot of power from me at the moment and I can feel him, I’ve never felt him so content.”

“He just wants to bond with you, this is intimate way of doing so. He would have done this with his mother, not take milk but suckle just the same. Undape tell me he refuse bond with her but bond to you right away. You are his heart and he wants only you for comfort.”

“Then just leave him I suppose, there really is no harm in this. It’s actually very nice to feel him take my power this way. I love him so very much I could cry right now.” Juubie said running fingers through thick dark hair as the baby pseudo nursed taking power instead of milk.

“Why cry?” Tahna asked and Juubie smiled.

“Because he’s giving me a very special gift. I get to feel not only what it is like to be a father, but also a mother in a way. He can’t do this with you, he can’t take power from the land yet I’m the only one who can give him what he needs just as if I am indeed nursing him like a mother would. I may have to feed him with a bottle, but he can tap my power this way and make a stronger connection. I get a chance to be both mother and father to him, this is a blessing and life perspective I will cherish.” Juubie said and Tahna smiled and leaned over to kiss Juubie deeply.

“You are a blessing to us both.” Tahna said looking down to watch the baby, fascinated with the discovery that Juubie could feed their son’s inner spirit in ways neither had expected he could.

Obie came in with Goh a few moments later and after the initial shock of seeing Juubie ‘nursing’ the baby wore off and Juubie explained precisely what the baby was doing they were just as fascinated as Tahna and Juubie were.

“I wonder if only wielder babies do this?” Obie asked the question as Tahna finished washing up to resume council sessions that morning since Juubie was feeling better and would be alright with just Obie for company.

“I think so. They are more needy than hearts. Hearts born with gift of power it is instinct. Heads need it and pull from parent until they learn they can get what

they crave from all living things.” Tahna surmised as he ran a comb through his very long hair.

“In other words you’re slow learners as babies.” Obie teased and Tahna laughed.

“Yes.” Tahna smiled and Goh chuckled himself.

“My mother told me once she had the worst time nursing me. My elder brother was fine he was about a year or so old before he stopped clinging to her, Gandes was a little saint she said and me I was her demon spawn. I was three and still clamped on to her tit and refusing to let go. She said I threw the biggest tantrums you’d ever seen in your life. Apparently I’m a very slow learner.” Goh said and Obie laughed.

“But you made up for it since dearest.” Obie said with a wink as Tahna finished getting ready and leaned over to kiss Juubie.

“Call if you need anything and I will come immediately.” Tahna said and Juubie smiled.

“I’ll be fine Tahna. I’m just tired now the worst is over. I’ll be fine with Obie and the tribe looking out for me. Go take care of business, they’ve put it off long enough for me.” Juubie said and Tahna smiled and headed out with Goh.

While Juubie napped Obie played with the baby quietly, thinking he was the most adorable little chubby thing he’d ever seen. Southern babies he’d noticed were all like Tanju. Little bundles of sturdy fat cuteness. Northern babes tended to be much more frail and skinny, it was an environmental aspect that was evident in the very people. Babies in the south needed to be stronger due to the harder living conditions and Tanju was the prime example. Not even three weeks old and already bearing battle wounds and had survived.

The claw marks were healing nicely and Juubie had already removed the bandages from the baby to let the air finish healing him. Four large scars ran from shoulder, down his chest and all down his fat belly. It was amazing the little brute was still alive at all. “You’re one tough little guy Tanju. I hope you realize how happy you’ve made your Papas. They love you very much and let me set the record straight. Uncle Obie will tan that little bottom of yours good if you think of being a rotten little stinker is that clear?” Obie teased with a smile and the baby just gurgled and gnawed on his finger.

“I’ll take that last burp as a yes then shall I? God you’re a cute little cuss. No wonder Juubie never puts you down, you’re irresistible!” Obie chuckled rubbing his nose against the baby’s and enjoying the time as Juubie slept peacefully and undisturbed.

By the end of the week Juubie was back on his feet, if still moving rather slowly. Tahna wanted him to rest more, but Juubie's nature was driving him crazy being idle so a compromise was made. Tahna wouldn't grumble and moan if Juubie took plenty of rest breaks.

The evening of the seventh day, everyone gathered by the falls as Tahna and Juubie carried their son over to the elder hearts and for a change Juubie was not the one performing the ceremony but standing there the proud parent as his one moon old son officially received his name.

Yune, being the eldest heart took the child from Juubie's arms and smiled as she held him up above her head, presenting him to the tribe and the gods. "One moon strong and already faced battle of not only life but danger. Strong Warrior of the clan and dragonhead one day of his own tribe if gods smile on you. I ask all here see you as Tanju. Son of Dragonhead Tahna and Dragonheart Juubie. May the Gods and Goddess light always shine upon you." She said handing the baby back to a smiling Juubie and everyone cheered happily as the baby was now counted as an official member of Tahna's tribe.

Tahna's tribe was in full celebration and all the Heads and Hearts of the brother tribes were invited to celebrate Tanju's naming day with them. Juubie sat on a stack of pillows, his green wrap accenting his eyes and his hair was unbound with a crown of plumeria in his hair. He looked radiant as he smiled and cradled the baby in his arms also adorned with flowers around his neck. The baby was happily playing with the pearl and Jade strand of beads that hung around Juubie's neck and Juubie looked like nothing in the world could make him happier.

Tahna sat beside them, his brow adorned with an intricate beaded headband, a breast band of more beads and claws lay across his massive chest and his face was split in two with a smile of pride as he greeted everyone who came to offer congratulations over the baby and bring the baby gifts.

Undape and Yune brought their grandchild a beautiful carved bassinet. Aoi and Tahno presented him with soft silk toys stuffed with their pure cotton and made from colorful fabrics. All in the shapes of the animals of the jungle. A bright green panther, a red boar, a purple lemur and a rainbow hued dragon. Aoi and the ladies of her tribe had outdone themselves with the toys. Puma and Haba brought him a brightly beaded rattle with a nice rubber plant handle for gums to chew on when he began teething. Puma's tribe had refined the making of rubber into an art form and the toy was sturdy enough to whether many hours of chewing without damage to either toy or baby gums.

Bottles and clothes, blankets and toys were stacked high, everyone was bringing something to give the new addition to the clans. Obie and Goh stood off to the side smiling.

“This is almost a royal affair if you look at it through northern eyes. Tahna looks like Gerdar did when Amandine finally had their last baby. I swear the whole kingdom brought him gifts.”

“If you want to be technical Goh. All the dragonheads are basically kings of their own lands. Tanju is the firstborn son of a particularly popular Tribal king. Everyone loves Tahna so naturally they are going to celebrate like this. Especially considering no one expected Tahna to have his own children in the first place. Not to mention you can't walk five feet without stumbling into a conversation about Juubie. If Tahna was popular, Juubie is a God to them. There's not a single person here not thinking Juubie is the greatest dragonheart since Queza the Dragonwise. Half the people think he's dragon soul like you and the other half are positive he's dragon soul reborn. It's a good thing Juubie is so modest or his head would explode from an ego trip.”

“I don't think he realizes how much he's respected. You know Juubie, when does he ever think of himself first?”

“He doesn't. That's why they love him so much. Tanju is going to have one wonderful set of parents. If that kid grows up to be anything other than the next tribal elder I'd be surprised. He's going to have fantastic role models.”

“That he will and we'll have the joy of being neighbors and watching him grow up. I can't wait. Yidane said they are just about finished building now and I've gone ahead and given him cart blanche to begin importing from the north. We're gonna start with the basics first. Cookware, steel, tools and ceramics. Functional items. From there will see how demand goes and play it by ear pretty much. We've all decided in council at last who is going to supply what to the north. Tahna's going to supply sugar and Pineapples, Tahno cotton and Papayas, Puma refined rubber. I've got a whole list of things that are going to make northerners think twice about considering the south primitive and backwards. They've made advances of their own down here and I think everyone is going to be pleasantly surprised.”

“Even we've been surprised and we've been here many times before. So if you and I can pause with wonder with as much as we've seen? I don't doubt your predictions. I'm so excited Goh. We get to have a hand in wondrous changes and we're still young enough to enjoy it ourselves. I can't wait to get home and finally do things I've always wanted to do with you. No more riding through snow and ice for days until our asses are numb on horseback. No more risking our necks in frigid storms out in the middle of barren nowhere villages, no more coming back to Pernath for just a handful of days and sleeping in whatever bed is available. We'll have our own home at last. Where we can finally collect frivolous things to set on the table or hang on a wall. The same bed to sleep in every night with you, a kitchen I am going to abuse and love every minute of it because I'm not burning

my hands in an open fire on the road. A proper table to sit and eat at, a desk to write on and not using my lap. The list of perks of this new duty does on and on.”

“Doesn’t it just? I liked that same bed every night part you mentioned. That will be nice.”

“You horny devil I meant to sleep.”

“Like I’m going to let you sleep much when I’m happy and rested? You know me better than that Obie.” Goh said and Obie chuckled and turned to hug Goh’s waist.

“I do. I’m really not complaining and you know me better than that too.”

“I do. I love you Obie, I really do, More so today than I did all those years ago.”

“I know, just as you know I think you hang the moon and stars at night just for me.”

“And who accuses me of being a big soft-hearted bugger?”

“You’re a bad influence.”

“Right, sure. Pull my other leg Obie.” Goh winked leaning over to give Obie and affectionate kiss as they cuddled together and watched the celebration content.

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## **“Dragonhead and Dragonheart”**

*A Wielder and Wellspring Story*

*Author: D. Sanders*

### **Act IX - Gathering Games and Greater Changes**

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Once the council sessions ended at the end of the second week, it was time for everyone to truly enjoy themselves now that matters of business and tribal welfare had been decided.

Tahna was smiling into his breakfast and Juubie cocked an eyebrow. “What are you all smiles about this morning?”

“Today is the first day of Youth Warrior games. Today all the youngest under eighteen and over thirteen will gather and we’ll find out which of the new youth warriors will begin earning their markings and who will want to join our tribe and others.”

“So it’s a bunch of teenagers beating each other silly?”

“Pretty much, it’s much fun. There are four rounds of competition for them to show us their skills. First the bow, then spear, Wrestling and then answering a Dragon Riddle. We’ll get to see which tribe they’ve asked to join and then we’ll get to see them fight and decide if we accept them or not.”

“Are you going to turn down anybody?”

“Of course not. Even if not win, no one gets turned down. It is in the trying we see their worth. They are all very young this is just to get an idea of what we will be gaining and which skills they are best at so I and the other dragonheads can assign them their new duties at the end of the games with the others.”

“Tell me we’re going to get girls too. All our women are already married, it would be horrible for a bunch of new boys to have no one to, you know. Take care of teenage hormones with, I doubt very seriously they’ll all be bent in the same direction as you and I are.”

Tahna laughed and nodded. “Juubie, they’ll get to ask the girls they love after the games to come with them and ask fathers for their mate’s hand. It’s tradition, this is the time everyone comes together to make new alliances and refresh old ones.”

“One big week of weddings then?”

“Exactly.”

“Can I ask a dumb question then? What happens if they find out after we get back they can’t stand each other and decide they’d rather not be married to each other?”

“Then next gathering they part each other and change alliances. It happens sometimes. We are lucky in our bond there, not all are as lucky as you and I in having compatible mates. They will just live separately as friends rather than lovers until next gathering.”

“Okay, now another question that really bothers me a little. What of the boys like me?”

“What do you mean? You are only male heart here.”

“No I meant the boys who would be useless warriors. I couldn’t pitch a spear if my life depended on it, I detest getting dirty and I’d rather be brewing up noxious muscle creams than hunting. We didn’t have any boys like that in our tribe and I know just from human nature there has to be a few of them. I realize it’s traditional for the men here to hunt and the women to gather, but what about the boys that would make better gathers than hunters and vice versa. There’s got to be a few girls that would be fantastic hunters. I’ve seen a few women here who could dance a jig while holding me above their heads one handed.”

