



AUTUMN WIND

By

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Chapter One

With her long, black unbound hair whipping behind her, Mina Windwalker bent forward as she raced her chestnut pony across the rolling hills. The horse's hooves pounded the ground as it thundered over the short grass plain. Riding bareback, her fringed buckskin dress tucked up around her tanned thighs, she drummed her feet against the horse's sides to make it go faster.

Tears shimmered in Mina's black eyes. Her heart had been broken that morning and she doubted it would ever mend. The man to whom she had been betrothed since she was a little girl had betrayed her. His treachery had wounded her deeper than any knife and she was shamed.

Crashing over a small stream bed, the horse stumbled on the other side but kept its footing as it plunged up a small hill. Mina's hands were clutching its thick mane. There were no reins to guide the beast, no bit in its mouth to hamper it. It picked up more speed as it took to the flat, open prairie.

The sun had set by the time the horse began to tire. Its sides were heaving. Concerned for the animal, Mina unhooked the fingers of her cramped right hand and reached out to pat the horse's neck. Almost instantly it seemed to know she was giving it permission to slow down and the great beast did, its stride shortening until it was doing a slow trot.

"I am a selfish woman," she said, leaning over to lay her cheek against the horse's neck. "I ask your pardon, Red Hawk."

The pony stopped moving and lowered its head to sniff at the grass. It made a chuffing sound as though it forgave her for her lack of consideration.

Mina felt guilty for her thoughtlessness in pushing her mount so hard and swung a leg over its head, sliding to the ground so it could

rest without her weight--slight though it was. She looked around and knew precisely where she was. She hissed with irritation for she was many miles from her tribe's encampment. She had let her wounded heart blind her to all but the need to exorcise the demon of her intended's unfaithfulness.

"Mother will skin me alive," she said with a sigh.

Spying a copse of trees, she started toward it, knowing Red Hawk would follow. The pony was well-trained and after allowing her senses to test the air, she found nothing about it to make her skittish. Walking slowly, fanning her hand on the tall grass that grew in spots as high as her knees, she felt keenly the pain of finding the man to whom she would soon be Joined in the arms of another. Seeing him covering the whore with his body, pumping between her legs, made Mina's soul ache. Not even the soft breeze of the night wind could cool the heat that still clung to her cheeks as she thought again of what she'd seen.

"Why, Chaska?" she whispered.

She had gone to the settlement to surprise her betrothed but the surprise had been hers. The door to Chaska Dark Wolf's room in the scout barracks had not been locked and she had slipped inside to wait for him, hiding in the closet from which she intended to jump out and scare him. She had not expected him to return from his day, spent as a scout for the Capitol Army, with a white woman in tow nor to find his brother, Takoda, close behind.

"Chaska, listen...." Takoda had begun.

"I will have her first," Chaska had pronounced and made quick work of ridding the blonde-haired tart of her clothing.

With the closet door cracked open, Mina had slapped a hand over her mouth to keep from crying out, shocked to the very roots of her hair at the things her intended was doing with the woman.

The woman had a lush figure with pendulous breasts, crowned with dark nipples that stood out in sharp contrast to her white skin. She was bare from the belly down, obviously having shaved away all pubic hair from her mons. The sight shocked Mina so badly she could not properly draw breath

“Nice,” Chaska stated as he rubbed his hand over the bare area. “I like this. It feels lusty.”

Takoda stood with his back to the closet, watching his older brother push the whore onto the bed. She flopped backwards across the mattress with her arms flung wide, her legs dangling off the side, fleshy thighs parted obscenely. When Chaska knelt down to place his mouth on the woman’s sex, his brother turned away, going to the other side of the room to take a seat.

“You should not do this, *ciye*,” Takoda said.

Mina was stunned as she watched the man to whom she was betrothed as he licked the slut between her legs, dragging his tongue between her folds. It was a disgusting thing he was doing and it made her sick to her stomach. She swiveled her gaze to Takoda and saw that he had put his head back and was staring up at the ceiling, one leg crossed at the ankle over the other, his fingers threaded together at his belly.

“This is not right,” Takoda said, his voice tight.

“Shut the fuck up or get the hell out,” was the reply.

The sickening sound of Chaska slurping between the woman’s thighs, her legs now draped over his shoulders must have bothered Takoda as much as it did Mina for the younger man uncrossed his legs and shot up from the chair, exiting the room as though the hounds of hell were after him. As he passed in front of the closet, Mina looked up to see anger and disgust stamped on his dark visage. The door slammed shut behind him as he left.

“Where’s he going?” the woman complained. “I wanted him to fuck me, too!”

“I’ll do enough fucking for the two of us,” Chaska said and got to his feet. His hands went to his belt.

For the next hour Mina huddled in the overheated closet and listened to the vile sounds coming from the bed. Maybe she was a virgin, but she was aware of what men and women did together. She had heard the late night sounds coming from the other side of the blanket wall as her father took her mother. She had listened to the older girls telling tales of their inductions into womanhood, had

listened to brides regaling their friends about wedding nights, and she had seen animals mating about the camp. Yet nothing could have prepared her for the things Chaska was doing. He was worse than the dogs that rutted after the bitches in heat. His hands were all over the white slut and he was rubbing himself against her as though he were a cat, wallowing upon her like a dog on something dead.

Mina's education advanced that afternoon as she watched her betrothed mount the woman from the rear like an animal, pushing and withdrawing himself into and out of both her holes. She viewed the woman suckling his shaft and sweeping her pink tongue over his sac and along the crease of his rump, probing into his puckered hole. His delight at lapping between the woman's legs and hers at spreading his butt cheeks apart to tongue him brought the bile rushing up Mina's throat and she had nearly given herself away as she gagged.

It wasn't just the slapping of flesh against flesh or the smacking, licking sounds that shocked Mina. It was the noises Chaska made as he rode the woman, the cruel way he twisted her nipples and the words he spoke as he took her that humiliated Mina. At the height of his grunting and groaning, she had finally found the courage to slip out of the closet.

The woman saw her and for a moment the look of pleasure froze on her face, but then a wicked, hateful smile stretched the red painted lips and the whore's eyes had crinkled with laughter. She actually winked at Mina and made a kissing motion. Mina did not see Takoda turn and watch her flee.

Mortified to the depths of her being, Mina fled the room, ran outside, and swung up on her pony to race away. Vaguely she heard her name called but she ignored it, kicking the pony into a faster gallop.

And now here she sat with the night sounds settling around her as she leaned against the tree trunk and stared off across the wide vista of darkened prairie. She knew her parents would be worried about her and that a caning awaited her when she returned to camp, but not even the thought of her mother's heavy hand or scathing tongue mattered at that moment. She needed this time alone to come to grips with the

ruination of her life and to decide how best to handle what she had observed.

She did not know how long she sat there before she realized she was no longer alone. The hairs stirred on her arms and she turned her head from side to side, sweeping the area in front of her. Someone was watching her. The knowledge was terrifying, for she was unarmed and alone and no one knew where she was. She could hear her heart pounding with fear.

With calmness she did not feel, she sat up and turned her head to look behind her.

He was hunkered down not ten feet away, his steady brown eyes locked on her, his elbows on his knees and arms dangling between his spread knees. She let out a long wavering breath.

"How long have you been there, Takoda?" she asked, relieved it was her intended's brother and not a renegade white man intent on raping her or worse.

"Long enough," he responded in that deep, husky voice she found so pleasant to listen to. "Be glad I was not an enemy. Your mind had flown this world, *arechi hyegahaota*."

She smiled at him calling her little whirlwind. That had been his nickname for her since they were children. Takoda was only a year older than her while Chaska was three years older than Takoda. "How did you know where I was?"

He stayed where he was, his face hidden in the shadows, his bare chest gleaming in the moonlight. "I followed you from the settlement," he stated.

Mina nodded. "That was you who called to me," she said. "I was too upset to notice."

"How much did you see?" he asked, no doubt thinking she had come upon his brother and the white whore after he left the room.

"I saw it all. I was in the closet when you and your brother came in," she said and saw him flinch.

Takoda got to his feet and came over to her. He dropped gracefully to the ground and sat there cross-legged as he looked at her. "I hesitate to make excuses for him but he was drunk," he told her.

“At that time of the afternoon?”

