

Marinia, Zhinari, Koji, and Matt

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*Princess Marinia and her friends in th first story to contain them all-
ok, more chapters....i'm really slow at typing, so this is alot for me.*

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1 - The Squirrle camp

Marinia & Zhinari
{and Koji, and Matt}

Chapter 1

Marinia sat in the early twilight gently coaxing fresh flames from coals left by the previous night's fire. Zhinari was still asleep and Marinia was relaxing in the few moments she had alone. Breakfast was nearly ready when her companion finally awoke. They ate in silence, contented by each other's presence. They had only the few most essential traveling supplies with them, and after picking up their meager belongings, they set off. "I suppose it shouldn't be much longer before we reach Kellnaria." Marinia stated. "Good. I can't wait for us to whop their stinky lizard butts! We'll give them something to think about for generations to come - if there are any survivors!" Marinia shook her head. "Our task isn't to annihilate their entire species just to..." "Retrieve the Black star memory devise for espionage headquarters... but I still plan on whooping them-So there." Marinia sighed. "Ah, well, at least there will be no lack of excitement with you around." "Yup, that's the idea."

Two small squirrels scurried up and stopped in the path right before the two travelers. One bowed, "M'lady, an' Zhinari." Marinia replied; "Yes Scarramaser?" "Honorable Leaders, it appears that entrance through the small western gate will not be possible. Shall we hold back until the situation is changed?" The princess shook her head. "More than like our Young spy has gotten himself caught. No, the stakes now include a young Garfe's life, too. Zhinari, if you think we can, I believe we should attempt scaling the fortress walls themselves - tonight." "Alright, Marinia, as long as you want to take the risk..." Zhinari's wry remark stood as a painful reminder of Marina's past experiences with climbing up vertical surfaces. Marinia lowered her eyes at Zhinari's remark then raised them again. "Then it is decided. We climb at Sunset." "Ok...as long as you think you can." the squirrel who had not said anything previously now stepped forward. "Come. Night will not come for several hours yet." She spoke in a high, squeaky voice. "We will take you to our camp."

They soon entered a clearing overridden with squirrels. There were no campfires, but many different tents could be seen on the ground as well as in the sturdier branches of the nearby trees. On one of the edges of the clearing sat a few Garfe members and most-humans. Marinia and Zhinari, no longer accompanied by the first two squirrels, started across the camp. The multitudes of squirrels parted like the red sea before them nearly instantly. Ever since rescuing them from incessant infighting, all most-humans were now revered to as "Honorable Leaders". The squirrel's activity resumed as they sat down alongside their own kind. "Oh, hi Marinia, and Zhinari! It's good to see you again!" A wolfkit shorter than most Half-humans, though still taller than Marinia greeted them. "Ah! Koji, my dear friend, where have you been?" "Never mind that," Zhinari cut in, "Koji, Where's Princess?" Koji sighed and shook his head. "He was sent to open the small western gate." Zhinari rolled her eyes. "Oh, GREAT. We have to rescue him again?" "Apparently."

Marinia looked directly at Koji. "Who let him be sent this time?" "Well, he was kind of the only volunteer." "It's ok. We'll get him on our way out tonight." Marinia Sighed. "Tonight?" Koji exclaimed. Zhinari raised her eyebrow. "Miss Brave-heart here decided we would climb the wall tonight." Koji looked a little concerned. "Marinia, not again... remember what happened last time?" Marinia heaved another sigh and glanced down. "Yeah. I know." She gazed deep into his eyes. "Koji, I have to do this."

There were no more disputes.