Tahna laughed. “Aye, there are some large women here. I don’t know Juubie, that really isn’t something I think any of us have considered before.”

“Then maybe it’s time it is considered? In the north there are traditional male and female roles but lines do get crossed occasionally to suit the person. Like Tavryn back at the port. She’s one hell of a carpenter a traditionally male profession. She crossed that line beautifully as did Yanus, he’s the bloke married to Gunther back at port. Gunther is that blacksmith who makes even your biceps look normal sized and Yanus is the accountant with his nose in books during the day and cooking like a master chef at night for Gunther. Yanus wouldn’t know what to do with a hammer if you handed him one with detailed instructions. He’s just not a man who enjoys manual labor and puts his mind to work instead. What happens to the boys who aren’t talented at the hunt and what happens to the girls who’d rather wrestle a boar than cook and keep house?”

“Probably living much unhappy lives when you say it like that Juubie. Come, I think we need call meeting of elders. Tell them that as you told me perhaps we can be making new games this year.” Tahna said and Juubie grabbed Muimei to baby-sit Tanju while he and Tahna called the other Dragonheads together for a quick meeting.

Juubie spoke his observations to the council and Goh once again looked quite proud of him and stood and backed Juubie up. “He’s right, in the north your

profession is not so much dictated by your gender as your desire. Granted there are traditional jobs and people who fit and enjoy them. But there are always a few who desire something different and if you give them a chance to do what they love, they prove themselves even more valuable assets because you are using the skills they are best suited for.”

“Dragonheart Juubie, once again you show us how very Dragonwise you are and how you look always to see how best to serve our people and help us grow stronger. I think change good, keep us growing as a people. We can only try new way to see if it works well, we cannot assume without at least trying. I vote we invite women who wish to join games to do so. All men who would choose to be workers in tribe instead of warriors be given the choice. Are all in favor?” Undape said and a resounding affirmative was sounded and Juubie was thrilled.

As everyone gathered at the beginning of the games, Undape stood and made the announcement of the changes. All warriors who wished to withdraw from the games and choose other work in the tribe were allowed to do so and any woman who wanted to fight with the men were to at once go find bows and spears and come to the games and sign up to participate.

There was much rejoicing and quite a few young women raced off looking determined to show off her mettle and there were half a dozen or so boys looking very relieved. One in particular coming over to Juubie and Tahna bowing. He was probably no more than fifteen and in comparison to others his age much smaller physically. “Dragonheart Juubie. You make me happy with your wisdom. I always poor warrior, make father and mother worry. I always want to be healer medicine man. I like much helping others to feel better, makes me happy. I wanted to try hard today so I could come to your tribe and learn from you. May I still come if not fight in games?”

“Of course you can.” Juubie said smiling and the youth’s eyes came alive with joy.

“Dragonhead Tahna?” He asked and Tahna nodded.

“My Juubie is correct. Healer is also good skill to have and you will help my Juubie much if you work hard with him. Welcome to our Tribe Tabu.” Tahna said and Tabu thanked them both profusely and then raced off and was met by a boy around seventeen who looked physically relieved as Tabu talked excitedly and hugged him joyfully.

“Oh ho. Looky, looky. Who’s the tall handsome one with Tabu?”

“Remba. He also asked to be part of our tribe. I hear he very good with bow, he is favored to win that round of games.”

“Seems to me Remba looks as relieved of the changes as Tabu. Wanna bet they are lovers too?”

“No bet. I can tell by looking.”

“See, I told you there had to be boys like me here. Tell me now, how relieved you’d feel if I had to face warrior games I was horrible at and just got a reprieve.”

“I’d have look on my face much like Remba. He must worry sick, I know I be worried over you.”

“Exactly. Tabu’s parents are probably also thanking the gods right about now. I know mine would be. Tabu will be happier, Remba probably much happier and Tabu’s parents can let him go knowing he’s going to stay safe and work doing what he’s best at regardless of the fact he was born a boy. It takes all kinds of people to make up the world, the gods make us all different for reasons.”

“Wise words again my heart. Come, let’s go watch the games. I am curious to see Remba now. Without worry on his heart he will be much better and we shall see how the girls do as well.” Tahna said as they moved to stand beside Tabu who cheered loudly when Remba got up to take his first shot.

Remba smiled at him and then focused and his first shot was a clean bulls-eye. Tabu was full of life and animated and Juubie couldn’t resist asking.

“Is he your mate?” Juubie asked and Tabu blushed and smiled shyly.

“Aye. Well, we want to be. Love him much I do. Remba always help me when I fail at hunt. Always promise to take care of me he does as I always promise take care Remba. Bad headaches he gets, I learn to make medicines to help him. He why I want to be healer so he no suffer. Love him very much all my life as he say he love me.” Tabu said and Juubie smiled.

“No better reason to be a healer than to take care of those you love and I’ll teach you first a good mixture for headaches for him later.”

“Oh thank you Dragonheart Juubie. Thank you so much.” Tabu said and Juubie couldn’t help but smile. Tabu was very much like he was, he was sure he’d get along with his new apprentice healer just fine. Then a part of Tabu’s response sank in and Juubie asked for clarification.

“Tabu, what did you mean by ‘want to be’ lovers? Is someone preventing you? You’re both old enough.”

“Oh, no, no, nothing like that Dragonheart. Our parents know we wish to be together and are fine with letting us leave together. My Father and his already

give Remba permission to marry me officially long time ago.” Tabu said, flushing hotly.

“Oh, I think I can guess. Having difficulty with pain?” Juubie asked quietly and Tabu looked ashamed and nodded.

“Aye. Hurts much when we try so Remba stop. Does it always hurt?” He asked pleading with his eyes and desperate for help. Juubie just smiled and winked.

“No it doesn’t. I’ll tell you later what you can do so it doesn’t hurt. Come to my tent after the games break for lunch and I’ll help you Tabu. I know exactly what you’re going through. It’s alright and nothing to be ashamed over.”

“Thank you so much.” Tabu said quietly his eyes showing such gratitude Juubie wanted to cry. He already loved this boy like a kid brother, they were going to get along fabulously. Obie had given him this talk once, it was Juubie’s turn to return the favor to someone else. It was also his duty to see to the well being of his tribe members both mental and physical. This was paining Tabu deeply, you could see in his face how much he loved Remba and it was destroying him not to be able to love Remba physically as well as with his heart.

“OH nice shot!” Tahna shouted, his attention solely on the games and specifically those young men who had asked to be part of his tribe and he applauded loudly with approval as Remba took his next shot and shattered his last arrow right down the center with his next. Tahna was impressed. Tabu looked like a lovesick puppy and if he’d had a tail he’d have been wagging it and Juubie was thoroughly amused by the whole scene.

Remba took five shots in all, and every one lading the same mark repeatedly. “He is dragon eyed that one! Well done!” Tahna cheered loudly as Remba collected his last arrow from the target and walked over to where Tahna was standing and bowed.

“Thank you for your support Dragonhead, you honor me.” He said and Tahna smiled.

“You honor me with that bow warrior Remba. I am glad to see it will be returning with me to my lands.”

“Thank you very much Dragonhead Tahna. I am very happy to serve you, many years I admire you. Also, I wish to say thank you for accepting Tabu too, he much better healer than Warrior. He too gentle to kill in hunt. I like not him having to do things that make him sad.” Remba said and Tahna smiled.

“As I like not my heart to be sad. Go let one you love congratulate you, he is waiting.” Tahna said with a wink and Remba smiled.

“Aye.” He said turning to Tabu who hugged him fiercely as he walked over.

“Always so good! So proud I am of you.” Tabu said and Remba smiled.

“As I always of you.” Remba said hooking his arm around Tabu’s shoulders as they turned to watch the other contestants. The game was far from over. There were three rounds of eliminations to go before the top two faced off in a head to head match to determine the winner.

Three women entered the youth tournament for the eighteen and under age group. All three of them equally as good as Remba and he watched them intrigued. Looking forward to facing off with them in the next round.

As the morning wore on, eliminations were made and games were paused for an hour for mid-day meals and then the finalists of the archery tournament would face off with each other.

All three women made the final cut along with three men. Remba in the lead just barely with only one shot more true to center than his next opponent, one of the women by the name of Kindra. She was going to be difficult to beat and Remba was thrilled at having such good competition it got his blood pumping and he could barely eat his meal he was so excited.

Juubie had asked both Tabu and Remba to join them for lunch and Tahna was just as excited as Remba as they talked over the meal and Remba showed Tahna the bow he’d made. Tahna was impressed Remba would be a valuable asset to their tribe indeed, his skills with the bow only rivaled by his craftsmanship in making them.

As they chatted about bows and hunting merits and styles Juubie gently took Tabu’s hand and urged him to follow him and they quietly slipped into the tent. Juubie settled Tanju on the floor on a blanket and he indicated Tabu to sit.

“We have a good chance here to talk while our loves grunt over bows.” Juubie said and Tabu laughed softly.

“Remba is just excited. He wants to shoot with Kindra much. He like when he cannot win easy.”

“So does Tahna, that’s why they are getting along so well. Tahna values anyone who strives to improve. It is a good trait to have.” Juubie said collecting a small bottle from a box and coming over with a smile he handed it to Tabu.

“What is this?” Tabu asked uncorking it and sniffing the contents. “Smells like aloe oil and the blooms I use to make skin soft cream for my mother.”

“Very good nose. Yes, exactly. That is what you use to mate your man Tabu. I’m going to be blunt, it hurts like fire if you try mating without using something like that. You will need Remba to put that on and in you and on himself before he tries next time. If you do, it will not hurt. I’ll be honest and say the first few times Tabu you are going to be very sore afterwards, your body will take time to adjust to being loved, but it is worth the soreness and it does fade quickly. Love between men is much different than between women.”

“Thank you Juubie. For a long time we try and hurts my heart we fail. I try not cry when hurt because upset Remba. Remba so good to me and love me even though I could not mate him. This makes me so happy I could cry. Thank you so much.”

“That’s what I’m here for Tabu. As your heart you can always come to me and ask me anything you wish. May I ask you a question?” Juubie said settling on crossed legs with a smile on his lips and his chin resting in his palm.

“Anything my Heart.”

“How did you meet Remba. I’m curious.”

Tabu smiled. “Always with Remba. He and I grow up in same tribe. He two year older than me and we very good friends when little. I always small, I very sick once when baby and our heart say that why I am small. I almost die from very bad fever. When I older other boys tease me and Remba always make them stop. I always bad at bow and spear. I always sad when have to kill animal. I know must to eat but I like not kill things. I like more helping our medicine woman. She old and I always help her because I young and can run fast to get things she needs. She teach me how to make things and I like it much. When I ten, Remba fell and hit his head bad. I so scared and he heal but since then get very bad aches in head. I learn to make powders for him to drink to ease pain in head. He always tells me I care for him good and he makes me happy. When older and I have to join hunt and do very bad, Remba always go with me and not let me kill things because he know makes me sad. He do twice the work so I not have to. Last year is when he kiss me first time and I never forget. We out on hunt and boar come very fast and tusk hurt my leg and I fall and hit head on rock and dead weight I become. Had I been alone, I die. But Remba there and Remba kill it and crying as he carry me back. He most scared. When I wake up, Remba was holding my hand and his eyes very red from tears. He cry again happy I wake and then is when he kiss me and tell me he love me and want marry me. Make me cry then too so happy, I loved Remba too.”

“Oh how romantic. Thank you for humoring me with your story.”

“You love Dragonhead young too. I know tales.”

