

Hazin looked down at the village. He didn't believe it when he heard that there were people who looked like him on this side of the sea, but the boy told him truth. (but when he heard about the long azure robes they wore covering their bodies and the ugly horses they rode, he abandoned his misgivings and rode north with little care for the settlement he was leaving behind.

Hazin was in the New World. A newly discovered land that had never been walked by man until 6 years ago. It was here where he had fled his slavery and where everyone fled for a new life. It was inconceivable that a Mesa tribe had crossed the ocean for this trip, considering boats were never used by his people. They were shepherders after all. His cautious nature would usually control his decisions. On any other day, he would observe these people from a distance before interacting. But today he saw his tribe and he smelled the goat stew of the Mesu, he could not help but ride forward and throw caution to the wind.

When he was a few yards away a group of 5 young warriors stepped forward with staves ready. Upon seeing Hazin they were confused. The man rode a

beast dissimilar to what they knew but no one could mistake his tan skin and hazel eyes for anything but a Meza man, but it wasn't clear he was Mesu.

“What business do you have here stranger?” the shortest and boldest among them asked.

“What business does a cub have questioning a leopard?” Hazin asked.

The men behind the small warrior smirked at that.

“Are you truly as mighty as a leopard?” the man asked angrily.

“Are you seeking to find out?”

The men behind him stopped smiling then and moved to step beside their companion.

“Who are you to speak to me like this?”

“He is a man that we still tell stories of to this day.” An older man walked forward to stand in front of the young warriors.

“He is a friend of the Mesu?” the short warrior exclaimed.

“He has guarded the Mesu, fought for the Mesu, born and raised among the Mesu. He is my brother.” The old man opened his arms and waited to be embraced.

Hazin froze in shock before embracing the man. They broke apart but held each other's hands as they stared into each other's eyes. Hazin thought he

had reached the point that nothing made him shed tears again. But seeing that man's smiling face his eyes could not help but leak silently.

"It is really you Adam. I never expected to see you again."

"Neither did I expect to see you again Hani. I thought you were slaughtered in that great attack."

"No brother, I was captured and made a slave."

"By the Urmans? Surely not. No one who is captured by them is ever seen again."

"I escaped and not too long after made my way here."

"Surely you are favored by God."

Hazin felt hate grip his heart. It had been a long time since he had felt anything other than sadness. He responded as kindly as he could.

"If you knew of my trials and tribulations you wouldn't utter such words. His stony expression made the men nervous.

"Forgive me, brother, I find it remarkable that after many of our warriors perished anyone who survived was blessed. Let alone to be able to return to the tribe after separation. Such a thing is no doubt a heavenly working."

Hazin held a pensive look before nodding his head. "I bow to your reasoning brother. Perhaps things are as you say."

The silence was awkward afterward. It was clear Hazin disagreed with the elder and had more words he wished to say but didn't. This was considered maqit. When two disagreed, to allow things to be unsaid was to allow

disharmony to root. Hazon knew these things, but he preferred to keep his mind to himself.

“It is good to see you. And I'm sure you feel the same about me and the rest of the Mesu.” Adam said never losing his large smile.

“Right, Hazin said.

“I still feel awed. How did a tribe of the Meza find itself in this land? Why are the Mesu here?

Out of all the tribes of Meza, we are the most like the leaf. When we saw the winds of destruction blowing we fluttered to the shores. When the winds blew even that far. What could we do but fly beyond them.”

Come let me show around.”

Hani spent the next few hours being guided along by Adam. He met many villagers. Most were unfamiliar after so many years. Young children who had become men and women, a few who could tell apart from others because of the resemblance they had to their parents. But many of those parents were missing and none of his fellow warriors were around. It did nothing to alleviate his sadness, but many were excited to hear that the legendary Hani had returned.

“It seems we have lost many people.”

“In our great exodus, many were left behind. “

“It is a tragedy.”

“Indeed, but we have a new land and a new opportunity. With you a legend like you suddenly coming back the people will be inspired! Adam declared.

“Is Khadija still around?” Hazin asked hesitantly.

For the first time, Adam’s brilliant smile dimmed.