He shrugged. “It is not the first time, Mina. The Capitol Army did not need us today so he spent the day in the saloon drinking with the whore. I thought to get him back to his room before he passed out, but I did not know he would bring the woman with him.”

“He did not seem as though he were about to pass out,” she said with a snort.

“The thought of rutting stimulates a man.”

“I can not marry him, now, Takoda,” she said, lowering her head.

“The tribal council will think differently,” he reminded her.

“Let me be clear. I *will* not marry him, now,” she corrected.

“You will not have a say in it,” he said quietly.

She raised her head, her chin jutting forward, eyes narrowed.

“Then I will kill myself,” she said. “Rather than allow your brute of a brother to do to me what he was doing to the white slut. Such things are disgusting.”

“You say that even before you know if you might enjoy what he was doing to her?” Takoda countered, his lips twitching with amusement.

“No, I would not enjoy it and this is not funny, Takoda Dark Wolf!” she threw at him and jumped to her feet. She started off only to find him at her side, having moved so quickly she hadn’t seen him act. Such was the way of the men of his clan. He snaked out a hand to take her arm, his thumb rubbing along her upper arm.

“You may not think so now, but a year down the road, you might look back and laugh at your childishness,” he said.

“Childishness?” she shrieked, jerking her arm from his light grip. “You think I’m being childish? What if that whore has a vile disease? Our Joining is less than a month away and he would have brought that disease to our pallet and given it to me!”

“Jasper’s whores are not diseased,” Takoda said, folding his arms over his chest. His pectoral muscles jumped, drawing her eyes to his brawny chest. Even in the moonlight, his scars were visible to either side of his long black braids. “He has them checked every

week.”

She was staring at the five inch long slits where the medicine man had inserted bone skewers under the muscles of his chest wall. The white ridged scars bore evidence that he had danced the *Kachono*--danced with the Sun--and pulled himself free of the skewers that had been suspended from ropes attached to the Sun Pole. The men of her tribe were proud of such scarring for it attested to their bravery and endurance in the face of brutal pain.

“I will not be his wife, Takoda,” she said, forcing her gaze from his scars. Chaska had yet to dance with Sun and it was whispered he might not.

“And if he insists?”

“I will run away.”

Takoda snorted. “Then the men of the tribe will come after you, *arechi hyegahaota*.”

She stared into his eyes. “Would you be among those men?”

“You know I would,” he stated. “Chaska is my brother and it is his honor at stake.”

“He has no honor,” she declared.

“My brother will be upset that you caught him behaving in such a manner.”

“He should have thought of that before humping that whore!”

He laughed at her choice of words. “Men do not think with their brains when they are rutting, Mina,” he said. “They think with something else.”

She was eying her pony, wondering if she could get to it before Takoda caught her and decided it would be nearly impossible. He was the fleetest of foot among the warriors and it was his family’s position in the tribe that would not allow her to escape.

“There is another solution,” he said, his own gaze going to her mount.

“I do not see one,” she said, her shoulders slumping.

“I could go before the tribal council and ask that you be given to me instead.”

The very suggestion shocked Mina to her core. Her eyes

widened. Takoda had never shown the slightest interest in her except as his brother's intended and that interest had been offhand at best. He had always treated her like a kid sister, ignoring her most of the time though--of late--she had caught him staring at her in ways that made her very uncomfortable.

"You would take me to wife?" she asked in a near-whisper.

"It would honor the Agreement of the *Gahaota* between our fathers. My mother would not object and I doubt yours would. It is time I settled down," he said. "My job with the Capitol Army will last only another year and then I will be free of them."

She knew how much the men of her tribe hated having to work alongside the white men who treated them as barbarians, savages of little value. The Dark Wolf clan had been kept longer in the service of the Army than the warriors from among the other tribes.

"But you do not know that we would be compatible," she said. "You do not know...."

He moved again in that lightning quick way he had and hooked his left arm around her waist, jerking her to him in a fierce hold that made her blood sing and a strange moistness flow abruptly between her legs.

"Tell me my body would not be compatible to yours," he said, his hard chest pressed tightly to her breasts, his groin prodding her lower belly. His right hand cupped the back of her head. "Tell me you would not rather have me than my slovenly brother." He was much taller than her--taller even than Chaska--and she had to crane her neck to look up at him standing so close to her.

"Takoda...."

He swooped down and slanted his mouth over hers. His kiss was searing and unlike any stolen kiss his brother had ever taken. This kiss sent shivers down her sides and caused a tightening in her womb. He anchored her head so she could not pull away from his lips, but pulling away was the last thing she wanted to do. Her arms moved around his waist and she held him to her as fiercely as he held her.

It seemed only natural to sink to their knees upon the ground.

He lowered her gently, stretching out atop her, his strong, solid body covering hers as he intensified his kiss. His right hand slid down her shoulder and onto her breast.

Mina jumped as though she'd been prodded with a red-hot brand. Chaska had once touched her there but it had been in passing, almost as an afterthought after a very chaste kiss. Takoda's hand was molding her, kneading her, squeezing her gently and the sensations such an action caused made her squirm beneath him. It pooled the blood between her thighs and made her moan low in her throat.

He tore his mouth from hers, his dark eyes moving over her face as though trying to memorize every feature. "I have loved you since you tripped me and sent me into that mud puddle when you were four years old."

"You remember that?" she asked.

"I remember everything about you from when we were growing up, *arechi hyegahaota*," he said. "I remember your *awihya ishnaha*, your coming of age ceremony. You were so beautiful and I felt such pride. That day our fathers sealed the *Gahaota* between our families for you to become Chaska's wife and it became the worst day of my life."

"Takoda," she said. "You were just a boy. You could not...."

"I was thirteen winters old, Mina. I was nearly a man and I ached already for the loss of you."

She smiled at him and reached up to lay her palm against his smooth cheek, stroking her thumb over his chiseled lips. "Why did not you say something to me?"

He turned his face so he could place a kiss against her palm then fused his gaze with hers. "What was I to say? You had been given to my brother. It would have been dishonorable to have spoken to you of my feelings."

"Yet you do so now."

"Now you have vowed you will not accept the Joining with Chaska," he said. "Now I can offer you my protection and my love. I would make you a far better husband than Chaska ever could."

At that bold statement Mina could not help but compare the two

men. Chaska was the shorter of the two, heavier in weight and given over to a bit of flab around the waist and under his chin. Takoda was leaner with a tightly honed body upon which not an ounce of fat could be seen. Where Chaska's braids were longer than Takoda's, his hair was coarser and usually smelled musky. In contrast, Takoda's hair was sleek and shiny and as she stroked her fingertips along the tip of his braid, she discovered it was as soft as a duckling's down and smelled of sweet grass. Strips of otter-skin intertwined with a twisted deerskin thong had been added to each braid to stiffen it. Among the Dark Wolf clan, Takoda was a warrior of some note, while Chaska seemed content to follow his younger brother and not take upon himself the mantle of leadership.

"Chaska Dark Wolf is lazy," Mina had heard one of the elders remark. "And he has embraced many of the unhealthy practices of the white man. It is said that he hates to return to human form when he changes for it takes too much energy."

She lowered her gaze to Takoda's mouth. Unlike Chaska's tobacco-juice stained teeth, Takoda's were straight and very white for he disdained the filthy habit. And then there was Chaska's fondness for the white man's strong drink.

"What are you thinking?" Takoda asked. He lightly rubbed his thumb across her nipple and shifted his weight upon her so she felt the hardness between his legs.

Mina gasped but did not push his hand away. She was enjoying the heat from his hand through the buckskin of her dress. Enjoyable, too, was that hardness that brought an ache to her lower body. "I am wondering what the tribal council will say. Do you think they will set aside my betrothal to Chaska so easily?" she asked.

"I will go before them and offer to engage in a contest with Chaska for your hand. I have supporters among the council of elders. I believe they will allow me to challenge for you."

She could not imagine brother against brother in combat for her. Chaska was not known for his warrior abilities and she doubted he would be willing to meet Takoda on the field of battle. There was no uncertainty of who the champion would be.

“I will speak to your father, first,” he stated. “That is the honorable and right thing to do.”

“What if my father does not accept your suit?” she asked.

“There is but one way to assure that he does,” he said with a growl.