“Aye. However, we were apart. Nevertheless, I bet had I been southern born, our stories would have been very similar. I don’t like killing things either and Tahna can’t abide bullies. We’re very much the same and I’m sure you and I will be good friends Tabu. I’m not all that much older than you. Think of me as your big brother and I’ll teach you all I know. I could really use your help in the tribe. Especially now that I have Tanju to raise too, I’ll be very busy. I’m looking forward to working with you Tabu.”

“Oh, Me too. I want to be like you so very much. I have not heart skills, but I can learn other skills and tend others. I take care of Remba and that all I want most.”

“It sounds like he feels the same and its almost time for the finals. Let’s go cheer him on.” Juubie said picking the baby back up and putting him in the sling as Tabu placed his bottle in his hip pouch happily and the group returned to the games.

Every dragonhead turned out for the youth archery finals. All wanting to see the outcome and those who had new tribesmen were rooting them on as much as Tahna was rooting for Remba. It was good for the spirit and showed them their new leaders welcomed and encouraged them already and it gave the leaders a chance to really study the new blood and see where their best attributes lay.

All twelve finalists shot at once and then the warriors judging went to each target and looked at each arrow. The two furthest from the mark were eliminated and then the targets moved back further. Remba and Kindra were still in the game and they both smiled at each other.

“You very hard opponent, I hope shoot with you more.” Remba said and Kindra nodded.

“Aye. I like having hard time against you. Make game more fun.” She replied as they readied themselves to fire again.

Once again the two furthest away were eliminated and the targets moved yet again. Soon it was down to the final two and no one was surprised to see Remba and Kindra were the last two standing.

They each took their final shot and the warriors were all in debate down at the targets so far away now they looked like dots on the field.

The chief warrior came back with a string one end marked red the other blue. They were the measurements of arrow to center of the target and both tips of the string held such little amounts of paint it was clear the winner was going to win by a hairs length.

Tabu was chewing his fingernails nervously as the warrior came up and showed the dragonheads first his markings and Undape stood to announce the winner.

“Never have we had such a close game in the youth tournament. You both dragon eyed sure and make your tribes proud of you. I see good sport between both all day and much encouragement given. You both not only play fair but play with heart. The winner is by single narrow side width of arrowhead. Both shots would have been most successful hunt. The winner is Warrior Remba, Second Place and most honorable second Warrior Kindra! Undape said and in doing so, also granted the very first woman her warrior title.

Remba turned and hugged his opponent who laughed and hugged him back and then winked and held a finger up. “Next gathering in Warrior adult games I beat you! Better practice hard!” She said and Remba laughed.

“Almost beat me today! I will practice most hard I will! Much fun with you I have today. Proud to fight with you I am. Would have you in my hunt every day.” Remba said honoring her and she smiled.

“Would be honored to fight with you.” She said bowing as Tahna came over with the winner’s red beads with an arrow head pendant to hang around Remba’s neck and a new quiver to hold his arrows and to Kindra he bowed and placed the blue second place beads around her neck and she also received a new quiver. Her very first of her own.

“You both have done very well. Any dragonhead here would much welcome you into his tribe. You both will be good providers to our people in the hunt and sure shot dragon eyes you both have.” Tahna said bowing to them both with honor.

It was then Remba paused and asked to see Kindra’s bow. It was old and worn and looked to be someone’s cast off. “Wait. Cannot accept first place. Look at bow she use.” He said handing it to Tahna and then taking off his beads and hanging them around Kindra’s neck.

“You better than I am to come so close using tool not fit for more than wood fire. You deserve first not me.” Remba said and bowed to her and she looked stunned.

“I make you better bow and then we fight again more fair. I must work harder to beat you.” Remba said and Tahna looked so proud he could burst.

“Spoken like true warrior. What say you Kindra? Do you accept his refusal of first place to you?”

"I would dishonor my brother warrior's most kind words. I accept if I may follow my arrow brother to Dragonhead Tahna's tribe so I may hunt with him and shoot with him as Sister Warrior. I wish honor him as he honor me."

"Both spoken like honorable warriors. I accept you both into my tribe and you will be hunt partners. Protect each other on hunt and provide for our people with your skills. Come I give you both your warrior markings you earn this day!" Tahna said and the crowd cheered and Tabu rushed Remba and was spun around in an embrace of joy and Kindra's father marched up to her and squeezed so tight she had to pry him loose again.

"So proud you make me daughter! I only teach you shoot because you seem like it, never think I see you grow to earn warrior marks! I miss you when go from my hut, but so proud I am." He said and then he turned to Remba.

"You! Brother Warrior most honorable and so young! Your father must be much proud of you too."

"I hope he is. My father pass last year, but I hope he watch me from spirit lands." Remba said and then the older warrior held out his hand and Remba clasped it.

"Then Son to me in heart and stand beside new sister strong." He said and Remba smiled and nodded.

"I will, she make me fight harder I have most fun trying catch her." Remba said and Kindra grinned.

"I make you work brother."

"Good." He said as they both turned and followed Tahna to his camp where Muimei and her ladies were waiting to band both new warriors arms with the symbols of Provider and Protector. Many of the new young warriors who specialized in bows were getting their warrior markings today from their new tribes. Kindra the first woman to bear the marks on her arms and she and Remba sat together smiling as their arms were tattooed.

Tabu looked a little worried, Remba was so happy and he had a good partner for the hunt. Tabu began doubting his worth and was sitting off to the side quietly when Kindra spoke to him.

"Why sad?" She asked and at the mention of sad Remba's head snapped around and his face looked concerned. Tabu smiled falsely, trying to hide his doubt.

"Not sad. Thinking you both very much good." Tabu said and Remba sighed.

“Tabu, I see more in your eyes. Cannot lie to me I know you better.” Remba said and Tabu sighed.

“I just thinking partners very good, better than I for you. Make poor warrior and never shoot like Kindra. She protect you better.”

“Tabu! Hear not this I wish. Come here.” Remba said and Tabu obeyed and sat at Remba’s feet and he only just reached down to turn Tabu’s face up by his chin.

“Like Kindra much I do yes. As would sister. I Love Tabu. Doubt not my heart, you say you marry me I beg you not change mind.”

“Oh no Remba, not change mind. I love you. Just she so much better.” Tabu said and Kindra snorted.

“Better at shoot maybe. Better at hunt maybe. Not better in many things. No wish marry Remba I not better at protecting heart than you. I see today much love shared between you two. I not better for Remba heart. You are. Think not I want your mate Tabu. I want fight with him no more. I have boy I like much, he better for my heart than Remba. He fight in spear tomorrow. Come with me to cheer him tomorrow?” She said smiling and putting Tabu’s fears to rest.

“Aye.” Tabu said, finally smiling where it reached his eyes and Remba leaned over and kissed him.

“That is smile I like most. No doubt I love you again Tabu. Hurts me.”

“Forgive me My Remba.”

“Always.” Remba said as Juubie smiled where he had been observing the markings being given with Tahna.

“We’ve got some good new members coming to us Tahna. I looked at the list you have of how many want to join our clan. We’re going to double in size.”

“Aye, and all of them much good youths. Many older seasoned warriors and their families wish to come too. Goh has even more coming to his tribe. They want too see change too. We will have many people, much good will come and has come. Kindra first Sister Warrior and many will follow her this gathering. Only three in the archery youth games, twenty already signed up for adult games. We will have many changes.”

“Then it’s a good thing Tabu is going to be my apprentice healer. With all the new people in both our tribe and Goh’s we’ll need healers. There are only three of us counting the two still back in Southern Port. If we’re going to have about sixty

families for me to care for alone, I will desperately need Tabu's help. Especially since we also have Tanju now too and he's going to monopolize much of my time while he's still a baby."

"Aye. When tribe grows, work grows. But we will manage and find good routine soon enough. Let's first find our new members tents and get them in our camp. They are with us now and tonight I be thinking we have at least one marriage I must perform."

"Aye. Tabu and Remba. Would you do me a favor before you marry them?"

"What?"

"Give Remba a little talk. I already talked with Tabu and they've been trying to mate without help to ease the pain."

"Ouch."

"Yes, ouch. Tabu was so upset about it, he loves Remba so much it was really paining him in soul that he cried and Remba had to stop. I gave him some of our mixture to help and gave him a little instruction on how to use it. However, I only gave pointers on being on the bottom beloved. Because let's face it, Tabu is obviously not the aggressor in that couple."

"I understand. I'll tell him how not to hurt Tabu and tell him how to use what Tabu has. I had to ask non-breeder myself for knowledge."

"Obie told me too. It's hard being men sometimes and when you don't have anyone to tell you, trial and error is painful."

"Aye. I'll talk to him. He just about finished with his markings. If you take Tabu and Kindra to get them tents, I'll take Remba and have talk."

"Perfect." Juubie said walking over with Tahna and taking both Kindra, whose arms were now bandaged, and Tabu by the hands he lead them off to get them settled in the tribe and Tahna took Remba aside.

"I want you come with me first Remba. Wish talk to you first."

"Aye. Dragonhead." Remba said and followed Tahna to his tent where they sat and Tahna passed him a cup of spirits.

"First toast to new warrior. How feel to be man now?"

"Very good. I have been hunting with my tribe since I thirteen, but to have my marks now feel most good."

“Getting marks is one thing we all look forward to when boys. When earn marks, earn right to marry. You wish to Marry Tabu I know.”

“Aye. I wish that for a long time. I love him since I was little. I always know in my heart I grow up to marry Tabu.”

“That is nice to hear. Marry you I will whenever you wish it. First I give advice, not dragonhead to warrior but man to man. My heart tell me there is much soul pain in both of you and why. Mating hard when both men.”

Remba looked relieved. “Aye. I hurt him when I try and my soul die when he cry. How can I not hurt him?”

“Juubie give Tabu what we use already. It is lotion oil Juubie makes. I tell you how to use it and there will be no pain. You cannot use too much, and you must take time and not rush into mating. Make him ready to take you, use oil with fingers and make sure you get most inside. Then use fingers, you will see he relax and stretch. You also make him feel good this way at same time and make more pleasure for him to feel. When he ready you will know, you will see it open more for you. Like flower to sun. Most amazing to watch how body works on your mate. Make sure you put oil on yourself too before you mate him. It will feel good for both. This will take time Remba, after first mating, even when do everything right Tabu will hurt next day. He will be sore from body not used to mating. It will fade in time as he adjust to being your mate. When being non-breeder men as my Juubie calls it, we have harder time mating each other. Man to woman and woman to woman much easier because women make own oil to aide in mating, men have not same gift so we have to make aide to help. This not told to men, because most need not have to know. Most mate women and it is something that does not need to be said. So when we grow up and find we want mate other men, learning is hard if no one like us tells us how. We only see other people mating and then when we try we hurt each other. It pains soul and cause much frustration. Heed my lesson and you have much love to share with your Tabu.”

“Thank you. I cannot tell you how grateful I am. We had no one like us in our tribe and no one to ask. I was going to ask you and I thank you for telling me. I wish not ever to hurt my Tabu. He hold my soul.”

“As my Juubie holds mine and hurt him I wish not to either. I understand much we are the same Remba. Ask me anything, I am always here to answer. Now go find Juubie, he finding you and Tabu tent to share as part of our tribe.”

“May I ask one more thing?” Remba asked and Tahna nodded.

“Will you marry us tonight? I wish not wait anymore.”

“Before Dinner so we may feast not only your marks but your union.” Tahna said with a smile and Remba cheered as he headed out of the tent to find Tabu and Juubie. Tahna chuckled, he still felt that way over Juubie and he probably always would.

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Everyone gathered in the center of the camp where the low tables of the tribe were set out and meat turned on the fire. Kindra’s parents sat with her at one table all bright smiles as they officially bid their daughter farewell from their tribe and into Tahna’s. Tabu’s parents sat with him and Remba’s mother proudly sat with him as Tahna stood from his place at the head table. Juubie standing with him smiling brightly.