“She knows the next world now Hani.”

Hazin looked at the ground and was silent. Before long Adam spoke.

“Hani-”

“I am called Hazin now.”

“Hazin is not a name for a person.”

“It perfectly suits me.”

“Well the Bedu know you as Hani, we tell the children stories of Hani, and we owe much to Hani, so you must go by Hani.”

Hazin looked unconvinced.

“You have introduced me to most of the villagers as Hani, so when I declare my name change it will be a simple affair.”

“I cannot announce that the legendary Hani now wishes to be called sad. You saw our people's faces when I announced you. You give our people hope during our trials and tribulations.”

Adam reached and cupped both of Hazin's hands into his own.

"May you persist as Hani for a while?" he asked while staring into his eyes.

Hazin did not want to agree, but looking at his sworn brother he could not deny him.

"I can be patient."

"Good," Adam smiled and embraced him.

"I will be sure that you are properly recognized and thanked."

Hazin walked through the village at dawn. He had spent the night in a small tent on a cot. He did not mind. It was better than most of his sleeping conditions over the years. He would be patient. Proper recognition could only mean an elder position. He did not look forward to the ceremony, but afterward, he would be gifted goats, a larger home, and a wife. It was forbidden for a man to know a woman until he became an elder, so this was a moment many looked forward to after retirement. With the hope of a better future, Hani slept.

The next week was similar to the first day. Hani would be introduced to others and then discuss with Adam.

"The council of elders seems to have not changed."

"The Ruling Council has mostly survived, the junior warriors council is new of course, the center warrior council is excellent, and the senior warriors council are younger than usual, but possess much sense beyond their years. As far as those retired, there are many apprentice elders you will find familiar."

Hazin grunted. He wished to complain that they survived while others did not, but it truly meant the warriors had done their jobs.

"How long will my apprenticeship be?"

Hazin was prepared for six years. Most apprenticeships lasted over a decade, but he was sure his sworn brother could cut it down.

"One year."

"Are you playing the hyena?" Hazin asked in shock.

"Also, I have talked to the senior warrior council, and they would be honored to have you as an elder."

"A warrior's council is a simple matter," Hazin said dismissively. "How do you plan on getting me to Ruling so fast?"

"Most of the Rulers remain the same, but Muhammed and Isa have been promoted."

"Truly?"

Adam nodded with a smile.

“But even that is not enough to make the difference.”

“The argument is that you have suffered an ordeal that has prevented you from taking the necessary time to apprentice to be a Ruler and that during this ordeal you have gained much wisdom and many insights. That you need only be reintegrated with the clan.”

“Surely there is opposition to this.”

“Indeed, most of the council is unconvinced.”

“How can we convince them.”

“It will be up to you to impress upon them your wisdom. Many doubt that you are beyond a goat-brained warrior, blessed by the God.”

Adam stared at Hazin waiting for a response, but Hazin was quiet. Hazin was seething. He thought he had learned self-control, but there was something about the mentioning of God that made his mind flame. His thoughts became maqit. At the moment, he wanted nothing more than to punish Adam.

“Hazin... these are not my words, please do not take offence.” Adam said worriedly.

“I am not so easily offended brother, he said solemnly. “I am simply reflecting. A still tongue can lead to moving thought.”

He knew a simple proverb should put his brother at ease.

The worry on his brow smoothed out.

“Of course,” Adam said, “Tell me what is on your mind.”

“I can impress them. There are many things about not only the new world but the world at large that is unknown.”

“Tell me and I can be judge of whether such things will be impressive.”

So Hazin spoke of all he had witnessed over the years and Adam left the tent bewildered and filled with disbelief.

A few days later, Hazin walked to the circle of elders. He was not sure he was ready for this task. It seemed like he was a slave just yesterday and now he was scheming just like the old days to be a Ruler. But the world changed like the seasons. If one wasn't prepared for the unexpected then they would only be a victim to its designs.

It wasn't long before he sat down next to Adam among the other Elders. It wasn't long after he sat down that someone began to take his measure.

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“Tell me what thoughts travel through the grasses of young thought Hani?”