His slid his hand from her breast and down her side to her thigh. Shifting slightly so his entire weight was not upon her, he crushed the skirt of her dress in his hands and began inching the hem up her leg.

“What are you doing?” she asked, her eyes wide.

“Claiming you so there will be no mistaking who you belong to,” he answered.

Mina stopped breathing. In her tribe it was not uncommon for young people to experiment with mating and though the tribal elders did not condone such practices, neither did they condemn it. It was left up to the individual clans to set the restrictions and limitations for their female children while males were allowed free range. Her parents, however, had strictly forbidden her to have relations with Chaska but they had said nothing about his brother.

“*Teshima. Nyhimaiah Washina,*” he whispered, telling her he loved her and that she would be his as his palm touched her upper thigh.

His hand was gentle and calloused and deliciously warm as he placed it between her legs, the base of his palm resting on her folds, his fingers threading through her nether curls. Why she felt no mortification at so intimate a touch did not occur to her. She simply lay there basking in the feeling he was invoking. He was gazing down at her as though she were a feast laid out for his enjoyment and that made her very soul soar inside her body.

“Tell me no,” he said, “and I will stop.” He pressed the heel of his hand against her firmly. “Though I am on fire with need of you, I will stop.”

Mina could not have spoken had her very life depended upon it. She was lost in the dark fire smoldering in his eyes, the strong planes of his handsome face, the way he put out his tongue and curled it over

his bottom lip for just a fleeting moment before drawing it back into the warm recessed of his mouth. That particular sight sent a quiver of need straight through her lower body.

"I would never say no to you, *chemioho*," she replied, calling him her betrothed. It was a name she had never once used to Chaska.

His body trembled at her words and he turned his hand so his fingers were paused at the entrance of her sheath. Lowering his head, he put his lips to the side of her neck where the flesh was night-kissed and cool. His warm breath wafted over her throat.

"I will never hurt you, *arechi hyegahaota*," he swore. "I offer you only respect and honor. All that I have, I lay at your feet."

Among the Kochodol tribe--the Sun People--their warrior's words were law. Lies were never spoken and deceit was rare. Honor was more important than life and for a warrior to make a vow, to swear an oath, it was unbreakable.

"Make me yours, then, *chemioho*," she whispered to him. "Make me your woman."

He raised his head and claimed her mouth once more, his tongue slipping between her lips, probing for entrance and when she opened to him, he thrust inside slowly and swirled the tip against the roof of her mouth. Her groan made him grunt with pleasure.

Mina felt his fingers sliding slowly, delicately along her folds--the index and middle digit bracketing that sensitive area to move down the slick valleys alongside her outer lips. His short nails scratched gently as he brought his fingers up again just as slowly and she shivered. With his tongue now deep in her mouth, she was dragging ragged breaths in through her nostrils and could hear her blood pounding like the hooves of the giant buffalo thundering over the prairie land. When his thumb touched some ultra-sensitive part of her just beneath the mons, she instinctively arched her hips up and flattened her sex against his palm.

He released her mouth. "Easy, *arechi hyegahaota*," he said. "I want this to be as nearly perfect for you as I can make it."

It was perfect just lying there on the ground with him as the black velvet of the sky hung like a canopy above them. His lips at the

hollow of her throat were perfection and as his tongue swept over that responsive area, she put her hands up to clutch at his broad shoulders.

Takoda eased away from her and sat up. Positioning himself between her thighs, he knelt, nudging her legs farther apart as he slid the hem of her buckskin dress up to her waist, baring her to his view.

“Oh, *chemioho!*” she exclaimed, turning her head to bury her face against her shoulder.

“No, my lovely one,” he said softly, reaching across her with his right hand to lay the back of his palm against her right cheek to turn her face back toward him. “There is no shame in what I do. It is right. It is what a man and woman do when they mate. I want to see every part of you.”

Her face heated with embarrassment, she said nothing, just lay there as he gazed down at the juncture of her thighs. Grasping handfuls of the soft sand beneath her hips she squeezed her eyes shut.

“Your body is a delight to gaze upon, *hishnae*,” he said softly. “And your scent is driving me mad.”

Hearing him call her heart of his heart in the language of their people sent chills racing through Mina. It was a term of endearment not lightly bestowed and when a man found the one woman to whom he could speak that precious title, he had already made a firm commitment to her down to his soul.

Takoda took her shoulders in his hands and helped her to sit. He then pulled the dress from her body, laying it carefully aside. The night wind wafted over her flesh and brought goosebumps that grew more copious when he put his hand to the center of her chest and pressed lightly, letting her know he wished for her to lie down again.

Silently, she watched him get to his feet and remove first his utility belt from which hung the possibles bag, his knife sheath, and flint bag. Next he took off the belt holding up the soft breechclout that cupped his genitals and that had been made from a piece of soft, weathered tipi covering. Her avid eyes would not look away as he took off his leggings and stood before her adorned in only the two red, cobalt and white bead worked rawhide armbands that circled his arm just above the bulging biceps and the three row bone chocker at his

throat.

“Does the sight of me please you, *hishnae*?” he asked.

Mina had to swallow before she could answer. She was unable to tear her attention from the thick shaft that jutted toward her. It was long and made the very teeth in her mouth ache with wanting it inside her. “*Ayai, chianusko*,” she replied, naming him her beloved one for the first time.

Takoda smiled and went to his knees between her spread knees. “You are more beautiful than I could have ever imagined,” he said and laid the palm of his hand on her thigh, stroking her tenderly, almost reverently.

Gently, softly, and unhurriedly, he stretched out atop her, letting her get used to the naked weight of him pressing her down. He laid still though his cock flexed against her lower body.

“He wants you,” the warrior said.

She could feel moisture along her thigh and knew it must be coming from his shaft. There was a faint scent and for some reason that heightened the desire coursing through her body.

“Tell me what to do,” she asked.

He smiled and his face became so handsome it hurt her heart to look at him. His was such a perfect visage, a faultlessly formed body. Lying beneath him she throbbed like the strings of a lute. When he took her hand and placed it on his rigid sex, she drew in a long, slow breath.

“You are hard,” she said in awe.

“Stroke him, *hishnae*, and I will grow harder for you,” he vowed.

His flesh was soft yet the core of him was like iron. As she ran her hand up and down his length she could feel the blood drumming within his shaft. A thin coating of something warm and slick soon covered her palm.

“It is the essence of life that you feel clinging to you,” he explained. “It is that which makes a baby inside you.”

That thought widened her eyes. It astounded her to know she wielded such power in her hand. She released him, wanting more but

not knowing how to ask.

He seemed to understand and his hand was once more between her legs as he shifted to his left side so he could touch her heated core. He rubbed his hand up and down her sex--his middle finger seeming to go lower and lower until he was probing just inside her channel.

"It will hurt the first time, *hishnae*," he warned her. "That I can not prevent but I swear to you it will never hurt again."

"I know," she said and at his elevated brows she giggled. "Women talk, warrior."

He grinned. "Not nearly as bad as their men folk," he countered and slipped half of his middle finger inside her.

"Umm," she said, closing her eyes to the glorious feel.

Takoda moved his finger in and out of her slowly, going deeper with every third invasion into her moist heat. When she had accommodated that finger, he insinuated the second into her and continued the slow, methodical foray until he could add the third finger--stretching her gently, slowly, but firmly.

"You are slick with your own essence," he told her and withdrew his fingers to bring them to his mouth.

Mina stopped breathing when she saw him place his wet fingers between his lips to taste her juices. She stared at him as he licked the moisture from his flesh then lowered his hand between her legs once more.

"There is nothing either wrong or dirty about what I just did," he said and bent over to kiss her, to let her taste herself on his lips.

The slightly starchy aroma of her body clung to his mouth and she wasn't so sure she liked the sensation. She thought of the white whore suckling Chaska's shaft and she tensed.

"I do not want to suckle you, Takoda," she said, her forehead creased.

"You do not have to do anything you do not want to, *hishnae*," he assured her. "But I want more than just a sampling of your juices. I want to feast upon them."

Before she could stop him, he slid down her until his mouth was cupping her sex, his tongue lapping at the moisture. He used his

thumbs to spread her vaginal lips then he attacked her clit with flicks that made her squirm beneath him. By the time he peeled the hood from that sensitive little nub and began to lightly suckle it, she was in the beginning throes of release.