2 - The Fortress

Chapter 2

Darkness crawled toward the horizon burying the sinking sun in the gnarled clouds that fringed night's black cloak. The stars hid themselves among the ominous clouds as Marinia and Zhinari crept toward the fortress's southwest wall. Zhinari carried a dark climbing rope wound tightly over her shoulder. There were two walls to cross, the second of which was nearly double the height of the first. Marinia placed her hand on the cold stone and closed her eyes. Memories of slipping and falling off of cliff faces and into holes flooded into her mind, and as they overwhelmed her body, she shuddered. A gentle hand on her shoulder snapped her out of it. "Hey, you ready?" "Yeah." her voice trembled. "You don't have to do this if you don't want to." "I know." she paused and looked at Zhinari. "Lets get started." her companion nodded and skillfully slung the padded grappling end of the climbing rope over the first parapet; it caught the first time and she tested it's security with her own weight. Once assured that it was safe, she stepped aside and handed the rope to Marinia. "You go first." She sighed and, gripping the rope tightly, began the ascension. Zhinari followed. She felt a little safer when she reached the top and descended the other side. Stealthily, the pair walked across the wide open area between the two walls. Soon the dark shroud of the second wall loomed over them. It was clear that the rope would be unable to reach the top of this wall. Zhinari tied the grappling end of the rope around her own waist and passed the other end to Marinia. With both ends secured, they started this more treacherous climb. Zhinari went first, and once the rope between them was nearly taught, Marinia started up. At the second repetition of this cycle, when Marinia was nearly right beside Zhinari, a gate down below them slammed open and a whole brigade of soldiers poured out. Both climbers froze as two bluefire torch spotlights were brought out. The shouts of the enraged commanders drifted to the frozen figures' ears. "Come on! Get that Bluefire going!" one shouted. "No, No! You idiots! Shine it that way, not in my face!"

A moment later two blue tunnels of light started roving up the wall. "They know were here." Zhinari hissed. Marinia drew a surgery-sharp dagger from her healer's pouch. "What are you doing?" Zhinari inquired.

"If they catch me, you can still complete the mission." she replied quietly. "Are you Insane?!?!" Marinia did not reply but swiftly sliced the rope from around her waist. She clung to the wall for a moment and looked into her friend's eyes. "Go on without me. I'll see you later." in one moment she released her hold on the stones and fell. A moment later the two blue circles of light ceased wandering aimlessly and locked to trace her fall. Shocked by her companion's action, Zhinari couldn't pry her eyes away from the sight. Finally she did after what seemed like an eternity and she slid the rest of the way to the top of the wall.

Marinia braced herself for impact. How many times had she fallen in the past and come so close to death and now she did so of her own free will? The ground came upon her and everything was black in an instant.

Zhinari crept over the parapet and took stock of her surroundings. She was standing on a long, narrow catwalk that traced the edge of the entire fortress wall. A ways down, she could see a set of stairs leading directly from the wall top to the maze of a building itself. The inner fortress had started out as a single, simple barracks building, then, as the population of lizard warriors grew, so did the fortress. Soon it became a labyrinth of towers and buildings all connected and eventually so stacked and meshed together that they formed one giant structure.

Zhinari cautiously inched open the doorway, releasing a dull light created by the torches burning in their

sockets along the hall she had revealed. Other than the burning torches, there was no sign that anyone had been down this passageway since long before the torches themselves had been lit. Cobwebs hung from the sockets and ceiling, and dust sat dormant just about everywhere. Zhinari moved skillfully down the hall, careful not to disturb the dust. Mentally she recalled the maps of this place she had studied with Marinia just the night before. Down a few more halls and corridors, through several secret doors and unused rooms and she would be able to fetch the elusive blackstar devise that was so vital to defeating the lizard nation once and for all.

Slyly she drew her scimitar, a grim grin creeping over her face. Marinia's sacrifice would be duly avenged. Defeating this great fortress single handed would surely be written in the tales and legends of the generations to come among all good beasts.

Marinia's eyes edged open to reveal a blurry image of the room she was in. The small cell was obviously part of a tower's basement. As her vision cleared, she could feel the complaints of numerous bruises and cuts that decorated her body. Gingerly she touched her head and drew back suddenly in pain. Peering sharply at her now wet hand in the dim light given by some torch down the dark passageway she saw blood. She cringed and clutched her hands about her body to brace herself against the pain. Suddenly, voices started echoing down the hall. A familiar voice defiantly growled against the deeper voices of the burly guards. "Grrraugh!! You'll never be able to keep me forever! My friends will come and..." a guard broke in, laughing haughtily. "Good luck, little furry one! We captured your friend trying to rescue you- she fell from the wall trying to get in just tonight! The klutz!" Matt's voice changed drastically from rage to defiance, though he could not hide the tremble of concern that now grasped him. He knew that neither Marinia nor Zhinari would attempt such a climb without the other, and neither would leave the other behind unless faced with extremely drastic circumstances, and even then...the voices drew nearer. "Where is she? Is she ok?" One of the guards jeered at the other, "Oh, the fuzzy one is worried about his girlfriend!"

"Is that so?!" "I bet he wants to see her!" they approached her cell. Marinia's eyes shone with hatred at the cruel treatment of her friend. The guards grinned and slammed the unfortunate wolfkit into the unforgiving iron bars that formed the door to her cell. "Have a look!" Matt's eyes met Marinia's in a brief, sad glance before He was dragged off down the hall to his own cell.