Old Man Yarrow asked. Hani had been introduced to the elders and briefed about them by Adam. Old Man Yarrow was easily the most vocal and the hardest to impress.

“It's a shame,” Hani said, “In this land of immigrants, everyone is a stranger. How can one know friend from foe?”

“Hold your tongue, give with ease have open arms, and you’ll find yourself with only friends.” Old Man Yarrow responded with one of the Mesu’s sayings.

“And for those who would harm us? Our foes?”

“Foes... this is not the battlefield, and you are no longer a warrior. To sit among elders, one must realize that life requires a less violent approach.”

“And if there are those who approach your life with violence?”

“Then flutter away or defend yourself until your brothers can save the day. Truly it is simple.”

Hazin smiled and shook his head. There was no point in speaking when a man had his hand over his ears. He had seen the world outside of the tribe. People with strange appearances and evil customs. You could become a man’s sworn enemy having done him no wrong and be pursued until either he was dead or you. And brothers weren’t always around to protect you.

The others waited expectantly but he refused to speak.

“Surely you have more to say.” Old Man Yarrow said.

“No.”

The man was flustered.

“How can I correct your vision if you will not allow me to see your view and show you the improper ways in which you see?”

“Be calm. I see the world one way. You see it another. Would you have me blind for it?”

“If two can’t see eye to eye, then either one submits to one’s vision or loses an eye.” Yarrow spat.

Hazin met the cool gaze of Old Man Yarrow.

“Even though our minds differ we are all one alike.”

“How can two be of different minds and the same tribe?” OMY asked.

Hazin had no answer for that. They tried to get him to answer again, but this time he remained silent.

He met like this with the elders many times over the week. They discussed matters of war, love, prosperity, and all manners of living. Old Man Yarrow argued with him fiercely each time. It seemed he did not approve of Hazin or his views. It would be easy to say the right things, Hazin had never forgotten the proverbs of his people, but he had different views of the world now.

Views he wouldn’t hide. In between that, meeting the new generation of warriors, preparing to join the warrior council, and finding a bride, he did not have much time to worry about what the Rulers thought of him. Not until Adam came to visit.

“I do not wish to disturb you brother, he said from outside the tent, “but I have business to discuss with you.”

“Business or no business you are always welcome in my home Adam.”

“I thank you for your hospitality.”

“I welcome your presence.”

Adam stepped into the tent, and they exchanged a few more pleasantries before being seated in the grass.

“So what is this business?”

“The elders have spoken on their opinion of you.”

“Is it well?”

“Not as good as the goat, but some are intrigued by you and your novel ways of thinking.”

“What about Old Man Yarrow?”

“He hates you.”

“For my views or because I dare to argue with him.”

“Everything about you. And many others feel uneasy about the new ways you think. It is not of the Mesu.”

“That may be true, but neither is sailing around the world, or horses, or the permanent houses that I see the elders enjoying. It seems that they wish to settle here and that is entirely against the ways of the Meza as a people.”

“Do you seek to convince them are maqit or do you seek to convince them you are worthy?”

“I can do both.”

~~Hazin shot suspicious stares at everyone that walked by the tent. Causing many visitors to mutter and pass by the usually busy tent. After a few hours of less business the man sent Hazin away.~~

~~“You still seem to be traumatized by this foreign land. People see that you are worried and thus they are worried. Go home and rest. Then come to the fire tonight and we’ll join in harmony to put your mind at ease..”~~

~~Hazin smiled and nodded, but there was a thread of anger in his heart when he departed.~~

~~He could not express it however, it was maqit.~~

Now that he was a retired warrior, Hazin could now choose a bride from the eligible women among the tribe.

The ten women in front of him ranged from 15 all the way to 27.

Of course, there were rules regarding who he could choose. He had to be able to provide the requested dowry. All selections must be approved by the elders.

Anyone not of mature age could not be selected without the approval of parents and the bride-to-be. Hazin would never choose such a young woman

because it was forbidden for them to consummate their marriage until the girl had reached the age of maturity. He wanted someone who could slake his lust now. Not only did he desire them to be of age, but to have experience with a man. So, he chose the oldest woman there Makkah.