“My new Tribesmen and Tribeswoman stand.” He said and all three stood.

“Tabu, come forward.” Tahna said and Tabu obeyed and got on his knees in front of Tahna and Juubie.

“I ask you to vow honor to your tribe and to me as your Head and to Juubie as your heart.”

“I vow always to honor those of my tribe and to give my skills to the benefit of all.”

“Then stand Healer Tabu and welcome to your Tribe.” Tahna said and Tabu stood smiling as Juubie came forward and tied a new medicine hip pouch around his waist and then a green beaded bracelet around each wrist. A crown of white plumeria on his head to denote the goddess gifts of healing and then Juubie indicated the empty space beside him.

“As my apprentice and assistant healer, your place is by my side and you answer to me as your heart. I vow to teach you your craft as your heart and I ask you to pass on what I teach you to those who need you.” Juubie said and Tabu beamed.

“I vow my Heart. Always at your side I shall remain.” Tabu said taking up his place at the head table directly to Juubie’s right. Remba looked so happy and proud Juubie was sure he was fighting tears.

Tabu stood there proudly next to Juubie as Tahna called for Kindra to stand.

“I ask you to vow honor to your tribe and to me as your Head and to Juubie as your heart.”

“I vow always to honor those of my tribe and to give my skills to the benefit of all.” Kindra said and Tahna smiled at her.

“First Sister warrior, you should be proud. You stand on ground not yet broken. It is up to you to forge your path for the sisters who follow you. Proud I am to be your Head.” Tahna said as he stepped forward and placed a panther claw beaded choker around her neck and a beaded headband on her brow. On each cheek he painted a red line with his thumb under each eye.

“I also have one more gift for you, this from your brother warrior Remba.” Tahna said turning and handing her a beautiful new bow. “Use his gift with honor, he gives you fine weapon. Care for it as you would care for the maker.” Tahna said and Kindra was close to tears as she clutched her bow to her chest.

“I vow it dragonhead. Always I honor tribe and Brother warriors.” She said and Tahna indicated she was to join the other warriors of the tribe at their tables and they welcomed her with smiles and hearty slaps on her back. Treating her like an equal. One passed a cup of spirits into her hand and she tossed it back with one gulp and got another round of cheers.

It was Remba’s turn to be called and he knelt before Tahna.

“I ask you to vow honor to your tribe and to me as your Head and to Juubie as your heart.”

“I vow always to honor those of my tribe and to give my skills to the benefit of all.” Remba repeated the traditional vows and stood and received the same beads as Kindra and the same cheek paintings.

Tahna smiled as his finger left Remba’s cheek. “Today I watch a boy turn into man. I see most honorable warrior in games. Shoot with spirit and good sportsmanship all day. Then I see remarkable worth of soul when you give Sister Warrior win when you did not have to. It was not you who chose her weapon, but when you see her weapon poorer than yours and her shooting equal. You do right thing and honor her skill above your own. That takes man of greater honor to do and you do with no regret. Proud you made me today. Proud you made good mother and great honor you bring to whole tribe with your actions today. The Elders sent this to you to show their equal pride in you.” Tahna said bringing out a another quiver full of arrows, a new machete belt complete with the weapon to place on his hips and then Tahna unrolled a parchment with a picture on it of a dragon’s eye between two crossed arrows, but most important the rune markings that indicated a man recognized for his great worth and honor.

“This is also mark you gain from Elders. Muimei will give it to you tomorrow to bear over your heart. You earn right to stand by my side as your head. Most honorable of my warriors. You lead the hunt under me. You lead the charge after me. I count on honor to stand at my side when I need one to trust to protect the Dragonheart of our tribe when the battles I face are greatest. When I must leave,

I leave my heart in your hands. I know you will honor me and protect the tribe until your last breath. You prove to all today you have soul of dragon.” Tahna said indicating Remba should take the empty chair to Tahna’s left.

“I vow always to honor you all with my soul.” Remba said shocked as he took up his place next to Tahna.

The entire tribe let out such a deafening cheer the entire valley echoed with it. Kindra was on her feet bouncing up and down and clapping wildly. The other Warriors shouting and hollering and banging cups on spears and knives on the table. The women beating drums the children dancing and Remba saw his mother in joyful tears and Tabu’s parents equally proud of him as they were of Tabu.

Tabu was sobbing with Joy and his smile at Remba was so filled with pride and love Remba wanted to sing.

Tahna just held up his arms for silence. “There is more my people to celebrate other than our fine new members. Remba and Tabu, please come stand before me.”

Remba smiled and took Tabu’s hand and they walked over and stood in front of Tahna who beamed happily at them.

“I hear you wish to Marry. Is this true?”

“Aye. Dragonhead.” They both said in unison and Tahna nodded and then turned to the parents.

“Do you approve?” He asked and First Tabu’s father stood.

“Aye. Dragonhead. They have approval for a long time. I gave my consent along with Remba’s sadly departed father when they asked us many moons ago. This gathering they are both of age and we are happy to see them marry at last. Love all their lives.” Tabu’s father said smiling and Tabu’s returned smile to his father was heartwarming. There was much love in this family. Tabu’s mother was happily crying along with Remba’s as they held cloths to their eyes.

“Then with consent of parents and by wishes declared by both partners. We recognize the bond you wish to form together. In the eyes of the Tribe and under the gods and goddesses in the heavens let all see you Married in heart.” Tahna said and more cheers rang out when Remba and Tabu shared a kiss.

Juubie stepped forward and wrapped their hands in red silk string and draped flowers around their necks. “May the blessings of the Gods smile on your union

and may the silk that binds your hand symbolize the ties that bind your hearts.” He said and Kissed both of their cheeks.

The union and blessing was over and they were officially married. Tahna bellowed for the feast and a separate small table for two was set directly in front of the head table. Tabu sat in front of Juubie and Remba in front of Tahna. It denoted their rank to their leaders as well as their place of honor as a newly married couple. Food was served and wine flowed and Tabu and Remba kept laughing as they tried to eat with their hands tied together. It was tradition that they didn't remove the silk string until they retired for the night . It was always comical to watch the newly married couple struggle to feast and then always opt to just feed each other because it was easier and romantic and much cause of teasing from the other couples who'd had their turn with tied hands before.

Juubie chuckled and leaned over Tanju who was sleeping in the basket between his parents to whisper to Tahna. “I am so glad we didn't have to go through that.”

“I know. Our bond is different, we need not symbols for it. Much hard to eat when bound with string.” Tahna chuckled.

“So how did the talk go?” Juubie asked and Tahna winked.

“They have no trouble later on union night. I tell him more than he probably want to know. But much need to know.”

“Good. I had Muimei and the women decorate their tent. They'll be pleasantly surprised when they find it later. If they aren't already in a romantic mood, they sure will be when they return to flowers and wine and sweets to share.”

“You are romantic fool.”

“I know, I think it's beautiful. I adore Tabu, he's such a wonderful soul. He's very talented too, he brought over his medicines from his former tribe earlier, I won't have to teach him much. He's very clever already.”

“Good. We can use already trained healer. We have more games tomorrow and seven more join us tomorrow. We will be feasting much this week. Next week adult games start.”

“Which games are you playing in?”

“I like all, but wrestle favorite. I try get Goh to wrestle and he call me daft headed baboon ass. He know when he lose. He going to do well in Dragon Riddles. I very much want fight against him in those.”

“Tabu is still going to do the dragon riddles. Those he says he’s good at and he’s not apt to boast of himself. When are the youth riddles?”

“Spear tomorrow, Wrestle after, Riddle last. Riddle hardest.”

“Then his lack of sleep tonight won’t be an issue.” Juubie said and Tahna laughed.

“I am thinking sleep not much for long time. Remba like me, young and have pretty mate. Tabu must remind his mate let him rest night before his games.” Tahna said and Juubie chuckled.

“Too True! However, will Remba listen? You surely don’t!” Juubie teased and Tahna leaned over and kissed his cheek.

“I may be dragonhead. I still only twenty-three and my mate most beautiful and make me remember how young I am when I hard like stone.”

“I do hope I get to play with that stone later.”

“Aye. My heart not only one who thinks tonight romantic. Like Unions much I do.”

“I love you Tahna you idiot.”

“Love you too my Heart.” Tahna said pulling Juubie closer to sit in his lap as they watched the feast and Tahna fed Juubie off his plate proving he was just as romantically inclined as the next man.

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As soon as Remba and Tabu finished eating. The warriors converged on them and physically picked them up and toted them off and deposited them in front of their tent. Remba took Tabu’s hand and once they disappeared inside, they were left alone.

Remba just pulled Tabu into his arms and kissed him deeply. “Love you Tabu.” He said as their lips parted and Tabu rested his forehead against Remba’s chest with a sigh.

“Love you with whole soul I do. So proud of you I burst with joy. I cannot be happier.” Tabu said and Remba carded his hand through Tabu’s thick hair and just held him close.

“Only ever want see you happy. Whole life I only have to see your smile to be happy myself.” Remba said and Tabu melted into his arms.

“Always know what to say to make my heart beat wild in chest.” He said and Remba just smiled and led Tabu over to their bed and pulled him down with him and kissed him until Tabu was breathless.

Remba sat up from the kiss smiling and his fingers tugged free Tabu’s medicine pouch and his loin skirt to expose a very obviously aroused body.

“Most beautiful you are to me Tabu.” Remba said as his fingers lightly stroked and petted and Tabu whimpered and arched into the touch.

“When touch me I burn like fire.” Tabu said and Remba smirked and dripped kisses down his chest and belly.

Tabu whimpered again and Remba sat back a moment and shed his own clothes. Tabu sat up and was going to do what they usually did when they were intimate together and his lips were already close to Remba’s manhood when Remba stopped him.

“No Tabu. Much as I love when you pleasure me this way, I learn today how not to hurt you. I want not your lips I want you today. Where is gift Juubie give you?” Remba asked and with shaking hands Tabu pulled out the bottle from his pouch and handed it to Remba.

Remba took the bottle and kissed both of Tabu’s hands. “Fear not my heart. Hurt you not I vow. I give you pleasure first this time.” Remba said easing Tabu onto his knees.

Tabu was more than afraid but also wanted this so badly he wanted to cry he was so torn with emotional distress. He felt a slick fingertip begin by just lightly encircling his opening, teasing it gently in a circular motion. Tabu quivered, the light touch sending shivers down his body.

He felt cool oil be spread liberally and then a single finger push slowly inside. Tabu whimpered and the finger stilled. “Hurt?”

“No. Feel nice Remba.” Tabu said and the finger moved again. In and out and more oil applied with each passing. A second finger joined the first and Remba was fascinated just as Tahna said he would be. The more he moved his fingers and the more oil he applied, the wider the opening grew. Tabu was moaning now and in an obviously pleasurable moaning. Remba was using both hands and his fingers pulled and stretched until Tabu’s opening was well widened and quivering under his hands.

Remba took one of his hands back and covered in oil already he stroked himself to coat himself as Tahna had said to. He then got to his knees and held Tabu’s

posterior cheeks wide. "Tell me if this hurts Tabu. I'm going to put it inside now." Remba said and Tabu only nodded, biting his lips.

The moan that fell out of Tabu's throat went directly to Remba's groin and then out through his own throat as he pushed and felt his manhood slip completely inside with minimal resistance. He pulled back out slowly then pushed again.

"Tabu?"

"Stop not! Remba so nice!" Tabu's voice shook, his hands were fisted in the pillows and Remba groaned when Tabu's hips pressed backwards, taking him in even deeper.

Remba was already panting as he started a slow pace that steadily grew until they were both lost and no longer thinking and just feeling as their bodies connected and they loved each other for the first time.