Marinia cringed as the guards slammed the door to Matt's cell and shrunk back as they sloshed back by hers on their way back to the kitchens for a good drink. Well, at least she knew where Matt was when and if Zhinari made it down here and broke them out.

Koji stood under the ridge of trees at the edge of the forest peering out at the top of the second fortress wall. It was around 2:00 in the morning, and the signal was over an hour overdue. Something must have gone wrong- this wasn't like Marinia- Zhinari maybe, but not Marinia. He turned to the squirrel scout who had been waiting for the signal with him. "Go back and tell the others that the sign is not here yet. Something must have gone wrong." The squirrel nodded silently and disappeared into the branches. Koji turned back to watch for any sign of the two torches that would tell when Marinia and Zhinari would be leaving from a small door in one of the sub-levels in the raised platform of earth on which the fortress stood. Surely they couldn't be too much longer...

Zhinari slid her blade swiftly across the throats of the two guards in front of the small chamber in which the evil Lizard-Master gloated over the blackstar devise. At the moment, the Lizard-master was sound asleep in his bedchambers. She stood silently gazing at the eight-pointed star-shaped memory chip, and then she snatched it and slid it swiftly inconspicuously into her bag. Two drunken lizard-men sauntered down the hall- it was time for a change in guard duty. "Drat." Zhinari muttered under her breath as she slid against the door frame. The two fresh guards saw their slain comrades. "What the?!?" "Come on!" their footsteps squelched hollowly as they charged up the hall to investigate. Just as they were within

inches of the former guards whom they were supposed to replace, a terrifying voice emanated from the shadows of the doorway; "One more move and you join them." the two froze and the bolder one spoke. "Who goes there?" "Dare you question the Empress of the World?!" Zhinari charged and impaled the speaker then slashed his companion in one swift movement. After casting the four carcasses out a window, Zhinari headed toward the dungeons several floors below. A whole brigade of soldiers followed the lizard-master at full speed. Laraff was mad. How could his own guards allow a stranger to break in and steal his most precious possession? He had awoken to a strange dream and decided to check on the Blackstar device and what did he find? Nothing! Even his guards were gone! "Right under my nose!" the enraged leader huffed down the hall in the direction Zhinari had gone. "You're all a giant pile of worthless slugs!" he kicked the soldier nearest him. Just then, he caught a glimpse of a figure slinking away down a corridor. "After it you stupid Buffoons! Don't let that spy get away!"

Marinia awoke sharply to the sound of footsteps flying down the hall. A moment later she thought she saw a shadow move. A familiar voice hissed out. "Matt? Are you down here? ...Princess?" "Zhinari?" Marinia whispered. "Marinia?!? They didn't leave you to die at the bottom of the wall? You're alive?!" Relief was vaguely evident in her voice. "Apparently..." Marinia mumbled as Zhinari loosened the crude hinges of the door that held her friend in. The shouts of soldiers in the distance down the hall announced their arrival. The door swung open, free of its hinges. "Come on!" Marinia hissed in her friend's ear. Zhinari looked back down the hall, a reddish yellow glow of battle fiercely emanating from her eyes. Marinia grabbed her arm. "There are too many of them- Come on!" They looked into each other's eyes for a second. The voices drew closer, snapping them out of their trance. Instantly active, they dashed down the hall to Matt's cell. Matt looked up dazed as they approached the door. Zhinari undid the hinges for his door as Marinia stood guard. Matt stepped out of the cell and stood beside Marinia. Zhinari glanced up vengefully in the direction of the approaching searchers. Marinia grabbed her again and hurried her off down the hallway with Matt in toe.

The dungeons were a maze of dark stone hallways and damp, long forgotten, unused cells. Marinia and Zhinari had carefully and thoroughly studied the map of the dungeons along with the maps of the rest of the fortress several days before they even came here, and they knew their way around better than even the soldiers who had spent their whole lives here. They soon came to a small abandoned doorway that opened to a short, narrow alleyway paved in stone. On one end was the old execution area, and at the other was a small old guard building atop which they climbed.

Zhinari slung the weighted end of the climbing rope over the top of the outer wall and stepped back. "Ladies first." she grinned at Matt. "Yeah", he smiled and started up the wall. He had just reached the top when a dozen or so soldiers burst from the door. "Hey! Stop Them! They're getting over the wall!" Laraff had personally lead a group of searching warriors through the dungeon's labyrinth, and now they came dashing across the courtyard.