Mina had no idea what it was that was building inside her. It was heat and it was moistness and it was an itch that caused her to grind her hips against her lover's face. She was panting as she lay writhing beneath his mouth. Whatever was eating away at her insides was doing the strangest things to her breasts. They were tingling and the nipples were so sensitive that when he reached up a hand to touch one, she cried out and something happened inside her that seemed to go on and on and on, pulsing with the most delicious feeling she could never have imagined. As that sensation became even more intense, Takoda pushed himself over her and he impaled her on the thick heat of his shaft.

There was no pain--only a slight stinging--but how the man filled her! She felt stretched to her limits and yet the pleasure seemed to start up again when he began moving inside her and before she knew what she was doing, she had thrown her legs around his hips and was meeting him thrust for thrust.

Takoda's hands slipped under her rump and he lifted her up, positioning her so that his plunges were controlled and measured and as gentle as he could make them despite the fact he wanted to pump as hard and as fast inside her as he could. She was heavenly tight around his throbbing member and so slick and so precious as the waves of her release milked him. He was not all the way in her and when he finally pushed, finally seated himself as deep as he could go she shrieked and clawed at his back, bucking beneath him, thrashing her head back and forth as another wave of intense pleasure claimed her.

"*Ayai, hishnae,*" he whispered against her throat. "*Ayai!*"

She felt him go perfectly still inside her then his shaft began to jerk--once, twice, three, four, five times. She knew he was spilling his seed into her. She clung to him as he shuddered several times then laid down upon her, his full weight crushing her in such a pleasurable way, she could never have expected it. Wrapping her arms around

him, she held him with her chin atop his sleek dark hair and listened to their hearts.

“*Teshima, hishnae,*” he said, avowing his love for her.

“*Teshima, chianusko,*” she replied and, off in the distance, she heard one of his blood kin howling to the full moon sailing overhead.

Chapter Two

Chaska Dark Wolf was furious when he awoke barely at dawn the next morning to find his future father-in-law shaking him roughly, yelling at him to rise. He shook off the old man's hand and sat up, wincing at the wicked hangover that was crushing his skull. "What is it, *neshoko*?" he snarled, remembering to give the old man the title of father at the last moment.

"Where is your intended?" Kohana Windwalker demanded. He was glaring at Chaska. "She did not return to our camp last evening. Where is she?"

It took Chaska a moment to realize who the old man meant then he made the mistake of shrugging. "How would I know? She was not here."

Kohana lashed out with a hand that was quicker than the younger man could have anticipated and clamped his fingers around Chaska's neck. "Where is my daughter?" He shook Chaska.

Knowing he could not attack the old man but wanting to with every fiber in his being, Chaska put up placating hands. "I do not know, *neshoko*. I have not seen my betrothed for a week now." He attempted to put respect and fear into his tone when all he really wanted to do was curse the aged fool.

Mina's father let go of the younger man's neck and turned away. "Her mother is worried sick," he stated. "This is not like our daughter to be so thoughtless."

Not really caring whether or not Mina ever came home, Chaska flung the covers aside and stood up, not in the least concerned with his nakedness though he noticed his future father-in-law pursed his lips with annoyance. "Did her pony come home? Could he have thrown her?"

"No, the beast did not return," Kohana replied.

“Let me get dressed and we will go find Takoda,” Chaska said, padding over to the washstand to lean over the ewer and throw water into his aching face. “He is the best tracker among us.”

Kohana’s sensitive nose caught the whiff of spent body fluids and narrowed his eyes. “You have not befouled my daughter, have you?”

Chaska froze in the act of putting on his leggings. He straightened up, his eyes unblinking. “Of course, not, *neshoko*. Why would you think so?”

The old man nudged his chin toward the bed. “This place smells like essence.” There was deadly iron in his withering tone and accusation in his dark eyes.

His face turning pale, Chaska knew he could not lie to the old man. “I had a woman here,” he admitted and then with a careless wave of a hand he added, “a white slut suckled me.” There was deceit in his explanation but it wasn’t an out-and-out lie. The white whore *had* suckled him but he dared not admit he had thrust himself between her evil thighs. That would not set well with his future father-in-law and might well break the *Gahaota*. He did not need the wrath of the tribal council descending down around his ears.

The admission Chaska made concerning the white prostitute seemed to shock Kohana. “You could not discipline yourself enough to wait for the Joining, Chaska? It is less than a month away!”

Grinding his teeth as he settled his breechclout into place on his hips, Chaska gave the old man a steady look. “I have needs I would not have gone to your daughter to fill, *neshoko*. I have too much respect for your family.”

Kohana held the younger man’s steady gaze for a moment then nodded. “I would have castrated you had you despoiled her this close to the ceremony.”

“As we will castrate any man who might have done harm to her,” Chaska stated. He settled his blade in a sheath at his waist then sat down on the edge of the bed to pick up his footwear.

“Hurry up,” Kohana said. “We must find your brother and be about locating your intended.”

“Takoda does not stay in the barracks,” Chaska stated as he pulled on his moccasins. “He disdains the white man’s buildings.”

“As a good warrior should,” Kohana said, flicking his eyes with irritation over his future son-in-law.

Clenching his fists, Chaska drove his nails into his palms, striving to quash the urge to pummel the old man to the floor. He liked his white man’s comforts and would not trade the soft mattress for a hard pallet on a cold floor.

Walking out of the barracks, Chaska led Kohana around the back to a row of tipis where lived several of the scouts who felt uncomfortable with the white man’s ways. Calling out to Takoda, Chaska frowned when there was no answer. He flung aside the flap and ducked inside, surprised to find the fire pit was cold and his brother’s pallet untouched. He felt a strange emotion tickling down his spine and, when he turned around to find the old man right behind him, he knew full well what the old man was thinking even before he spoke.

“She is with him,” Kohana stated, his face going stony.

“We do not know that, *neshoko*.”

“If your brother has laid his hands upon my child....” Kohana lifted his chin. “You will be the last of your line, Chaska. I will skin that wolf and tack his hide to my tent pole!”

“He would not betray me in such a way,” Chaska said but wasn’t so sure. He had known how Takoda felt about Mina for many years now though he never would have imagined his brother would act upon those feelings. Knowing his younger brother had been ashamed of him for bringing the whore to his room and then taking her as he had, worry began to crowd into Chaska’s brain. Surely the young whelp would have sense enough not to take Mina’s maidenhead.

“There will be a reckoning if Takoda Dark Wolf has compromised my daughter,” Kohana said. “This I promise you!”

* * * *

As the early morning rays of the sun spread over his face, Takoda slowly opened his eyes. For a moment he was at a loss to

know where he was but then the weight upon his shoulder and the soft silk of Mina's hair touching his cheek brought full awareness back to him. He squeezed his eyes shut. How could he have allowed her to spend the entire night away from her family? They would be frantic by now and thinking the worse.

Mina moaned and put a hand to her eyes. She, too, was disoriented and wondering why there was a slight pain between her legs. With that internal question came the answer at lightning speed and she sat up as though jerked by the strings of a puppeteer. Her head snapped around and she stared wide eyed at her lover. "What have we done?" she asked with a gasp.

Takoda sat up, as well, and reached for her, taking her into his arms. "We obeyed the dictates of our hearts, *hishnae*, and are one, now," he answered. He dropped his chin to the top of her head. "Have you regrets?"

She thought of his brawny body on top of hers, his hard cock inside her and thought of having that all the days of her life. The images that went through her mind made her blush. "*Nei*, Takoda," she said. "I have no regrets."

He put a hand to her breast and frowned. Her flesh was chilled for it was late in the month of September and although the night had been warmer than it should have been, they had slept in the open without clothing.

"I did not think, *hishnae*," he said. He reached for her dress but she shot out a hand to grab his wrist. He looked down quizzically at her.

"I ache for you," she said, her love shining in her eyes.

Takoda glanced down at her and winced as he saw the virginal blood smearing her thighs. He prayed he had not hurt her in his lust. "We will have many times to enjoy one another after the Joining," he said, trying to be practical and good but the moment he looked back up into her dark, dream-inspiring eyes, he was lost. He bent his head and fastened his mouth to hers.