Tabu's name a steady cadence of passion uttered with every thrust of Remba's hips and Tabu moaning Remba's in a counterpoint of desire.

When Tabu shuddered and came and his muscles constricted even tighter Remba sobbed Tabu's name as his own body, too long denied could not hold out against the added stimulation and he followed Tabu into release and they both melted into the bed panting and crying and kissing each other between tears of joy. So long they had wanted to share this intimacy and now gained the tears wouldn't stop.

"Love you Tabu, by the gods love you so much." Remba uttered covering Tabu's face with kisses.

"Love you Remba. Feel so good. My heart not stop beating, my chest on fire." He said and Remba smiled.

"Aye. Mine too. No pain?"

"None. Just love I feel."

Remba smiled and pulled Tabu close and wrapped around him in their bed. "Hold you always Tabu. Till my end days."

"Love you until mine." Tabu replied as they shut their eyes and drank in each other like fine wine until they fell into dreams that paled to reality.

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## **“Dragonhead and Dragonheart”**

*A Wielder and Wellspring Story*

*Author: D. Sanders*

### **Act X - Gathering’s End**

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Tabu woke up to see Remba hovering over him smiling. “Wake up beside you most nice. How feel today?” He asked and Tabu rolled over to face him and his stiff body was answer enough.

“I am sorry.” Remba said and Tabu just smiled.

“Just little sore. I live. Juubie tell me I be sore until my body learn you as lover. Worth pain, felt so nice.” Tabu said and Remba gently kissed him.

“Aye. Much nice.” Remba said and then his eyes flashed in pain and Tabu knew that look.

“Headache Remba. Your powder in my pouch.” He said sitting up to get it and Remba pushed him back down.

“Stay rest, I can mix. I know not what I do without your medicine powder. You take much good care of me Tabu.” Remba said digging out the power and mixing it into juice and draining the cup in one series of gulps.

“As you care me Remba. Now eat too, know powder not good when belly empty.” Tabu said and again Remba nodded and obeyed.

“They come often now. More so than before. Like not Remba. I want Juubie look at you.”

Remba just nodded as he chewed through a mango his mouth full.

Appeased for the moment Tabu moved gingerly and settled against Remba and ate his own fruit and drank deeply from the water jug and was content to stay in Remba’s arms all day and never move. However, he knew they had too, they had tribal duties now and as soon as they finished eating and washing they dressed and headed over to Tahna and Juubie’s tent.

Tanju was in rare form that morning and wailing at the top of his lungs as Remba and Tabu arrived. Tahna looked exhausted and Juubie looked like he was at his wits end as Tabu poked his head inside the tent smiling. “Little one much full of voice this morning. May I?” He asked holding out his arms for the baby. Juubie grateful for someone else to try something to settle the baby handed him over.

Tabu walked over to a bowl and juggling the baby quite deftly he filled the bowl with water and then set the baby inside. Cupping water in his hands and

supporting the baby's head gave him a nice cool bath. "It warm this morning, I think just being too hot." Tabu said and sure enough the baby began to calm as Tabu gave him a cool bath.

"Well I'll be damned." Juubie grinned squatting with Tabu by the bowl. "You have siblings?"

"No. I only child. I just like much and help with our healer with babies who give cry like this. Bath trick used to calm, sooth with water when nothing else seem work. Babies like bath." Tabu grinned and Juubie took over as Tabu indicated he should.

"Tabu thank you. Whole hour he not stop and I worry much." Tahna said flopping down on his bed with a sigh as Remba came in and sat with them.

"Tabu always good with little ones of our village. He always have hanging on legs." Remba said with a smiled and Tabu laughed.

"I just big baby, like play with them I do." Tabu chuckled sitting with Juubie and letting Tanju play with his finger while Juubie continued the bath.

"Well I'd tried everything else this morning. He didn't want a bottle, he didn't have nasty diapers, he wasn't sick, and he didn't want to chew on me I just could not figure out what he wanted. Now I know." Juubie grinned as Tanju now happily splashed in the water kicking his little legs and soaking the floor around the bowl.

Once he was happy and cool, Juubie just put on a diaper and laid him on a blanket with his rattle and he was more than content again. "I think I got more of a bath than he did." Juubie chuckled changing his now wet loin cloth for a dry one, totally at ease living in the south now. Before he'd have modestly excused himself, now he was non-pulsed with nudity and he hung up his wet cloth and walked stark naked across the tent to pull out a dry one and not a single occupant of the room cared at all. Even if they did notice, especially Tabu who smiled.

"I not feel so different now. Nice to know I have at least one person in new tribe I can look in eyes." Tabu grinned and Juubie chuckled as he tied his loin cloth on.

"And one I don't have to crane my neck up at either. We can start the shorty club. All members must be under six feet tall. That leaves you, me, Obie, Gandes and the toddlers I think." Juubie teased and Tabu laughed.

"I always like that Tabu smaller. I think he prettier that way." Remba said and Tabu smiled at him.

“You just like lift me easy. We win much game of shoulder wrestle in water.”  
Tabu said and Juubie clapped.

“Oh god that is fun and Tahna and I win too because he’s not falling all over trying to hold me on his shoulders either. I so can’t wait to topple you over Tabu.”  
Juubie grinned and Tabu grinned right back.

“Remba solid on feet we not easy beat.”

“Oh that sounds like a challenge.” Juubie said and Tabu nodded.

“Oh aye, like Remba I like not win easy either.”

“Tahna?” Juubie asked and Tahna smiled.

“We have whole lake here. I am suddenly wanting practice wrestle.” Tahna said turning to Remba.

“Than practice I give you.” Remba replied. He and Tahna were of a like height even if Tahna was broader due to his slightly older age. They were close enough in age however that it would be fairly evenly matched. Tahna’s upper body weight would be a handicap in this sort of sport.

The entire tribe followed the group, Muimei babysitting Tanju on the shore as Juubie and Tabu were hefted onto their mate’s shoulders and they waded into the cold chest high water.

They drew an amused crowd as Tabu and Juubie locked hands and began laughing as they each tried to push the other off their mate’s shoulders. Tahna and Remba just trying to stay on their feet and balance their lovers on their shoulders.

It was Juubie who shrieked first as Tahna over compensated for the last shove and they both went tumbling under water. However it was Tabu who shrieked next as Juubie came up from under water behind him and grabbed hold of his waist and pulled.

Soaking wet and laughing they were back up again and Juubie won the next round of mock battle and they called it a tie as they came splashing out of the water again soaking wet and smiling.

“That much fun!” Tabu laughed as Remba wrapped a towel around his shoulders.

“It was. You’re hard to knock off Tabu!” Juubie said wringing out his hair as Tahna also draped a towel over him.

“You both looked to have fun.” Goh said coming over with Obie.

“Invite me next time? Goh’s not so bad at that game either!” Obie said and Juubie nodded.

“Wanna take a go Uncle Obie?”

“Next time, I’m not dressed for wet. But oh yes next time!” Obie laughed as Remba grabbed his skull and Tabu was immediately at his side.

“Remba!” He said and Remba shook his head.

“Be alright Tabu. Just bad pain it will pass.” He said and Now Juubie knelt.

“He said you get headaches. They come on this suddenly?” Juubie asked looking into Remba’s dilated eyes.

“Aye. Like knife in head.” Remba said and Juubie did not like the sound of that.

“He said you’ve had these ever since you hit your head as a child right?” Juubie queried as Tabu quickly found his medicine bag and mixed Remba’s powder.

“Hang on, this is injury related?” Goh asked interested and concerned and squatting with Juubie.

“Aye. When twelve I fell on rocks and split head open. You can still see scar on forehead. I heal, but ever since I get pain in same spot.” Remba said as Tabu shoved the pain medicine in his hands and Remba drank again.

“Lay down, I want to feel the power flow in you.” Juubie said having Remba lay his head in his lap and he rested both hands on Remba’s brow and he hissed.

“I knew it. In everyone power flows freely, but it’s angry right here. Right in the spot where he hit himself. It’s like a dam, it’s stopping the flow.”

“Here’s let me at him.” Obie said taking Juubie’s place.

“He’s right Goh. It’s like when a node goes rouge and the power is tainted. I’ll bet you anything there’s a tumor or an old blood clot in here that’s pressing on his brain and giving him these headaches. Just like that old monk we met about ten years ago.”

Goh nodded and laid his hand on top of Obie’s. “I feel it. Okay, get him back inside, because I can take care of this with Obie but I’ll not kid you son. This is going to hurt like a son of a bitch, but once it’s over you’re going to feel much better and should not suffer headaches anymore. I’ll explain what I’m going to do

on the way and we might as well gather the other Dragonheads and hearts to watch. Obie and I came up with this treatment and it's not normally used on the non-gifted because it hurts so much." Goh said and everyone followed and they got Remba settled in his tent comfortably and everyone crammed in to watch.

"Tabu, Remba. Let me first explain a little what our gifts are in simple terms to help you understand. Dragonheads eat power. We thrive on it, we devour it like flowers eat sunshine. It is why we are basically always healthy. Because any bad or tainted power that comes into our bodies gets burned off and destroyed by the good power we take from our hearts. I do mean burn, it's hot like touching fire with bare hands. Dragonheads are power, or rather, they act like a power filter. They draw power into their bodies like natural magnets and as the power passes through them they purify it, make it white hot and then send it out again into the land. It's why a Dragonheart never has to be trained to use their gifts, it's instinct. Their bodies always pull power, collect it, purify it and then pass it out again. Sort of like you don't have to train a baby how to make dirty a diaper. His body just knows to expel the filth. Same concept applies."

"We're one big colon? Thanks for the nasty description Goh!" Obie scolded and everyone chuckled.

"Well you do take the shit and make it diamonds Obie. You're more of a reverse colon."

"Great now I'm a septic tank?"

"Basically."

"You need to work on your analogies Goh! I'll give you septic tank!"

Everyone was laughing and Goh just shrugged. "Beloved. You know damn well that's what your body does, it's not my fault the gods made you one damn fine power septic system."

"You're cruising for a bruising! You should have just stuck with a filter system description." Obie shook his fist and Goh chuckled.

"Okay, better analogy than my hyper-sensitive one. Think of a tea strainer. The tea and water goes in and you only let the water back out."

"Better." Obie winked and Goh grinned.

"In your opinion." Goh teased and Obie just shook his head.

"Follow us so far Remba?" Goh asked and Remba nodded.

“Aye. Much funny but understand much more than I ever did before.”

“Good. Now then, here’s where you come in. Dragonheads eat power, hearts filter it and you create it. All living things are power. Trees, birds, dragons, flowers, fruit, the worms in the ground. Everything that has life is power and you don’t feel it, you just are power. Sometimes, most times, the power is good and flows like a river. When you’re healthy you’re flowing good. When you’re sick, the power gets tainted and flows badly. You are flowing badly Remba. There’s an angry little knot of power in your head making you hurt. That angry power tells us there is something wrong with your body. Obie can feel power, he can taste it and tell good from bad immediately. I can touch it, move it and manipulate it and pull it out from one source and push it through Obie’s body to purify it again and replace what I take with what was purified.” Goh explained and everyone understood plainly. It made a lot of sense.

“In your case, what is wrong with your body is probably either a tumor that has grown under your skin after your injury which is pressing on your brain. Or it’s a place where the blood clotted as you healed and it never broke up again and just sat in there pressing on your brain and giving you those monster headaches. Either way the cure is the same. I am going to take pure power from Obie and push it into the bad power in your head and then pull the bad power and push it into Obie. This will burn away the clot or tumor but at the same time since you are not gifted, this is going to hurt Remba. You’re going to feel on fire, because I am very literally burning you from the inside out. It will not kill you, but I can guarantee you’re going to wish you were dead while I’m working. This is why we don’t normally use our power on people, when you’re not born like us, forced power hurts. Even Obie once suffered this power overload and it burned him wide open. Therefore, if it can hurt someone who is used to feeling power, you my friend are going to want to punch my lights out later. Nevertheless, it’s really the only way to get that out of your head and stop your headaches. Those may kill you one day, if that is a tumor and it’s allowed to grow and get angrier, one day it will kill you. This is an instance of the cure almost being as bad as the disease. Understand?”