Zhinari and Marinia spun around, weapons drawn and prepared to defend themselves. Quickly and skillfully they warded off the first wave of attackers. The enemy retaliated with an even larger group of fighters, and they warded them as best they could. Suddenly, from above, several well aimed chips of the stone roofing hurtled down and struck two of the lizard men and checked their charge. Matt grinned and poised two more makeshift projectiles. "Go! Go!" Marinia pushed her friend as two more of the deadly stones found their marks. Zhinari scurried up the wall and quickly grabbed two pieces of the crumbling tiles. "Nice work, princess," She stated as she flung the pebbles at the fresh surge of attackers.

Marinia pushed back several more lizards into their own ranks before she too started up the wall. The enemy drew back a little ways then a volley of spears and arrows flew in. As Marinia dodged a spear that narrowly missed her, an arrow pierced her side just above her hip. She set her jaw and finished the

climb. As she joined the others at the top, Zhinari flung a spear she had caught back at its owners. Matt threw another volley of stones as Zhinari moved the rope to the other side of the wall. Marinia snapped off the arrow head and removed the rest of the arrow from her body with a grunt of pain. Matt glanced at her, a little concerned. She threw the arrow's tip into the air, then using the long end she batted it back at their pursuers "Raaugh!!" she shouted out. The arrowhead lodged itself deeply into Laraff's arm, and he cried out in a painful rage. Zhinari and Marinia ducked down to avoid more flying weapons while Matt slid down the rope to freedom. Marinia went next; Zhinari, after disconnecting the rope from the top slung it over her shoulder and descended with the speed and agility of much practice. At the base of the wall, they looked around. They had descended from the southern fortress wall. In the woods to the left, Koji stood waiting. Marinia limped along as fast as she could with the help of her two friends. Koji saw them coming, and crouched in the bushes waiting. Once the three were within eleven feet of the trees, he ran out to meet them, and taking Matt's place at Marinia's side, he and Zhinari practically carried her under the cover of the trees. Laying her down gently against a sturdy maple, he looked at Marinia's face, glowing in a beam of moonlight. "What happened?" he asked, his voice quivering slightly. Marinia glanced down at her hand that had not left her side since descending the wall and shook her head. "I'll explain later...Zhinari? Did you get it?" Zhinari grinned and held up the blackstar device. "Yup." she fished around behind her right shoulder for a moment then held up a bag and a sword. "Aaaand I got your stuff." she handed it to Marinia, then suddenly reached around behind her back and drew out Marinia's medical dagger, "And this." She raised her eyebrow at her friend and handed it over. Koji caught the look that passed between the two close friends. "Ok, what happened?" Zhinari explained the whole incident to the two astonished brothers while Marinia cared for her own wounds. "Why did you do that?!?" Matt gasped at Marinia. "I had to." came her simple reply as she started to get up. Koji reached over and helped her up. He put his arm around her shoulder to help her balance, and they started back to the squirrel's camp.

3 - Rainforest trek and the end of the adventure

Chapter3

Inside the fortress, Laraff was fuming. Back and forth he paced, raging anyone and everyone unfortunate enough to get in his way. The single guard beside his door was doing his best to be unnoticeable as his master seethed. "The Idiots! The slimy little half-witted slugs! They're so blind, they couldn't find a huge red boulder in the middle of an empty field at midday!" he strode over to the guard. "You! Why aren't you tracking them down?" he grabbed the guard by the front of his chain mail shirt. "I...I...it would be impossible...in this weather..."he choked. "Grrraugh! You're just as useless as the others!" he shouted as he slammed the soldier against the wall and dropped him. Then he marched across the chamber to a window from which he could see the clouds reaching past the horizon. The door opened and a short, stubby and bumbling lizard dressed in scraps of capes sewn together in an upheavaled way scurried in. The lizard master spun around. "What do you want?!" "Your wound requires tending." he grumbled in a high pitched voice. Laraff mumbled in protest as he reluctantly sat down to allow the surgeon to attend the wound made by his own arrowhead. "Naw, naw, yew need to relax...three little half humans can't get far in the storm thet's brew'n outside", as if to emphasize his point, a bright flash of lightning lit up the room as well as the sky. "They tell me one of them is wounded. No, no. they certainly cannot be getting far." the Lizard master nursed his rage sulkily as he whined to his surgeon. "Maybe not, but how could they be allowed to escape so easily?" "Those responsible for being slow enough to let them escape are being punished with starvation. Down't worry. We will have the spies back soon enough." Laraff shook his head angrily and wrenched his arm free. "I certainly hope so-for your sake!"