Naturally, all were shocked when he chose Makkah. Although she was beautiful beyond reason, she was a widow and without family backing. There would be few advantages gained from such a union. Hazin cared little about tribe politics. He did notice the look of dismay on Makkah's face was mirrored by a short warrior in the crowd. The very same man he quarreled with on arrival.

"Who is that man," he asked Adam.

"That is Ishmael. A splendid warrior who will be retiring within the next few years. In the running to become an elder among his generation, it's most likely he will win."

Adam led him to the place that was to be his home. It was a shale building. Made of clay but sturdier and significantly larger than a tent. There were not many buildings like this yet, but all the other elders possessed one. As much as they spoke of tradition it seemed they too embraced change.

On the inside, he had a large living room and a bedroom. This pleases him greatly. He had wanted such a home himself, but the skill to make one eluded. His hands were better shaped for war. He stalked out of the building after Adam left and went to the warriors' tents. He had a conflict coming up and needed some intelligence.

There was to be a week of wooing following the selection and a feast to celebrate if the two ended up together. Hazin used to dream of this week. Whispering baklava sweet words to his future wife. Reality never parallels his dreams, however.

Instead

"I am curious as to where you've traveled?"

"Many places few of my own will."

"Do you wish to share your experiences?"

"No," Hazin replied.

It had been like this the past few days. Makkah trying her best to be cordial and curious about the man who expressed interest in being her husband. But Hazin never spoke first and if he did speak it was abrupt and lacking substance. He would not even look at her. He seemed to be lost in thought staring into the distance.

Makkah balled her hands in frustration.

"I'm starting to believe I have done something to offend you. "

"Why give you face when you plan on rejecting me," Hazin asked.

“How could you know my desires or plans.”

“Maybe it’s the way that you look at Ishmael.”

“There is nothing abnormal about that. I admire all the warriors.”

“And the way he stares at you?”

“I have not noticed.”

“Interesting that you do not notice his desires, have you noticed him sneaking into your tent late at night.”

Makkah startled.

“Surely you have mistaken a mere plea for help...”

“Help to what? Caress your insides? Release his seeds?”

“Surely you’re not implying...”

“Implying that last night I was beside your tent. That I heard everything. That I saw him enter and leave your home at inappropriate hours.”

He shook his head vehemently.

“Of course not. If such information were made public, any chance for him to become an elder would be ruined. Your name and his name would be ridiculed and scorned. I would not do such a thing to my future wife.”

He turned to face her fully and looked her in the eyes with a cold smile. And in that gaze, he showed his callousness, his apathy, and his cunning.

“You will be my future wife? Right?”

The woman looked angry to be treated, so but upon meeting his eyes she looked down in defeat.

“Of course, I would be happy to marry such an esteemed elder as yourself,” she said sullenly.

Hazin laughed, but he did not smile. His laugh was not a laugh, but a device of mockery.

“There’s no need to look like there’s dung in your stew. There are many benefits to being partnered with me. You will see.”

After some pleasantries, the two departed their separate ways. The rest of the week of wooing they did not meet. Hazin did not care and after not showing up the first two times Makkah got the message. He did not need to woo her. In the conflict of hearts, he had already won. The week passed quickly and on the Choosing Day, Makkah and Hazin both agreed to be partners. Hazin could not help but chuckle at the shocked look on Ishamel’s face.

The celebration passed by in a blur. Hazin ate plenty but paid little attention to the dancing and drums, He desired to leave and did so at the soonest opportunity with Makkah in tow.

When they were alone in his bedroom, Makkah began to undress with a look of misery on her face. Hazin did not want an unwilling woman in his bed and

was turned off by how pathetic she behaved. He grabbed her by the chin and forced her to look him in the eyes.

“Makkah, when I said there were benefits to this arrangement, I meant that I am a solitary figure. I do not desire a woman by my side at night.”

“Does that mean you do not want to make love?” her miserable face looked up.

“Make love? No, I desire to fuck you. But after performing such duties I do not care “What bed you sleep in or who’s bed you sleep in.”