“Aye, and much rather have a lot of pain now for short while than have more headaches that kill me where I leave my Tabu to cry. I take pain gladly. I ready.”

“Good. Now everyone else just watch, this can be delicate. However, once you see what I’m doing, this will make it easier for you to help your tribesman with similar woes. It won’t work on things like broken bones mind you, but when it’s things like tumors or very bad illnesses that come from unnatural sources and are foreign to a healthy body, this works like a champ.” Goh said as Obie got comfortable and placed Remba’s head in his lap and laid both hands to both sides of his head.

“Just focus on my hands Remba. And scream if it hurts, don’t hold it in, it’s better to let it out.” Obie said smiling kindly and Remba noticed for the first time just how beautiful he was. He was older, there were just a few lines around his eyes and his golden hair like sand had a few white strands, but he was beautiful and had probably been stunning twenty-years earlier. He was still lovely and Remba smiled.

“I be fine. Thank you.” Remba said looking deeply into jade stone colored eyes that held such tenderness and kindness he could see the true dragonheart in the man. All Dragonhearts had such kind eyes.

Remba closed his eyes and focused on the warmth of Obie’s hands as he felt Goh place his on top.

“Here we go lad.” Goh said and the fire that ignited his head was agony. Like lightening hammering his head. The scream that came flying out of his throat against his will had Tabu on his knees weeping and Juubie holding him for comfort.

“It’s alright Tabu. He’ll be fine honestly. It won’t be long, it’ll be over soon.” Juubie said quietly, feeling his own heart torn for Tabu. It hurt to see one you love suffer, even if it was for the better.

After a few minutes the screaming stopped and Remba was unconscious. “Good he’s passed out, much better.” Tahna said and Juubie nodded still holding Tabu.

It was just another minute or two later and Goh and Obie were finished. “I got it, it was a tumor. He was very, VERY lucky. I’m surprised that kid was still alive in the first place. It was very big. It probably started as just a small blood clot in his head, One that would normally go away on it’s own but over the years it turned very nasty and the more blood feeding it just kept it growing. I think the only thing that saved that kid was the medicine he was taking. It kept his blood thin and eased the strain on the tumor. Tabu, you kept him alive. Without you he’d have died a very long time ago.” Goh said smiling at Tabu who was weeping as he crawled over to Remba to hold him. Obie smoothed Tabu’s hair.

“He’ll be alright now. Never fear. Your man will be strong as an ox again as soon as he wakes. Just let him sleep this off, you’ll see. There are no lasting effects from this.” Obie reassured and Tabu nodded smoothing Remba’s hair from his face and sniffing.

Everyone stood and exited the tent and all talking among themselves of how best to use this new kind of treatment on their people with Goh and Juubie was last to leave and just leaned over to kiss Tabu’s cheek.

“Goh’s right, you kept him alive Healer Tabu. You should be proud of your skills, you saved the one you loved until he could be cured. I’m proud of you. Just stay with him until he wakes and I’ll come by to bring you both lunch later when the games for the day break for lunch.” Juubie said leaving with Tahna to resume the days activities and leave Tabu to care for Remba.

Tabu had to keep busy or else he’d cry again. Just the sound of Remba screaming in pain would haunt him the rest of his life. He never wanted to hear that sound again. He knew he should be happy that his medicine had kept Remba alive, but he still felt miserable that he hadn’t done enough and that Remba still would have died without Goh and Obie’s help. He was beating himself up and tending Remba’s tattoos with aloe and wrapping them in clean bandages again when Remba’s hand lifted and cupped Tabu cheek.

“I hate when you cry.” Remba said and Tabu’s tears just increased with relief as he collapsed onto Remba’s chest sobbing. Remba just stroked Tabu’s hair.

“Tabu, please my heart, stop. I heard Goh. I heard everything. You saved my life Tabu.”

“Not enough. Still would have killed you.” Tabu sobbed and Remba’s heart broke.

“Stop that Tabu. Always you put yourself down, never once take pride in self. Always say not good enough, not strong enough, not smart enough. You listen too much to people who know you not. When little you believe boys who say you never be good warrior and because you believe them you do not trust yourself. Older, when others tease you that no one ever love you, you believe them and then fear tell me you love me. You know now that for very long time I wait and try show you I love you. Run you did every time I get close to tell you how I feel. I had to chase and then almost loose you and have you where you cannot run to give me chance to tell you how I feel. You never think good of yourself, hurt my heart when you do this. You are so smart, you know how to care for me Tabu and always there when I need you. You always help others, never complain and always you hurt and think not good enough. You are my heart. I wish you see all good things in you I have always seen.” Remba said holding Tabu close to his chest while small shoulders shook.

“Worst pain you give me when you blame yourself for when we have trouble mate. Oh I want die when you think it your fault. We found way that should be proof it never was your fault my heart. Please I beg you, no more thinking you not enough. I be lost without you.” Remba said pulling Tabu up so their eyes met.

“Love you my Tabu. Make me so proud to be your mate. I want shout from high place and tell world to look at you, see my mate, see how beautiful he is, see how good he is, see how smart he is. I live because of you and not just from your

medicine. I live because you give me love for my soul.” Remba said brining Tabu’s face down to kiss him.

Tabu sobbed into the kiss, his arms wrapping around Remba’s shoulders and clinging for all he was worth. As Remba sat up, Tabu’s legs wrapped around his hips and they sat there, chest to chest, arms holding tightly and Tabu trembling with need to hold Remba close.

“Always make me feel love. I sorry I hurt you Remba. Love you I do.” Tabu choked on his words and Remba just ran loving hands up and down Tabu’s back to calm him.

“I know you love me Tabu. That I never doubt once.” Remba said turning his face to kiss the valley between Tabu’s neck and shoulder. Making Tabu shiver and lean back with a smile through his tears.

“Tickle when you do that.” Tabu said and Remba smiled.

“I know, but get you to smile I do.” Remba said resting his forehead against Tabu’s, their eyes so close and shining and then shutting as Remba’s lips found Tabu’s and with a graceful arch of his back at Remba’s leaning forward Tabu was pressed beneath Remba on their bed pillows, his legs still wrapped firmly around Remba’s hips. Tabu was in no doubt of Remba’s state of health and if he had been, Remba’s forceful ripping off oh his loin cloth to get at Tabu’s skin would have been answer enough.

Lips closed around him and slick fingers invaded him and before Tabu realized what was happening caught up in the moment and sensation, his legs were high in the air over Remba’s shoulders and Remba was grunting like a man possessed. “Look at me Tabu! Look at me love you!” Remba ordered and Tabu obeyed with a moan as their eyes met. The look of sheer determination and possession on Remba’s face made him shiver and groan as he threw his head back and arched his spine to allow Remba deeper access.

“No, look not away, keep eyes open. Look at my eyes, see how I love you Tabu. Feel me love you, see it, know it, doubt it never!” Remba panted and again Tabu obeyed, his breath coming in gasps and cries.

Tabu was so close to falling over the edge of sanity when Remba paused and pulled. Falling back into the pillows and pulling Tabu on top of him still connected. “Now show me Tabu. Show me how you love me.” Remba said and once again Tabu obeyed, lost in his passion. His head was thrown back and his hands hot and warm on Remba’s stomach muscles as he rose and fell with a steady beat. Taking Remba into his body so deeply Tabu was sure he was going to burst with sensation. His thighs were on fire, the muscles protesting the movement but he couldn’t stop, more he needed more so much more.

Just when he thought he couldn't move again his world exploded and he covered Remba's chest in his desire and then felt his world spin on it's axis as he was spun around forcefully, his face in the pillows and on his knees as Remba loved him so fast and so hard Tabu was screaming his name with ecstasy.

"Feel me, know me. Know my love, my heart and my body. Never forget I am yours and you are MINE!" Remba grunted and then Tabu felt him come, fire filled his belly and sweat covered his body and he was crushed under Remba's weight as he heaved to breathe and covered Tabu's back with kisses.

"Do you doubt me now? Do you think I would love you like that if you worthless to me?" Remba asked and Tabu shook his head, he couldn't move, his whole body ached from emotional stress and physical stress. Remba sat up for a moment and returned with a cool rag and ran it all over Tabu's body, washing him free of their lovemaking with a tender smile on his face.

"Make mess of you I do. Not ever leave you that way, like not making you dirty." Remba said and Tabu smiled as he lay there in love so much it hurt.

"Not dirty. Your love never dirty." Tabu sighed and Remba just smiled and tossed the rag aside after he ran it over his chest and curled back up with Tabu on their bed.

"Ah Tabu, so good for my soul you are. Glad I am to say I marry you."

"Glad too, I have all ever want." Tabu sighed just as Juubie returned and grinned as he poked his head in the tent.

"Cover up boys, I'm coming in with food." Juubie said and marched right in and both Tabu and Remba smiled as they sat up and covered themselves with a sheet as Juubie just plopped right down on the floor with them, Tanju asleep in his sling and carrying a large bowl full of cold meats, cheeses and fruit.

"I'm positive you worked up an appetite. When your lover goes through hell, it's natural to be physical afterwards so eat up. How you feeling Remba?"

"Like new. Much good."

"Good. Now then, Tahna has orders. Remba, he wants you to join him for the spear finals to look over the new warriors coming to join us this evening and then before dinner he wants you to see Muimei to get your marks. Tabu, you and I are also paying a visit to Muimei. The whole council agrees you've earned marks of your own. You're getting the marks of healer right after lunch."

"But healers don't wear marks."

“They do now. It’s just as an important role in the tribe as warrior and all healers should be given the honor of bearing marks to show how important they are to a tribe. Undape and the others insisted we show better respect to healers after seeing what you did for Remba. So every healer is getting new marks.” Juubie said rolling out a parchment with a design on it. It was a single plumeria blossom covered in dew drops and in its center the symbol for health. “This you will wear over your heart proudly. All who see it will know their health and well being are protected under your hands.” Juubie said and Tabu was in tears again and Remba just smiled this time. Happy tears he’d let his love shed.

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Tabu and Remba were still sporting their bandages on the third night when the youth wrestlers were being welcomed into the tribe. In the past three days, Tahna’s tribe had welcomed a new Healer, and new First Warrior, the first Woman Warrior, seven spear throwers, one of them a woman too and tonight four more wrestlers joined the ranks of the warriors and these were just the ones under eighteen years old. The youth Dragon Riddles were yet to happen and two of the youths signed up for those events were yet to join Tahna’s tribe. One already in his tribe not included.

For a change Tabu didn’t look nervous. He’d gained quite a bit of confidence in himself the past few days. It helped that people now treated him with respect, the tribesmen and women greeted him now as Healer Tabu, he was married to a warrior who loved him unconditionally and never failed to boost Tabu’s confidence. Even those that used to tease him now called him by his new rank as second only to the dragonheart in his tribe if he passed by. The worst offender even coming to apologize for his behavior which Tabu accepted graciously without hard feelings or lingering grudges.

Kindra’s mate Hiba came in second in the spear throwing competition and it was their turn the night before to marry and try to eat with bound hands. He had looked so proud of Kindra and she of him as they bore their new and healing markings as the rest of the youths did.