Progress was slow and painful for Marinia as she was helped along by Koji and Zhinari. It had been hours sense they first set out, and despite frequent stops and the cover of trees, they had now been slowed to barely a walk by the ankle-deep mud and rain. They had sent Matt ahead to camp with the blackstar devise, and now they did what they could to follow. A bright flash of lightning illuminated the dark forest for a moment as rain poured from the sky turning the forest floor to slippery slime that was hardly navigatable for the two who were in perfect health and nearly impossible for Marinia. Suddenly she stumbled and collapsed to her knees in the soaked dirt gasping. Koji knelt down beside her regardless of the mud concerned. "Are you alright?" For a moment Marinia did not answer as she fought to catch her breath, and then looked into his eyes. She spoke in a whisper barely audible above the storm. "...It...it hurts so...so terribly bad..." she gasped and dropped her head, grasping her side with one hand and Koji's wrist with the other. "I...I can't make it...not now...not like this..." she took a weak breath and rested her head on her friend's shoulder. Together they sat oblivious to the rain that soaked them and the mud that soiled their clothing.

Zhinari stood under a tree a short ways ahead of them. She cared about Marinia, but when Koji was around the situation was often touchy and sensitive, so she preferred to stay out of the way. Instead, she occupied herself with trying to remember about how far the squirrel camp was from the fortress {{what herbs Marinia usually used to relieve pain}}. She knew that she could never remember something like that, especially sense she hadn't been paying attention *when it had been gone over {{when Marinia had done her healing}}, but it was better than doing nothing.

Koji awoke in darkness to a quiet, whimpering moan emanating from the huddled figure beside him. Marinia was asleep, head resting on his shoulder. He had always known her to be a strong, gentle, but iron willed person. She was usually able to care for herself, and though now, as she lay beside him and seemed so small, helpless and pitiful, he sensed her strength and protectiveness. Yet he also could not help feeling the pain that indwelt her body at the time.

A dark blue light lined the horizon, illuminating the outlines of every cloud, though still the storm raged on outside the small cave. Koji vaguely remembered Zhinari helping him carry the half limp, half asleep form of Marinia to a small cave she had found the night before when she had wandered on ahead.

Here Marinia had slipped into a deep sleep, still leaning on his shoulder.

Zhinari sat alone near the entrance of the cavern staring out into the rain. She was concerned, he knew, for she had not slept all night. After leaving Koji and Marinia in the cave, she had gone back to the trail and cunningly marked the way they had come so that none but the squirrel folk could find them. Now she had returned to wait with her friends.

Koji touched his forehead to Marinia's damp hair allowing the smell of a thousand woodland herbs and flowers to drift into his nose. She was the most extraordinary he had ever known, a close and trusted friend.

He couldn't let anything happen to her again- or so he hoped.

Matt swiftly beat through the underbrush. In the distance he could see three lantern torches marking the entrance to the squirrel's camp. As he approached, a disguised voice greeted him.

"Who goes there?"

Matt answered without hesitation, "One of the carriers of the blackstar."

Scarramaser squinted his beady eyes and peeped out from behind the log into which he had been speaking. Concern clouded his eyes as he spoke without bothering with the log.

"But where are the others?"

Matt shook his head.

"I'm not exactly sure..."

"Well, come inside and you can explain over a hot cup of tea."

As he stepped inside the largest tent in the clearing- the meeting tent- a petite squirrel hurried up to him.

"Land sakes! You're soaking wet! Come on over here and get dried off!"

Once settled and dry beside a small warm fire, he explained what had happened at the fortress- with a bit of exaggeration.

Three squirrel scouts were sent out, but other than that it was decided that a more extensive search would be delayed until it stopped raining-hopefully by morning.

Back in the fortress, the soldiers sat around tables in the great dining hall. Laraff strode around, glaring mercilessly at his horde. These were tough soldiers, war hardened, brave, and by no means foolish. Yet under even a glance from their master they cowered in fear. They had all seen his strength; his wrath was merciless, and once stirred, relentless.

"Somebody tell me how three small prisoners were allowed to escape?" he asked on the brink of calmness. A few of the soldiers shuffled nervously, but no one replied. A moment of silence passed before their master spoke again.