“I can go to him?”

“Yes”

“Even this very night?”

“You can go to him every night. Provided I am satisfied first.”

“Truly, you would have me love another man?” she asked confused and hopeful.

Hazin laughed that not laugh of his.

“Love what a strange notion. I am uncertain if my heart can do such a thing as loving. And any love that you could summon for me would surely be wasted. Give it all to him instead. I will take what I can see. Does this arrangement please you my wife?”

“Yes,” she whispered.

“Good, now enough pouting, and let’s finish quickly so you can run off to your lover.”

“Right,” she said.

While she didn't smile, Makkah was much more enthusiastic afterward to Hazin's relief. When she left, he couldn't help but think that he had spoken more in the past few weeks than he had in years. He had seen how effective his talking was and perhaps finally understood how a master of the tongue was more powerful than a master of the fist. It was almost time for the elders to make a decision about whether he could become an apprentice Ruler and this conflict would take all of words.

"You act arrogant. You sit in silent judgment of us. As if you know something we do not. As if we are ignorant. What knowledge do you possess? What wisdom have you gained from the other world."

Old Man Yarrow was yelling in Hani's face and spit flew all over. Adam had scripted what Hani should say and do, but Hani had decided to go with his instincts.

"What knowledge do I possess? Enough to enlighten an elder. One whose ears are not too old to hear. "

Old Man Yarrow grew red after hearing this and Adam could do nothing, but shake his head.

" I have much wisdom, but the most important thing I have learned is this; Life is cruel. In this world, you must take lest everything you own be taken away. Your food, your family, your freedom."

"Hani-" Adam interrupted.

“Did you not lose a generation of warriors? Did you not lose wives and children? The very land that birthed our ancestors.”

“God tests us with hardship, but in the end, all will be sweet as baklava.”

Hani snapped.

“What is sweet about illness? What is sweet about burying loved ones? What is sweet about death?”

“This sweetness you mention I have not seen, but the cruelty of the world I have seen. You must prepare for it.”

“It is plain to see you are war-struck you have the worries of those who have seen too much war. Rest assured; our warriors will be able to deal with anything that comes our way.”

Hazin grew silent and unwrapped the package he had on his back. Many thought it was a staff or sword, but were quite puzzled when it was fully exposed.

It was a couple feet long black, seemed to be hollow with a hole in the middle. The narrow barrel ended in a box.

“What is that they said?”

Hazin was quiet. He knew now that without threat or reward his words were pointless.

He picked up the gun and aimed it at a goat that calmly grazed in the clearing. All were silent and waiting to see what he would do with the object.

When he pulled the trigger; the goat fell dead. The men around him stared in shock and confusion. Hazin knew what they were probably thinking. When he

had first heard a gun, it seemed as if the voice of God had roared in anger and struck a man dead.

“What horrid thing is that? A man asked in fear.

“It is a gun. Similar to a bow and arrow.”

“Are you playing the hyena. A bow and arrow. This is....” words failed him.

“A bow and arrow take strength, skill, and practice. If one can simply point at something and destroy it so utterly, then even a child can be deadly.”

“These are as commonplace in the new world as goats in the old. When I speak of being prepared it is not because I am a war-struck fool,” he glanced at Old man Yarrow and sneered, “It is because we were caught unawares once and nearly lost everything. I do not wish for that to happen again.”

Hazin turned around and walked back to his home. If this did not serve to convince them of his wisdom and ability to help them survive, then all the other things you had learned would likely not.

Adam visited Hazin’s house and Hazin opened the door.

“My brother, it is a pleasure to see you again this evening, may I come in?”

“Skip the pleasantries and tell me what is happening.” Hazin snapped.

“It seems that your plan worked. The council is more convinced of you. I would say that there are only two holdouts now.”

“Really? Is Old Man Yarrow one?”

“Of course. You made him look the fool.”

“I’m unworried. In the end, he will follow the crowd, how about the other?”

Adam was quiet.

“Who is it? Hazin asked. His patience was worn thin of late.

“Brother there are many rumors of you. They say you share your wife with a warrior, that you look at the Mesu with hatred, and that you reject our ways.”