Tahna was high as a kite, he loved the new blood this gathering, they were all so full of spirit and those who’d asked to join his tribe were all good people he knew he’d grow to love very much over the years. Remba was one of the closest to him in age and they seemed to strike up a very good and solid friendship quickly. They found the same jokes humorous, they found the same traits of honor in people inspiring, they were like minded in how they loved the changes happening and both being non-breeder males, could relate to each other on common ground. They were like brothers very quickly. Having your first warrior also be someone you cared for as you would blood made the working relationship that

much stronger. Tahna knew he could entrust his mate and son to Remba and Remba would die to protect them he needed.

On the same Token, Juubie and Tabu were already acting like long lost siblings. Tabu spent his days at Juubie's side, helping with duties, grinding herbs, playing with Tanju if Juubie was occupied or taking care of the errand for Juubie if he was too busy himself. Juubie was the first to claim he'd never been trained as a healer and just knew quite a bit about making medicines from reading books. Books he gave Tabu to read and Tabu when he wasn't working had his nose buried in it fascinated.

Tabu had skills Juubie didn't. He knew how to set broken bones, how to lance boils and even a little surgery. When Juubie learned that Tabu had only been thirteen when he cut a baby out of a mother because the baby would not come out and mother was dying and he managed to not only save mother and baby Juubie was in awe. That was something he knew about from reading but would have never been able to perform himself.

Tabu knew how to make delicate thread from silk to use on sewing together bad wounds, he knew the best places in the jungle to find the herbs they needed. He was all around a far superior healer than Juubie would ever be and once he finished reading the book Juubie had given him their medicine making skills would be equal and Juubie was sure Tabu would exceed him there too in time. To say Tabu was an asset to their tribe was an understatement.

Juubie could turn his divided attentions to the tasks of dragonheart that took most of his time. Leadership mixed with almost shaman like spiritual guidance, teaching and various other day to day fiascos that needed immediate attention and Tabu would take the lead where health was concerned and only need Juubie's help when it was particularly bad and it needed Juubie's power to cure.

In just three days they were already working together like a well oiled machine and getting along like blood family. Juubie just adored Tabu and it showed and Tabu made no one guess as to his feelings toward his dragonheart. The affection was equally returned. It was plain to everyone, Tabu and Remba would never leave this tribe, and they would grow old and gray before they ever left Tahna or Juubie.

Goh and Obie had their own celebrations going on nightly too. Their initial camp of one tent for the Southern Port Tribe now sported twenty and just from the youth tournaments. They had three more additions tomorrow coming from the Dragon Riddles and then twenty more due from the adult games. Quite a few people wanted to experience north and south in the new tribe and break fascinating new ground.

Goh was going to wait to appoint his first warrior until everyone was here and the best man for the job would get the job and understand that technically Yidane was first Warrior because he too was a dragonhead.

Goh made sure to remind all the newcomers that they in-fact had two dragonheads and dragonhearts in this tribe and that the other two had to stay behind this gathering to make sure the port was finished being built.

Goh sent word back to Yidane about events and Yidane sent back equal good news. Building was finished so far and additions could be made as they grew. The first ships were already being stocked in the north and three warehouses were finished and waiting to be filled. He also sent back word they'd all start building homes for the natives that were coming to join their tribe and they'd have as many finished as they could before they all arrived home.

Goh related the news to his new men and women and one of the female archers who'd made the finals and was now a part of Goh's tribe was asking wonderful questions. Goh already liked her mind as well as her skills. She wanted to know if a cold house for community food was built, and it wasn't so Goh sent back word to Yidane to build one. She asked if the community hut where all gathered to eat was built and again it wasn't so once again Goh sent back word. They were still thinking like northerners with private kitchens and private larders.

In the south, tribes thought communally. Everyone shared and no one ever went without. If one man had a bad hunt the next had a good one and shared. Goh much preferred this way of handling things himself, he did not want anyone of his tribe, north or south to be hungry and poor while the next rich and fat. If Goh was not going to profit as leader and share the wealth of the tribe with the tribe then the same was going to be expected of the members themselves. He thanked Mabilia for her insights and instructed her to sit with Obie to discuss all she knew and Obie as usual would record every word and use his equally brilliant mind to orchestrate their new tribe's living and welfare. Which was his job as Dragonheart after all. A role he was definitely getting into the longer he was in the south.

He had taken to wearing the longer loin skirts, laced sandals and beads, his hair was growing long again and he was keeping it pinned up away from his face with colorful beaded clips that he discovered he liked making as a hobby. His skin was now sporting a nice tan and he looked ten years younger when he laughed which was now a regular occurrence. Goh hadn't seen him this relaxed in over a decade. He also hadn't seen him so deliciously gorgeous either in just about as long. Now that road travel weariness was over, climes too cold to sport about in sapping them of energy and one problem after another plaguing them their libidos had returned with a vengeance.

Obie was often left wondering just what on earth hit him as he lay breathless in their tent with a smirking Goh sitting up in bed and smoking a fragrant pipe with native tobacco. The rich chocolate and peppermint smell filling the tent and Obie would just laugh at his husband and tell him to wipe the smirk off his face and confirm that he still had it.

Goh too for that matter was looking wonderful himself and felt it. He was drinking in the south like a hummingbird drank nectar. He too was brown skinned with a healthy tan, his dark hair pulled back at his neck with a beaded lace that Obie had made for him.

He wasn't one to wear the shorter loin cloths, he felt over exposed and did not like his tackle jangling about when he walked. In response to his personal preferences he'd had the women make him some short knee length pants in the colorful silk fabrics with matching short vests with low cut backs and neck line that showed his dragon wings and Dragonhead tattoos and then just fastened around his waist with a simple tie or button. He never wore a shirt anymore and his feet also now bore sandals instead of boots.

Obie thought he looked incredibly handsome and told Goh so on more than one occasion. Apparently the women thought so too, and now several men and women were wearing variations of Goh's unique sense of style and blending of north and south.

Tahna remarked that he'd never seen a gathering so turned upside down and yet so vibrant with life. The changes had everyone living with renewed passion and joy. It was infectious and enthusiastic and everyone was jubilant and celebrating around the clock.

They all gathered on the fourth day to cheer Tabu on in his Riddles, The large red dragon that had appeared for Goh's first day at council was back and lounging on the rocks in the sun and asking difficult riddles to the young gathered before him. Tahna leaned over to Goh and whispered. "These are a little easier tests considering these are young ones still, wait until it's our turn. Much, much harder. Dragon expects much more from one with more experience." He said and Goh smiled looking forward to it.

Tabu did very well and he was one of the last two standing. The other was a girl and on her last question she got it wrong, but she was still in the running if Tabu missed his and then they'd both get a final question and the first to answer would be winner. If Tabu got his right, he was the winner.

The dragon looked to Tabu and mind spoke to Undape who repeated the question for those without the gift of mind speech. Talking as he were the dragon, repeating verbatim what the dragon said. "Little healer, strong mind you

have. I ask you last Riddle. What is real but intangible? What belongs to you but often found in the possession of another? What can be felt but is never seen?"

Tabu just smiled and without missing a single heartbeat replied. "Your soul Wise one."

"That is correct. You Are winner of Dragon Riddles little healer and gain marks of wisdom. Wear proudly with honor young one." Undape said and Tahna's whole tribe erupted with shouts. No one in the tribe, not even Tahna had won the Dragon Riddle games. Tahna had come close and been second before in them, but Tabu would be the first to wear the small rune of wisdom marking on his forehead. Very few ever gained those, only the winners of the Dragon Riddles ever got to bear those marks and once you won, you were not allowed to compete in them again. The dragons ruled this game and they stated in their reasoning that once competed it was proof of wisdom gained. Once shown to be wise can only grow wiser so there was no need to prove it a second time.

Tabu was dizzy with joy as he turned to face his tribe and Remba shot like a dart out of the crowd and picked Tabu up and spun him around until Tabu was also dizzy with motion as well as emotion. "I know you do it Tabu! See I tell you smart!" Remba said laughing for joy as he set Tabu down only to be picked up again by Tahna who carried Tabu all the way back to their campsite on his shoulders. The whole tribe dancing around Tabu with congratulations on his victory.

That night at dinner, he sat trying not to touch the very sore place between his eyes. It was only a small tattoo, hardly bigger than a fingernail. A quarter moon and small star, representing the Dragon Star, the light of wisdom. Juubie kept leaning over and applying aloe with a pain reliever in it to numb the skin since it was open to the air and could not be bandaged to protect it like the one still covered on Tabu's chest.

"Just don't touch it Tabu. I know it's aching right now. Stop frowning." Juubie said and Tabu chuckled.

"Not frowning on purpose, muscle keeps twitching there." He said and Remba leaned forward to look around Tahna and Juubie for about the fiftieth time that night to smile at Tabu. He was so happy and proud he glowed.

"Look so nice on you Tabu." Remba said as the two new tribe members, both girls and earlier competitors of Tabu sitting at the table of honor in front of the head table turned around. Neither of which had been his second place competitor, she had gone to Goh's tribe. These girls did however make the last six, very knowledgeable girls themselves, both seventeen and lovely.

“Aye. Most hard you were to test knowledge with. Answer so fast!” The first said and the second nodded.

“Want play much with you puzzle games more Healer Tabu. We test each other is fun too.” She said and Tabu smiled and nodded.

“Aye, would be much fun. Juubie very smart play with us too?”

“Oh are you kidding? Absolutely! I love good mind games. There’s a board game I used to play with the monks at the temple. You have to figure out a series of puzzles to get your token across the board. First one through the maze at the center is the winner. I’ll have my Papa send us a board I haven’t played it in ages. Count me in!” Juubie said and Tahna laughed.

“Can mates play too? Sound much fun this game. I think you tell me of it before in letters. The one you roll spot cubes to move token and then where token land is type riddle you have to answer from cards.”

“That’s the one Tahna.”

“I now much want to play. I wonder if father can send soon. Like to play while we have time here, good practice too before my try at gaining dragon star marks. Only one I not yet have.”

“Don’t tell uncle Goh then if we write Papa. He’ll be over to play too and you just can’t beat Uncle Goh. He’s good at it.”

“Then I really want play. Goh must fun man. Even lose to him he make you laugh while losing.”

“Yes he does. I’ll write Papa tonight I’ll bet we have the game then soon. I have one or I did have one once. Mama has put it away no doubt somewhere. We might have to adapt some of the cards though. The history questions are very much northern based questions.” Juubie said looking forward to a good game himself.

“I know north history! I read books Dragonhead bring once to my village and I like so much he send me many after he leave.” One of the girls said and the other nodded.

“Our tribe highest north, we have many visitors from Wielders as you call them. All tell stories of north I know too!” The other girl said and Tabu grinned.

“Then I must learn so not lose so bad. Love books, I read one Juubie give me I share when I done if like. It all about plant and flower. How to make many things

we not try before. Medicines and other things like dye and things that clean good.”

“Dyes? I love make dye!” One of the girls perked and Tahna noted yet another asset to his tribe on top of her mind. A good dye maker was also good for trade if her dyes where good.

“Oh me too! Can you make red that not fade? Red so hard.” The other responded and Tahna noted two girls who’d probably be fast friends quickly on top of probably concocting dyes together in the near future.

“Not yet, but try. I have one last longer than most but still turn light after many washing. We try come up with good one together from Dragonheart Juubie’s book?” Tahna just grinned, he had predicted that one rather quickly.

“Yes! Maybe we find way together then all want it and make good for our tribe in trade!”

“I think that very good idea. You both have job making dye then and if good it will be much good for our tribe.” Tahna said and both girls nodded and instantly went into conversation about dyes in general.

“We are certainly expanding by leaps and bounds here. I cannot wait to get home to start now.” Juubie said and Tahna nodded.