Their bodies fit like two halves of a whole and as she stroked his cock for a moment before he thrust it inside her, he felt such

happiness he thought he might well die from it. His heart was filled with love for this woman--as it had been since they were children. To know she belonged to him, to glory in the fact that he had been her first--and he hoped would be her only--and to realize she held affection for him made him giddy with delight.

With her lover sliding vigorously in and out of her sheath, Mina was overflowing with love for the warrior. Her hands were on his broad back, her heels hooked around his thighs, and her nipples being abraded by the friction of his chest against her. His weight upon her sent spirals of sheer enchantment coursing through her body. He was big and he was heavy and the way he pressed her to the ground made her feel like a real woman. She was like a moth flitting around the flame of his brightness and if she became singed by the heat of their passion, so be it. If she died from the forceful pleasure he was giving her, she would go to her scaffold a content woman.

Takoda flipped over to his back, drawing her over him so she was sitting astride his hips.

"What are you doing?" she asked, shocked to be in such a position upon him.

He gave her a wicked look then with his hands clamped firmly to her hips guiding her began to teach her the rhythm and the movement that would bring about their mutual pleasures.

"Slow and easy," he said, setting the pace for her.

At first she was a bit clumsy but then she fell into the rocking motion, learned quickly the art of sliding up and down the pole of his sex, and when she threw her head back, he reached up to cover her sweet, up thrust breasts with his palms. He kneaded her, rubbed the flat of his palms around her nipples, his fingertips barely grazing the lush mounds.

"Umm," she moaned.

"You like that?" he asked.

"*Ayai*," she whispered.

"I enjoy pleasing you."

Her long hair fell onto his wrists like a waterfall of black silk. It slid along his arms and where it touched him, his flesh tingled. He

was disappointed when she flicked it behind her back carelessly, yet the moment its length touched his thighs, he groaned with pleasure.

Despite her moan of protest, he moved one hand then the other to his mouth and drew his thumbs into his mouth, wetting them then he moved them to her nipples to fan across them from side to side.

“That feels so good,” she told him and as he felt the first tightening of her vaginal muscles, he took her nipples between his fingers and squeezed, twisting them lightly, plucking firmly at them.

“Takoda!” she shouted and began bouncing on his belly, her long hair flicking around her shoulders.

Takoda grunted each time she came down hard on him but his own enjoyment was rapidly swirling toward him. He could feel the itch beginning, the burning, and the *need*. His hands slid down her sides and locked onto her hips and with every contact their lower bodies made, the deeper the ache bloomed in his cock.

The waves of release came upon them at the same moment and as her sheath tightened around his rigid staff, his rod pulsed within her, and they both cried out, the mutual enjoyment vibrating through them at such a high level, it made them dizzy.

* * * *

The two ponies were paused atop the hill as the riders looked down on the encampment. Campfires were spiraling into the air, womenfolk were about drawing water from the stream, cooking, going about their everyday business. A few children were scampering around in the early morning light from the rising sun but there was no loud laughter from the children out of respect for the old ones still in their pallets.

“I am afraid *hishno*,” Mina said, overjoyed at giving him at the title of her heart of hers. Her own heart was hammering in her chest for she knew what her mother and--more importantly and frightening--her grandmother would say about her having been out all night.

Takoda reached over to take her hand. “I will go before the tribal council and explain, *hishnae*,” he said. “I will take the blame for this.”

She shook her head. “I am more at fault than you. Had I

returned home”

“They’ve seen us,” he said quietly. “Isn’t that your *lohnei nesheka*?”

Mina recognized her grandmother pointing at up at them and winced. Her *lohnei nesheka* had a viper’s tongue and used it with deadly skill. Not even her husband, Mina’s *lohnei neshoko*, could stand up under the barrage once *lohnei nesheka* built up steam. “She will flay me to the bone for this,” she said with a groan.

“Have heart, *hishnae*,” he said and drummed his heel against his pony’s flanks to set it into motion.

It seemed all the tribe had come out to stare at them as Mina and Takoda entered the camp. The only ones missing were Mina’s father, their chieftain, and Takoda’s eldest brother, Chaska. There was stark disapproval on the faces of those they passed and not one word, not one sound to accompany the slow clip-clop of their pony’s hooves. Mina felt as though she were naked under the scrutiny of her people.

Halting his pony before the tipi of Kohana Windwalker and his wife, Wasula, Takoda threw his leg of the animal’s head and slid to the ground. He held his hands up for Mina, his face stern when she would have balked at him helping her down. Putting her hands over his arm bands she braced herself as he swung her from her pony.

Wasula Windwalker said nothing to her daughter, merely pointed to their tipi and Mina ducked her head, casting Takoda one last look before ducking under the flap.

Takoda held his head high before the Windwalker women--mother and grandmother--as they glared at him with steely eyes that made him acutely uncomfortable. It was known all across the plains that the women of the Kochodol tribe were far more unforgiving and vindictive than their men. Generations before, it was into the hands of the women that prisoners were handed for torture for it was said the women were more sadistic and cruel than their male counterparts.

“It is a good morning,” Takoda said, giving the women the traditional greeting.

Neither spoke to him--no one did--and when Mina’s mother folded her arms over her chest and narrowed her eyes, he felt the hairs

on his arms stir.

All around him, the people were giving him looks that were meant to quell, to cause unease, and it was working. He felt as though a heavy, wet blanket had been thrown over his shoulders.

"I will go before the tribal council when all the elders have arisen," he told Wasula. "I will ask for a *pashoni* between us, Chaska and I."

At a mention of the *pashoni*, a contest of honor, there were mumbles from those gathered. A *pashoni* was only requested when there was a matter of principle involved.

Wasula lifted her chin. "By what right do you seek the *pashoni*?" she asked, her tone hard and unforgiving.

"I should not speak of it in public," Takoda said and the mumbling grew louder.

Zuzela Windwalker, Mina's grandmother, also stood with her arms crossed. She was giving the young man a steady stare that made his flesh crawl. When she spoke, he swallowed hard.

"The council is convening in the *montaikane*," Zuzela said. "Go before I take your manhood from you myself!"

Takoda glanced at the ceremonial lodge and saw the elders entering. He nodded to the women with respect then squared his shoulders, taking a deep breath as he headed toward the *montaikane*.

Wasula and her mother-in-law exchanged a long look and only a handful of the people who were not watching Takoda Dark Wolf, saw them smile. The smiles lasted only a few seconds and the twitching of their lips a few seconds more before the women ducked down and went into the tipi to confront Mina.

Almost immediately, a messenger came from the *montaikane* and the Windwalker women--grandmother, mother, and daughter--left the tipi for the lodge. When they left half an hour later, Mina was in tears, her arms held firmly by her mother and grandmother as they escorted her back to the tipi of her father.

When Kohana Windwalker and Chaska Dark Wolf rode up an hour later, it was to the sight of the entire tribe except for Kohana's womenfolk hovering outside the *montaikane*.

“The tribal council is meeting,” Chaska said unnecessarily. He flicked a nervous look to the man riding beside him.

“*Ayai*,” Kohana agreed as though he expected as much. “Is that not your brother’s pony before my tipi?”

Chaska looked that way and when he saw the big black stallion, he winced. “*Ayai, neshoko*.”

Wasula Windwalker emerged from the tipi she shared with her husband and two daughters and came toward her husband. Her face was without expression although her eyes glowed with a light that set off an alarm in Kohana. He reined in his pony and dismounted, handing the reins to a young boy who had come running at his approach.

“I must speak with you before you go in to the *montaikane*, husband,” Wasula stated. She swept her eyes over Chaska without greeting.

Kohana flinched. When his woman used the white man’s word instead of *tutishno* for his relation to her, it did not bode well. “Can it not wait?” he asked impatiently.

“*Nei*, husband, it can not,” she replied.

Sighing, Kohana inclined his head. When his wife, his *tutishno-a*, bid him walk with her, he sighed again. He felt the weight of the eyes staring after him and it made him tense. “Is he before the tribal council?” he asked.

“He is,” Wasula replied. “Awaiting your judgment.”

Kohana clenched his fists. “What was he thinking?”

“I warned you,” she told her husband. “You and Ohanze Dark Wolf would not listen when I told you of the *otahee* both Peri Dark Wolf and I had when Mina was born. The father of Takoda is as much to blame for this as you.”

“Women’s dreams,” he scoffed. “Such do not have meaning for warriors!”