"I will tell you how. Not one of you was on alert. Most of you weren't even half-dressed!"

He was clearly disgusted.

"The guards were sleeping! If we had been ready, they would have stood no chance of escape!"

One particularly slow soldier spoke up.

"It was the middle of the night- most of us were asleep. What were we supposed to be doing? This

whole thing was a surprise to us!"

Mumbles of agreement rose throughout the room. Lizard Master remained firm.

"From now on we prepare for the unexpected!" He stated in a commanding voice. "You sleep in your armor. Keep your weapons at hand-even in your bunks. And no one assigned guard duty will be found asleep!"

The unfortunate guards who had been napping the night before lowered their eyes in shame.

"You will be alert, report anything unusual. Let nothing escape your senses." he glared around at his army for a moment with glinting red eyes. "Get out of my sight!" he finally shouted. The army didn't have to be told twice- soon Laraff was the only one left in the dining hall aside from a deaf slave girl who was cleaning the tables.

He soon marched off to his chambers to sleep for a while.

It had been a long time since Marinia had felt this weak. Slowly she awoke to a throbbing pain in her side. She was vaguely aware of Koji sitting beside her. She tried to move, but every part of her body screamed out against it. She lay her head back gasping.

Koji looked down at her and gently placed his hand on hers.

"Marinia?"

She looked at him through narrow eyes.

"Hey." she whispered then tried to sit up.

His arm caught her as she fell back.

A moment later, Zhinari walked in with some firewood to replenish the dying fire from the night before.

Marinia shifted her gaze from Koji to Zhinari.

"Zhari?"

The catlike figure came over and knelt beside her friend.

"How ya doing?"

Marinia smiled weakly.

"I've been worse."

She caught her breath sharply.

"Then again, I've been better."

Zhinari sat back and poked at the fire with a stick.

Marinia leaned back and rested her head on the stone face, eyes closed. Koji released her hand and brushed back a wisp of stray hair from her face.

Marinia lay still for only a minute before her eyes opened again.

"We should try to get back to camp," she stated.

Koji made as if to help her up, but Zhinari stopped him.

"We will do no such thing. Or at least you won't."

In response to Koji's inquisitive glance she explained.

"Marinia, you have been out cold since early last evening. You know I am no doctor, but anyone can see you can hardly even move."

"All the more reason to get back...they have more proper... healing facilities than this."

Just then, a small voice piped up from the cave's mouth.

"Milady's right, you know. Top hole facilities back at camp."

A short, straight postured squirrel scout stood in the doorway.

"Then again, it's clear milady's in no condition for traveling."

Koji, who had trouble remembering any of the squirrels names spoke up.

"And you would be?"

"Sarheemp." he replied.

“Not to worry,” He turned to Marina, “Your friend was only about 15 minutes behind me. He insisted on coming, so Scaramaser and a couple of higher-ranking scouts are guiding him here.” without pausing, he turned to Zinari.

“Nice job you made of marking the way- professional stuff.”

Matt came crashing through the underbrush, followed closely by his escorts.

“Hi guys! Nice hole you found!”

After a brief discussion it was agreed that everyone had to get back to the camp. Marina refused to be carried, and so after a long, slow walk she arrived with the others at camp, limping and leaning heavily on Koji and Kitara, who had met them a little ways down the vague path from the cave. Two scouts had gone behind to cover their trail.

The entire squirrel camp was in a dizzying flurry of activity as they arrived. Pillows, blankets, and all sorts of bedding was being donated and taken to a smaller tent in which a makeshift bed was being made for the injured princess.

She was soon lying atop a soft pile of the squirrel’s making. Once her wound had been cleaned and bandaged, she lay gazing at Koji who had never left her side.

“Go get some sleep.”

She smiled encouragingly at him.

“I’ll be fine now, and you deserve it.”

Koji smiled back and nodded respectfully.

“I will come back later.

Several weeks after the defeat of the fortress, Marina crept out of her chamber and into a small clearing outside of the camp to watch the stars. As she approached, she saw another dark form sitting alone on a rock beside the path. Zinari glanced over then looked back up at the stars as her friend joined her.

Koji awoke to silent darkness. He stepped out, Kiki, his cat bounding after him. Wandering down a path in the forest, he soon found himself in the same clearing as his friends.

They sat together that night, looking into the clear summer sky where shooting stars glided in a show seemingly exclusively meant for the three friends that night.

The End!!!!!!! lemme know what you think!!!!!!!