“Me too. We come long way in very short time. We can only move ahead now I am much happy. We already had good tribe, we have even better one now. I am most proud of everyone.” Tahna said and it was obvious everyone in the tribe felt the same way as he did. Everyone was full of pride well earned for themselves and each other.

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The adult games began the next day and more feasting nightly. Tahna was once again crowned the victor in the wrestling games for the second gathering in a row. He was very good at it and he enjoyed it very much. His second place competitor was one of the older warriors who wanted to join Tahna’s tribe and they vowed plenty of rematches to come once they got back to their village.

The Dragon Riddles were brutal questions and done in two separate matches. All non-gifted against each other and then all the Dragonheads and Hearts participated in their own match and only if they hadn’t already gained their stars before. These were even harder questions because more was expected of them.

Juubie along with Tahna, Obie and Goh stood with minds reeling under very hard questions. Tensions were high as people kept getting eliminated and even higher when all realized that it was coming down to Tahna, Juubie, Obie and Goh.

They were playfully competitive with each other and making faces and having a good time as well as trying to answer questions.

Obie was the first to blunder and kick himself as he was eliminated and he went off to join his tribe and root on his husband.

Shockingly Tahna was the next to blunder. Leaving Juubie and Goh facing off with each other for the win

“Don’t get too cocky Uncle Goh.”

“You either Squirt.” Goh winked and Juubie grinned as a series of questions were asked, neither of them faltering for several rounds in a row.

Undape seemed in deep conversation with the dragon and then turned smiling to the contestants and spoke for the dragon to those in the crowd and the dragon also spoke simultaneously in Goh and Juubie’s minds. “Never before have I seen two such sharp minds. Both very Dragonwise you are and when dealing with such minds who are proving they so very wise I claim the very first tie in Dragon Riddle games. I ask no more questions, proof not more do I need to see. Both earn marks for minds of very greatest worth!”

Goh and Juubie cheered and hugged each other and then Goh took Juubie under his arm and gave him a solid rub burn on his head.

“You little stinker. Who said you could grow up to be so smart? I changed your diapers!”

Juubie just laughed and squirmed. “Who said I couldn’t?” He said squirming out of Goh’s head lock and sticking out his tongue playfully.

“Your papa sent you that board game. You and I one-on-one later boy. I’m not done with you yet.” Goh said and Juubie winked.

“You’re on and bring it on Uncle Goh!” Juubie said accepting the challenge and as markings on brows ached, two men sat around a board with a crowd watching as they played more mind games with each other.

Juubie groaned in defeat at the end of the game. The luck of the dice a factor and Goh’s last throw landed him in the center of the maze and with answering the final question off the card that Obie read as game mediator Goh was

crowned the winner. Then he immediately called a best two out of three because he was having a ball and Juubie had the luck of the dice the next round.

The final match had Goh in the victor seat and Juubie conceded defeat to dice and intelligence but all three games had been very close. No one was a loser really and much laughter and fun was had by all as the gathering officially was called to an end, All tribe affiliations confirmed and the next day had everyone packing up to make the two week journey home again.

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## **“Dragonhead and Dragonheart”**

*A Wielder and Wellspring Story*

*Author: D. Sanders*

### **Act XI - Home**

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Everyone was grateful to be home again, even after such joy to be found at a gathering it was nice to come home. Goh's tribe was already hard at work getting settled and Tahna's tribe the same.

New huts had to be built to accommodate all the new families and couples. Tahna's tribe had left with thirty men, thirty-two women and seventeen children and returned with Sixty-two men, sixty women and thirty-five children. They had more than doubled in size.

The cold house was made bigger, the community hut enlarged, several new huts erected and all jobs reassigned.

Remba and Tabu built their hut next to Tahna and Juubie's and every morning Remba went out with Kindra and Hiba on the hunt and then after lunch was at Tahna's side until the end of the day.

Tabu and Juubie had their hands full daily with chores and children and moments of chaos and simple routine.

When the warriors returned at mid-day the village was bustling with activity until sunset when everyone called a halt to work and gathered for dinner. Evenings were spent at rest. Either in groups or couples until everyone retired for the night. Every seventh day was a rest day for all. The only work done was shared by all and that only involved cooking the mid-day and dinner meals, not taxing labor.

It gave everyone a nice rest before going back to work again and it kept spirits up. It was during one of the rest days Juubie came squealing out of his hut holding a letter and running over to Tahna who had now a nearly one year old Tanju in the water with him enjoying the cool surf and giggling with his father.

“Jana's Bonded and she and Hollen are coming to see us for a honeymoon!” Juubie cried excited.

“That's wonderful news!” Tahna said coming out of the water.

“There's more! After they get back home, Hollen is going to stay in Garth with Papa and Mama to help out Papa and then THEY are coming to see us at last and bringing Renju with them!” Juubie was so happy he was crying.

Tabu and Remba had come out of their hut upon hearing the squeal and were happy to hear the news too. Juubie loved his family and it had been over three years since he's seen any of them.

Time passed quickly, trade was bustling in the port and all the dragonheads were transporting items to port to be shipped north and Goh and Yidane were transporting items from port directly to the tribes. They too had settled nicely and their whole tribe was working seamlessly in very short order.

They had natives who knew the land and the hunt and provided the meat, they had two dragonheads supplying protection and the staples like flour, sugar and fruits and vegetables taken in trade from north and south combined for their labor in shipping the items back and forth.

Both Dragonhearts were always busy keeping the inner workings running smoothly with direct relations with the people and assisting their husbands daily. When Jana and Hollen arrived off the ship in their port for a visit Goh was stunned to see how much she'd grown. She was eighteen and beautiful and many people at first glance thought she was Juubie. They did look very much alike, that was until they noticed she was very much a girl.

They took a nice leisurely walk down the beach from the port to Juubie's village and Juubie was with Tanju in front of their hut with Tabu just chatting while they mixed herbs together.

When Juubie caught sight of the couple coming down the beach he shrieked for Joy and went racing over to embrace his sister and her husband before literally dragging them back to meet Tanju and Tabu.

"Oh my goodness, he's so cute! I'm your auntie Jana!" Jana cried cuddling her nephew and cooing at him.

It was just a few minutes later Tahna and Remba came walking around the corner and Tahna smiled brightly as he spied the newcomers.

"I would know my Juubie's blood anywhere. You must be Jana." Tahna said and Jana's eyes widened.

"You said he was big, but by the gods!" Jana gasped and Juubie chuckled.

"Told you." He winked as she stood to embrace her brother by bonding and introduce him to her own husband.

Their visit seemed to fly by and they stayed a full two months before heading back north again. They vowed to come back again soon and Juubie was so happy to see how grown up Jana was and how good her bonding was. He

adored Hollen, he managed Jana nicely and she'd mellowed greatly after bonding to him.

The following winter the scene was repeated and this one even more tearful as Juubie cried huge crocodile tears into his mother's chest as he held her close. He'd missed her so very much. It had been over four years since he'd left home so suddenly. Rendra had been in shock to see her son covered in tattoos, but the joy in seeing him far outweighed her shock.

Tanju was already walking and was talking a little now and the first time he said "Grandma" that sounded more like "g'ma" Rendra melted and the baby was squirming to be let go from the kisses she rained down on his chubby cheeks. He was quite a handful and into his 'terrible twos' and getting into everything he could get his fat little pudgy hands on.

Jujain was soaking in the sun and heat and was rejuvenating with the tranquil rest. He was so proud of his son, he thought Tahna remarkable and the tribe fascinating. He'd forgotten just how wonderful the south was.

Renju was the biggest surprise. He'd gone from a scrawny eleven-year-old to a rather strapping fifteen-year-old. Several of the older girls around his age were rather impressed by the handsome youth who looked like Juubie, only a taller and broader version. He had taken the most after Jujain. He and Juubie had very similar faces, but physically Renju was already a good two inches taller and growing still.

Juubie said it wasn't fair that wellsprings got short changed in the height department and his kid brother was not allowed to get taller than his big brother.

Renju however was still the 'kid' brother and proved it by ribbing Juubie mercilessly now that he was bigger.

Juubie however got a little concerned when Renju kept disappearing and returning looking far too smug. When queried what he'd been doing he shrugged it off and didn't answer.

Once again however the visit ended before anyone wanted it to and it was back to the north again for the group. Renju however had plans to return soon on his own. He'd fallen in love with the south and a return trip was high on his list of priorities.

Work went back to normal again but soon enough, Juubie had found out what his brother had been up to. He had been sneaking off to Goh's tribe to see a girl. She was hardly fourteen and now very pregnant.

Juubie sighed, he knew what the dragons had told Goh just over two years earlier and the timing was too coincidental. It seemed that Renju was the wielder leaving behind a child he didn't know about and the poor girl having a difficult pregnancy was the one Goh and Obie feared losing to childbirth. She was a good girl. They all prayed they were wrong, but nine months later, three years after the dragons told Goh that he and Obie would have a daughter. The girl was born and the young mother died giving birth.

They all decided not to tell Renju about it until they could do it in person. However, that sadly too wasn't going to be either. Juubie received a very sad letter about three months after Lilia was born that told him that a horrible storm had blown in from the west into Garth and sent a whole field of cattle stampeding in were feral states, the nodes in the area went rogue and Renju had been fatally injured. He'd been caught in the stampede and the injury to his head too severe. He'd died almost instantly.

Juubie sobbed for days and Goh and Obie weren't in much better states. It was all too painfully obvious how prophetic the whole situation was and they immediately wrote Rendra and Jujain about their granddaughter to help ease the sorrow of their son's passing.

They agreed the best thing for Lilia was to have her stay with Obie and Goh. They were not going to argue with a dragon's wisdom but were very happy to know Renju at least had a child before he had died and they were grateful that Obie and Goh insisted the child be aware who her real grandparent's were. It made the loss easier.

Goh's eyes were rapidly deteriorating now, everything anymore was a mottled blur. He saw vague shapes and colors, but knew the little dark skinned, green-eyed brunette sitting his lap and sucking her thumb while she slept was the most precious and beautiful thing in the world to him. He loved her desperately and hearing her laugh was music to his ears.

Obie came in from the bathhouse to see Goh sitting with their daughter in his favorite chair, rocking her as she slept. He leaned up against the door smiling. "I will never get tired of seeing you sitting there like that Papa." Obie said and Goh smiled where he sat looking up and trying to focus in vain on the shape of the man he loved most in the world as he came closer.

"She likes this, you know how fussy she's been since she started teething. Anything to help her sleep." Goh said as Obie gently picked her up and moved her over to her crib.

"But Papa needs his sleep too. She'll be fine now. Want me to help you into the bath first?"

“Aye. Please.” Goh said as Obie took his arm and lead him into the bath. Everything within reach and laid out in a specific order so Goh would know by touch what he was picking up.

He was not one who took to losing his eyes easily and refused to be handed everything. He wanted to adjust and do things himself so with minimal help Obie complied. He returned to their home, leaving the door open and he settled in the chair to relax and listen for either Goh or Lilia whichever needed him first.

He heard Goh finish first and with just a helping hand out of the hot spring, Goh managed the rest on his own and wandered back into their rooms by touch and smiled as he walked over to Obie and kissed his hair. “Come to bed with me, I am feeling rather in the mood to snuggle with you tonight my beautiful Daddy.”

“Why Papa, your daughter is sleeping across the room you realize.” Obie purred back and Goh chuckled.

“And best to hurry while she’s still sleeping then I say.” Goh said and Obie chuckled as he followed his husband to bed.

While life was a mixture of joys and sorrows, the happiness outweighed the sadness and life went on and nothing compared to the contentment that home provided.

When you shared your life with a person you loved in a home that kept you warm and secure that was true bliss. Sorrows eventually fade and Joys followed by times of routine but all combined none of them could say that their lives were not complete and home wasn’t a location on a map. It was found in the hearts and in the arms of those you loved.

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END