“You should have listened, husband,” Wasula said. “This would not have happened had you and Ohanze paid attention to the dreams his wife and yours experienced.”

Kohana made a rude noise. “Dark Wolf and I did what we

thought best for our firstborns. We wanted an alliance between our clans and....”

“And now you have one,” Wasula said. “Takoda has asked the *wamanhano* for Mina’s hand and the elders have agreed.”

At the mention of the tribal council, the warrior groaned. “*Ayai*, now that our daughter is spoiled for Chaska!” Kohana snarled. “The *wamanhano* can do nothing else!” He shook his head then clapped his hands to his temples. “Chaska will be broken hearted. He will have to beat his brother and....”

Wasula threw back her head and laughed. “Beat his brother!” she repeated and her laughter grew louder. When her husband reached out to grab her arm and shake her, she gave him a pitying look. “Husband, Chaska will not be brokenhearted and he could no more take Takoda in a fight than I can take wings and fly.” As her husband started to protest her words, she held up a hand. “*Tutishno*, Chaska betrayed our daughter with a white whore. He first opened the door and then Takoda closed it behind him. There is no honor with Chaska and much with his brother. Do you not see?”

“*Ayai*, I know Chaska let the white woman draw upon his reed, but....”

“The white woman did more than draw upon Chaska’s reed and he did more than let her,” Wasula stated, all mirth gone.

Kohana’s eyes narrowed. “You know this for truth?”

Wasula nodded. “Mina saw it with her own eyes.” She reached out to stroke her husband’s bare shoulder. “What if the whore had been diseased? Chaska would have brought that evil to our daughter.”

The warrior’s shoulders dropped. “This is not good. He did not tell me the entire tale.”

“Did you think he would?” Wasula asked.

“He did not lie,” Kohana defended Chaska. He hung his head. “Yet he deceived me.”

“Takoda would not have deceived you in such a way,” Wasula said. “He is an honorable man who is willing to take our daughter’s punishment upon his own shoulders rather than allow me to cane her for her thoughtlessness.”

Kohana lifted his head and turned to give his wife a hard look.
“He said this?”

“He had the *wamanhano* send for us and made the offer.”

“Does Mina know what this means?”

“She does. She begged him to retract the offer but he would not. I say to you again that Takoda Dark Wolf is an honorable man.”

“What am to do, *tutishno-a*?” he questioned.

“Go to the *wamanhano* and declare your judgment,” she replied.

“Which should be ...?”

“Accept Takoda Dark Wolf as your son-in-law. Have the ceremony to Join them this night and then hope if she has conceived, it will be a boy child.”

Kohana groaned. “She could have his seed even now in her belly.”

“All the more reason to have them Joined before the new day begins,” his wife suggested.

* * * *

Takoda looked up as Mina’s father came into the *montaikane*. The chieftain’s face was hard and set, his eyes two black marbles devoid of warmth. Getting to his feet, he bowed his head before the anger he felt radiating from Kohana Windwalker.

“*Nashino peha kae, Nehato Kohana*,” he told Kohana, admitting to his chieftain that the matter was his fault. “*Nashino tovoho hotahee tchuni pesha*.”

“Ayai, you will take the punishment for my daughter,” Kohana declared, “and you will Join with her this night!”

Though intense joy shifted through Takoda’s heart and soul, he could not afford to show it before the *wamanhano* or the irate man facing him. “It will be my honor to Join with your daughter,” he said.

Chaska was then invited into the *montaikane* and was given the verdict of the tribal council. He tried not to look relieved that he would not be forced to Join with Mina after all or that he would not be required to fight his brother. After casting Takoda an irritated look, Chaska was told to leave the lodge but not the camp.

“Your brother must stand his punishment. You will watch,” Kohana said.

Chaska nodded, gave Takoda one more look--of gloating this time--then exited the lodge.

When Takoda came out of the lodge ahead of the *wamanhano*, every member of the tribe stood waiting. He tried not to look about him for Mina for he did not want her present at his punishment though he knew her family would insist upon it. When he saw her standing between her mother and grandmother, he sent a fleeting smile her way.

“He is a brave man, your Takoda,” Mina’s grandmother pronounced. “I would not mind having him warm my blankets on a winter’s evening.”

“*Nesheka--Oxacha!*” Wasula gasped at her mother-in-law then laughed. The two women exchanged knowing looks then both wiped the grins from their faces.

Mina’s eyes were red and she was trembling. She had lost her heart to Takoda Dark Wolf in an evening’s time and seeing his wrists lashed to the *hotaheen*, the punishment pole, with rawhide strips she wanted to fall to her knees, rend her clothing, and tear at her hair, trilling the ululu of a grieving woman.

“Stand up straight. Put back your shoulders! Be as brave as your man,” her mother hissed at her. “See how he keeps his head high? Are you not as honorable as the one willing to take your pain upon himself?” She reached out to brutally pinch her daughter’s arm.

Biting her lips to keep from crying out at the unexpected hurt, Mina clasped her hands in front of her and kept her eyes on Takoda. Already the *estahno*, the warrior designated as punisher, was uncoiling the bullwhip that would stripe the flesh of her lover’s back.

“Such a vile custom we have taken from the white man,” Mina’s grandmother said then turned to spit on the ground. “A split cane would be more respectable.”

“And would better have mirrored the punishment Mina should have received,” Wasula agreed.

Since the *estahno* was left handed and threw the braided

rawhide thong over his opposite shoulder, the first lash cut Takoda from right shoulder to left hip as it came down. Takoda's body jerked at the contact, but he made no sound. He shifted his legs farther apart to brace himself, his breathing slow, even and deep. Those watching closely saw his fists clench before the second hit but his facial muscles never moved. Each time the lash descended upon his bare back, his body involuntarily slammed against the pole but not once did he betray the pain he was enduring. Twenty times the thong fell to break open the skin of his smooth back and twenty times blood ran in rivulets.

When the *estahno* ceased and stepped back, coiling his blood-stained whip into a loop, it was Kohana who stepped forward to cut the rawhide binding Takoda's wrists. Though he said nothing to the young man, he did catch Dark Wolf's eye and gave him a quick nod before turning away.

His back on fire from the lashing, Takoda turned to face the people of his tribe. He held his head high, his shoulders back though that action caused him great agony. He chaffed his wrists—beaded with blood from the tight rawhide--and swept his gaze to his intended.

Mina heard her grandmother order her to Takoda's side, but she would have gone without the demand. She was shaking as she neared him and tears were gathering in her eyes again. He was pale and had to be in great pain, yet he was smiling at her, standing with one hand held out to her. As she slipped her hands into his, he drew her to him, holding her lightly.

"It's all right, *arechi hyegahaota*," he said softly. The nickname he had given her was so sweet on his lips.

"By this man's pain has he claimed my daughter for his own," Kohana said to those gathered. "This night will see their Joining! Rejoice with my family!"

A loud ululu went up from the people and at last smiles showed on the faces of those who were pleased at the outcome of this day. Those who were not pleased--Takoda's father and grandfather among them--remained stony faced, though they cheered the couple as was traditional lest the man and woman be cursed by the Great God and

no fruit come forth from their union.

“I am sorry,” Mina whispered as tears fell down her cheeks.

Takoda put a finger under her chin and raised her head, thumbing away her tears with his other hand. “There is nothing to be sorry about,” he said. “I have what I have wanted all your life.”

She looked up into his handsome face and felt the earth shifting beneath her feet. She longed to have his lips upon hers but that would have to wait. Such intimacy would be frowned on by the Sun People.

Chaska came to his brother and gave Takoda a bland look. “I did not want her to begin with,” he said in a low voice. “It is no hardship I suffer now.”

“I know,” Takoda said and realized from that day forward there would be antagonism between him and his brother.

Chaska sent Mina a hateful look and walked away.

“You should watch him, *chemioha*,” Mina told her lover. “He is a vindictive man.”

Takoda was too happy to be worried about his brother’s wounded pride. He wanted nothing more than to have his back washed and salved and when his mother and his sisters headed toward him, he eased Mina away from him. “I must go, but I will see you this night for our Joining.”

Mina ached to be the one to care for his wounds but already his mother and sisters were there, elbowing her aside and taking Takoda’s arms to lead him to their tipi. Though one sister gave her a frown, the other three gave her broad smiles and one even winked. The last she saw of her intended that day was as his grandmother swept aside the tipi’s flap and he disappeared inside to be attended.