“Am I a villain when a man acts maqit with my wife? Do you think that I hate you, brother? Did I not do the ceremonies? Tell those who have doubts about me to pose their questions and I will answer honest.”

“Tell me, brother? Do you still believe in God?”

“What does that have to do with anything?” Hani yelled.

“I am the other holdout.”

He paused and stared at Adam and for the first time in a long time, he was uncertain.

“But Adam, brother, surely you wouldn’t stand in my way. You were the one that set me on this path. The one who assured me I would become a Ruler.”

“You speak truth, but I am not certain what I did was the wisest.”

“Do you doubt my wisdom, my strength, my tenacity, my ability to lead?”

Adam shook his head and asked,

“Do you doubt God?”

Hani could hold it back no longer.

“WHY SERVE A GOD WHO HAS ABANDONED ME?!”

Adam looked Surely you are not of those who stray away from the straight path once you encounter challenges.

“Challenges! I was enslaved! My master was cruel. Barely fed. Barely hydrated. Endless work in the mines. I thought I would die chipping away at rocks. One day instead of chipping away rocks. I chipped away the guards with that pick. And I did not stop until I had killed my master. And the world knew the might of Hani Ibn Amad once more. “

“Brother..”

“Shortly after I escaped and came upon more Urmans. They befriended me and then betrayed me. Capturing me in my sleep and tying me up. They laughed cruelly at me and taunted me. However, they did not know I had learned the ways of the Boneless and that such bindings could not hold me. I strangled each one that very night.”

“Brother..”

“They say the wise man makes the same mistake once. I made it again and again. Trusting these Urmans and countless others. How silly of me. Outside of the tribe, the world is much different. No God rules. Just greed and selfish intent.”

“Our ways are superior and our God is as well. Surely you see that brother.”

“Your God is dead.”

“Hani, God created us, God drives us, God loves us.”

“shut up.”

“God loves you Hani.”

Hani wrapped his fingers around Adam’s throat and squeezed. If Adam would not stop talking then he would shut him up. Adam clawed at his hands, but Hani’s strength rivaled that of many. There was no goats bleating, no tent, no Adam, no Mesu. It was just him and that damn Urman that talked incessantly about God and him shutting up, just as he did that last one. Wake shot through the back of his head as something struck his head, and he was strangling his sworn brother. He turned to see Ishmael swinging a club and then there was nothing, but darkness.

Hazin sat on his knees before the elders. He was too weak to stay up by himself, but Ishmael held him. All around them the Mesu congregated and stared. They had tied his hands behind his back and forced him to kneel in order to humiliate him. The position didn’t feel humiliating; beaten, tied up, and kneeling. It was too familiar, as familiar as herding goats. What was strange was the look in his sworn brother’s eyes.

Adam spoke,

“This man is not of the Mesu. I ask for forgiveness for inviting disaster upon us. From now on we will accept no outsiders into this village. As for Hazin. He is a treacherous hyena. He shall be banished for impersonating one of your slain comrades and for his actions against the people here.”

Then Adam turned and said more quietly to Hazin.

“For pretending to be one of us you shall be banished and never to return again. A man’s wife is his life, however, you acquired her under false pretenses. For this, you shall not be allowed to bring her with you.

The people in the village center muttered. Many whispered about how lenient the punishment was. But the words of the elders were absolute. Such a thing as an elder being banished or imposters infiltrating the village was unheard of. They did not know how to react, so many didn’t.

Hazin was half walked, half dragged to the edge of the village, and pushed out.

Three young warriors followed him as he walked for an hour before they finally cut loose his arms. Ishmael did not say anything to him he simply walked back towards the village with the other warriors in tow.

As Hazin walked he thought about his future. He did not love his wife, but she was his and he would get her back. No man could have his property. He would strike a deal with the other settlers. There were many Urmans among them. Surely, they would not pass on the opportunity to obtain so many domesticated sheep. He was not the God of the Mesu, but on that day, he would make them show them fear that some being who never showed himself could not.

For the first time in a long time, Hazin smiled.