Danëh

by Jan Oda

“Don't do it, Danëh!”

“What other choice do I have?” Danëh kept cutting until the floor of the small hut was covered with hair and she could feel the cold creeping up her neck.

“Can you hold the mirror? I need to see what I'm doing.”

Mirah held it up, tears welling in her eyes.

“Don't, Danëh. It'll hurt.”

“I'm not afraid of the pain, honey.”

“Then why leave? I know they've hurt you, but it gets better if you stop protesting. Please….”

“It's not the pain I'm running from, it's the cage. I want to be free. Don't you miss home?”

“You won't be able to go home! It's the law! They had the right to mark us! And if we work hard, we can earn our freedom mark ourselves! Please Danëh, not like this.”

Danëh swallowed, but her hand was steady as she put the knife to her temple. She made a straight cut, all the way down to her chin. She repeated it twice, before dabbing away the blood welling from the cuts.

“Mirah? Does it still look like our tribal mark?”

Mirah glanced once at her face and swallowed. “I don't know,” she whimpered. “There's so much blood.”

Danëh took a deep breath. “It'll have to do, they can't know I'm a girl just by looking at my face.”

“You'll never pass for a boy. And then they'll kill you once they realize you're a runaway.”

“At least the law states that they'll *have* to kill me.”

She threw some more wood into the fireplace. Mirah started sobbing, hiding her face in her hands. Danëh caressed her shoulder, trying to comfort her.

“I'll need your help with this Mirah.”

Mirah shook her head.

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“Please? I can't live like this anymore. I need to be free.”

Mirah nodded slowly, but didn't look Danëh in the eyes.

Danëh slid off her dress, unveiling the tattoo that started at the top of her breast, twisting over her shoulder, winding down to her wrist.

“Remember, the whole thing, not just the parts with meaning. Otherwise they'll realize what I've done.”

“But what if it gets infected? You'll be alone, in the cold. You'll die!”

“Cold tends to be good against burns, honey. Just do it.”

Danëh stuffed her socks in her mouth, gagging herself before she lied down. She watched Mirah taking the metal rod from the fire.

It hurt like nothing had ever hurt before. She screamed into the gag, clawing her fingers into the dirt floor.

Mirah was still sobbing when Danëh regained consciousness. When she pulled the stable boy's winter outfit over the bandages, she nearly fainted again. She wasn't going to make it.

Carefully she put on her backpack, and she stepped into the winter night. Finally free. She looked back at the weeping girl by the fireplace.

“Love you sis. Always will.”

“Danëh, please… stay.”

“I'm not a whore, Mirah, and I'll never be one again.”