Chapter Three

Takoda could not lie on his back in his mother's tipi for the lash marks were a burning, stinging pain that made it difficult for him to remain still as he reclined on his belly. He wished he could writhe on the pallet to relieve the agony but did not want to show such weakness to his new wife. Mina was removing her Joining dress and the click of the quills and beads as she lovingly folded it made him wish he had been able to take it from her as a husband should. Instead, he had chills that clicked his teeth together and a fever that had made him weak. So there he lay wishing for something that would never be. He lifted his head to see her slipping an unadorned buckskin dress over her head and sighed deeply.

"Your mother has instructed me to smooth the salve on your back before you go to sleep and again in the morning," Mina said as she sank down beside him on the pallet. "Is now a good time?"

He sighed, wrinkling his nose. "As good a time as any." He was keenly aware of her as she knelt there and he ached to take her in his arms, to make love to her as was his right and duty.

She dipped her fingers into the salve made from dried white cedar leaves, honey, and melted bee wax. As gently as she could, she spread the salve over the wicked slashes on his back, her lower lip tucked between her teeth to keep from crying at the sight of his ruined back. Her touch was light, but she knew she was hurting him. His fists were doubled against the fur of the pallet as he tried not to make a sound. When she was finished, she went outside for the small pot of bee balm tea she had brewed for him. She came back in with a tin cup.

"Here, *tutishna*," she said, calling him husband for the first time since their Joining. "You must drink this for the fever."

He rose up with teeth clenched until he could bring himself into

a seated position. He was striving not to show her how much he hurt and even managed to cross his legs as he took the cup from her. "I hate tea," he complained, taking a cautious sip.

Mina smiled. He was as naked as the day he was born and shivering despite the unseasonable heat of the late September night. "The tea will help the chills, as well."

Takoda looked longingly at the buffalo robe he wished he could drape around his shoulders but he doubted the feet of the skin would help the agony along his back. He took another sip of the tea, trying not to pucker his face at the taste.

She looked down to see his shaft arched upward and was amused that he could be lustful after the ordeal he'd gone through. She lifted her head to meet his eyes and cocked a dark brow at his innocent look.

"A man will be a man, *hishnae*," he told her. "I have no control over him."

She was sitting with her legs bent to one side, half-reclining on her elbow as she watched him struggling to down the tea. "What can I do to help you gain the upper hand with him, then, *tutishna*?"

He grinned, lifted the cup to his lips, but said nothing.

Mina scooted over beside him and laid her hand on his rigid staff. "Poor thing," she said. "He is afraid of me."

"Afraid of you?" Takoda repeated, blinking. "Why would you think so?"

She trailed her fingers down his length from tip to scrotum. "Ayai, he's afraid of me. See how he quivers when I touch him?"

"He quivers for want of you," Takoda told her in a husky voice. Her hands were torturing him in a delicious way that set his blood to pounding.

"But sees how he tries to escape my touch?" she complained as his shaft jerked toward him.

"Perhaps he should have a tongue lashing for doing so," he said and then winced, squeezing his eyes shut. He remembered too late her repugnance at touching him in that way, but she surprised--and shocked him--when she merely grinned and bent over his lap, taking

him into her mouth without a qualm.

Takoda nearly choked on the tea in his mouth. "Mina!" he gasped.

She slid her lips from him for just a moment and looked up at him. "My grandmother said you would like this and that there was nothing wrong with drinking from a man's reed."

His eyes wide, he could do nothing but stare at her as she lowered her head again to run her tongue along the head of his cock, slipping her tongue in the slit. He shuddered and nearly dropped the cup. All thought of the pain networking his back was forgotten. Tossing the cup away, he buried his hands in her unbound hair and held her head lovingly as she suckled him. Closing his eyes, he let his head fall back--his breathing shallow and quick--as her lips worked their magic upon his willing flesh.

Mina had not been as keen on doing what both her mother and grandmother assured her would be of great benefit to her husband this night. The sight of Chaska with the white prostitute was a bitter memory in her mind. But Takoda was not Chaska, and he would never ask anything of her that she might find offensive. She said as much to her mother and grandmother as they had dressed her for the Joining.

"*Ayai*, but he will be hurting and you would not want him to go to sleep with his shaft hard and hurting as well," Wasula had told her daughter. "He will be aroused all night with you at his side and be unable to mate with you. That would be cruel. A warrior needs his rest."

"I don't think I can...." Mina had begun to protest but her grandmother had taken Mina's chin in her hand and stared into the young woman's eyes.

"The essence from a man's reed is salty and slick, but it is not a bad taste once you are accustomed to it. All women do this for their man. There is nothing shameful in it," her grandmother Zuzela had encouraged. "Know that you will be helping him to rest better by drawing the essence from him and giving him pleasure at the same time."

“When a man’s essence builds up in his reed,” Wasula said, “it causes great discomfort. Such discomfort makes them as testy as a wounded bear.”

“You would not want your *tutishna* to feel more discomfort than that he already feels upon his back.”

Mina had given in to the older women of her family and had decided they knew more than she. Surprised the taste of her husband was not loathsome after all, she began experimenting with the swirl of her tongue over his flesh, running the tip along his length and across his sac.

“*Teshima*,” he told her, loving her all the more for doing what she was doing. Her lips were setting him ablaze with passion and it was all he could do to remain still as she plied her sweet, moist tongue over his straining flesh.

Taking him deep into her mouth--striving not to gag as the broad tip of him touched the back of her throat--she suckled hard and heard him groan, felt him shiver. She cupped his sac and lightly kneaded as her grandmother had instructed and when he jerked in her mouth, she slid her lips up and down his shaft as her mother had suggested.

He could take no more of such exquisite torment without spilling his seed and the last thing he wanted to do was flood his woman’s mouth with what should be in her tight sheath. Gripping her head, he pushed her away, barely noticing the surprised and wounded look on her face.

“Take off your dress,” he said, struggling to get to his knees.

“Takoda....” she began.

“Woman, take off your dress!” he said, his heart racing, his breathing coming in brutal little pants.

She did as he ordered, yanking the dress over her head. He was on his knees with his teeth clenched. When he told her to lie down, she quickly obeyed.

Completely ignoring the pulling, tearing pain rippling down his back, Takoda bent over her and captured one breast between his teeth. He lightly nibbled her then pulled the warm bud deep into his mouth

to suckle her as hard as she had suckled him.

Mina gasped, her hands shooting forward to grab his shoulders but caution intervened at the last moment and she lowered her arms. She grabbed handfuls of the fur and dug her heels into the pallet, arching her hips as her husband laved her nipples--licking and flicking and suckling with abandon.

His shaft was as hard as flint and prodding the side of her thigh as he swung one leg over hers and nudged her thighs apart with his knees. He switched to her other breast and suckled her, rubbing his stomach against hers, dragging his cock between her thighs.

"*Hishno!*" she cried out.

He slammed his hands under her hips and dug his fingers into her soft ass. Lifting her up, he impaled her on his shaft--going down to the root of it within her. His blood was boiling in his veins, his body aching for hers, and as soon as her hot, slick moistness tightened around him, he began to pump into her as though there was no tomorrow.

As much as she wanted to throw her legs and arms around him, she knew she could not. She did not want to hurt him, to do more damage than had already been done to his broad back.

Takoda dragged his mouth from her breast and slanted it across her mouth, piercing her with his tongue as his shaft pierced her cunt. His was a need that sent tremors through him and when that first ripple of intense pleasure took his woman, he increased his rhythm, his speed, his depth until she was grunting with each hard stroke into her velvet heat.

Forgotten was the humiliation of debasing himself before the tribal council. Forgotten were the looks of disapproval and outrage from his family, the disappointment on his father's and grandfather's faces, the anger on the visage of his eldest sister. Forgotten was the knowledge that Chaska would hate him forever and that there would now be no more closeness between them. Forgotten was the shame of having his wrists tied to the *hotaheen* and the agony that had slapped against his back, tearing open flesh, and slicing into muscle. It was all forgotten as he thrust into his woman--his wife--and felt her keen

pleasure undulating over his shaft. All that mattered was satisfying her and reaching for that illusive paradise that was beginning to spread warmth through his upper groin and spill down his hard shaft.

Mina was in the throes of a release so intense it brought down the stars from the heavens to dance before her eyes. Her womb was clenching, her sheath locking tight around Takoda's rod, rhythmically squeezing him, milking him, and drawing his essence deep into her. She felt him pulse and then the heat of him spilling into her.

"Mina!" he cried out, frantically pushing against her until the last ounce of him squirted into her channel. He released a long breath then fell upon her--spent and gasping for breath--his entire body quivering with the intensity of his climax.

How she longed to hold him but all she could so was put her hands on his upper arms and squeeze to let him know how she felt. She, too, was struggling for breath, for her own release had nearly taken off the top of her head with its strength. When he finally pushed off her and collapsed on his belly beside her, she turned to her side to stroke his hair.

"*Teshima*," she said but realized he had fallen asleep as soon as his head had touched the pallet from a combination of the dream tea and the passionate mating that had driven them.

Snuggling close to him to keep him warm, she laid her head on his shoulder and was soon fast asleep beside him.

Epilogue

Takoda Dark Wolf caught his wife's attention and pointed to where the children were playing. The little boys were racing one another, the little girls playing with their dolls, but one boy and one girl were apart from the others. It was to these two Takoda directed his wife's gaze.

Huya-Na Lone Star was face down in the mud puddle, his angry little face covered in the dark brown goo, his hair plastered with the stuff. The six year old looked as though he could pummel the girl child pointing at him and laughing but Takoda knew better.

"Like mother, like daughter," Takoda drawled and drew his wife into his arms.

"Did she push him down?" Mina asked.

"What do you think?" he countered, rubbing the bulge of her distended belly where their third child was nestled.

"Tahcawin!" Mina called out to her daughter, shaking a chastising finger back and forth when the little girl glanced her way.

"Leave them alone, *hishnae*," Takoda said. "Had we been left alone, perhaps I would not have spent my growing up years a lonely man."

"And bringing up that loneliness every chance you get," she said with exasperation though it pleased her he still remembered those years without her. "Enough is enough, *tutishna*."

The warrior nuzzled the side of his woman's neck. "It will never be enough," he stated.

Their child took that moment to kick its father's hand and Takoda laughed. "A boy," he said. "No girl could kick that hard."

A cry rang out and he turned to see his eldest daughter pull her foot back and kick Huya-Na.

"Shall I still leave them alone, *hishno*?" Mina teased. "Or will

we allow Tahcawin to maim the poor boy?"

"Just watch," her husband suggested.

As the grownups observed, Huya-Na seemed to have had enough of Tahcawin's actions and when his tormentor would have kicked him still again, he caught her ankle and jerked. She went down with a loud oomph sound. Before she could scramble up, the little boy was over her, pinning her down.

"The little imp," Mina said and started to call out but Takoda slapped a hand over her mouth to prevent it.

"Watch," he repeated.

With a giggle, Huya-Na bent over his captive then swooped in to give her a sloppy kiss on her cheek.

Tahcawin shrieked as though someone had prodded her with barbed wire. She flailed trying to get up to attack her captor, snarling at him, kicking her legs.

The little boy hopped up, moving well back from Tahcawin's lashing feet. He ran towards his friends, turned to jog backwards for a moment or two, laughing and pointing at Tahcawin as she shot to her feet and screamed her anger at him.

Takoda removed his hand and chuckled. "A brave warrior is our little Huya-Na," he said.

"Oh, by the Sun!" Mina gasped, her hand going to her mouth.

Tahcawin stomped her foot then came running over to her father, her arms held up to him. He scooped her up and asked what was wrong.

"*Neshoko*," she stated, her legs locked around his waist. "Did you see what that awful boy did?"

Takoda nodded. "*Ayai*, just as I saw what you did to start it," he answered.

"He asked for it," Tahcawin snapped.

"I think not," her father said as he bounced her on his hip.

"You should try to be more ladylike, little one."

Tahcawin folded her little five year old arms around her pudgy little body. "*Neshoko*, I demand a *pashoni* from Huya-Na Little Star," she declared.

“Girls can not have a *pashoni*,” her mother told her.

The little girl’s eyes were red hot with rage. “Then what can I do, *nesheka*? How can I make him pay for offending me?”

“How did he offend you, *pasha*?” Mina inquired.

“Did you not see, *nesheka*?” Tahcawin exclaimed, reaching up to scrub at the place where Huya-Na had dared to put his muddy face.

“We saw,” her mother said with a twitch of her lips.

“I demand he pay for what he did!”

Takoda ruffled his little girl’s hair and whispered something in her ear. Tahcawin giggled then hugged her father fiercely before kissing his cheek.

“You understand?” Takoda asked.

“Ayai, *neshoko*,” she said, blushing. When he set her down, she ran off to join her friends.

“What did you tell her?” Mina asked as she slipped her arm around her husband’s waist and his arm went around her shoulders.

Takoda laughed. “I told her to marry him and make him look at her as her father looks at her mother.”

Mina rolled her eyes. “You did not.”

“I did,” he said. “Would I lie to you?”

“No,” she replied. Her gaze went to her oldest daughter and she saw that Tahcawin was giggling with her friends and they were all looking to where the boys were playing hoops, Huya-Na, with them. She saw her daughter heave an exaggerated sigh and dramatically put her little hands to her heart.

“She loves him?” she asked in an incredulous voice.

“And he loves her,” Takoda agreed. “With all his young heart. We should encourage that love, *hishnae*, and let it thrive as it is meant to.”

“But they are too young,” Mina complained. She put a hand to her belly where the latest Dark Wolf offspring was giving her reminders he or she was there.

“They are older than we were when you set your cap for me,” he told her.

Mina looked up at him. “Was that what I did when I tripped

you into the mud puddle?"

He smiled. "You tell me."

"You were looking at me," she defended her actions. "I took offense."

"I was always looking at you," her husband reminded her, "because you were the prettiest girl in the tribe."

"And you were the handsomest boy," she said, laying her head against the side of his chest.

He stopped and turned, slipping his crooked index finger under her chin. "You are still the prettiest girl in the tribe," he said.

"*Teshima, arechi hyegahaota.*"

Mina closed her eyes as her husband defied tradition and propriety by lowering his lips to hers. His kiss was a promise of all the warm autumn nights to come.

The End

GLOSSARY OF THE KACHADOL PEOPLE

Betrothed (female to male)	<i>chemioho</i>
Brother	<i>ciye</i>
Chieftain	<i>Nehato</i>
Contest of honor	<i>pashoni</i>
Daughter	<i>pesha</i>
Dream	<i>Otahee</i>
Father	<i>neshoko</i>
Father-in-law	<i>Nechoko-Oxacho</i>
Four Winds	<i>Gahaota</i>
Girl's coming of age	<i>awihya ishnaha</i>
Grandfather	<i>lohnei neshoko</i>
Grandmother	<i>lohnei nesheka</i>
Heart of my heart (female)	<i>hishnae</i>
Heart of my heart (male)	<i>hishno</i>
Husband	<i>tutishno</i>
I am at fault	<i>Nashino peha kae</i>
I love you	<i>teshima</i>

I (male/female)	<i>Nashino/nashina</i>
Intended (female to male)	<i>chianusko</i>
Little Whirlwind	<i>arechi hyegahaota</i>
Man	<i>Washono</i>
Moon	<i>Kecha</i>
Mother	<i>nesheka</i>
Mother-in-law	<i>Nesheka--Oxacha</i>
No	<i>Nei</i>
Punishment pole	<i>hotaheen</i>
Punisher	<i>estahno</i>
Punishment	<i>Nashino tovocho hotahee</i>
Sister	<i>diya</i>
Son	<i>pasho</i>
Sun Dance	<i>Kachono</i>
Sun People	<i>Kachodol</i>
Sun	<i>Kacho</i>
Tribal Ceremonial Lodge	<i>montaikane</i>
Tribal council	<i>wamanhano</i>
Warrior	<i>Kishnabo</i>
Water	<i>Wuchina</i>
Wife	<i>tutishno-a</i>
Woman	<i>Washina</i>
Yes	<i>Ayai</i>
You will be mine	<i>Nyhimaiah Washina</i>
You	<i>tchu</i>
Your	<i>tchuni</i>