

Chapter 15

With Haven Home in sight and the sun still well above the horizon, Abbia slowed her small band of travelers down to a gentle walk. They had ridden hard and in silence for many miles, determined to get home before nightfall, to break bread with family and sleep in their own beds. They still had plenty of daylight to wind their way up the mountain to the secret and well guarded maze of caves that led inside the ring of mountains to Haven Home.

Madam Claudine's words came back to haunt her. The universe gives each person what they need at the time they need it. How was it that she needed all of this chaos and confusion, all of this danger? And hadn't Madame Claudine said that the spoken word held power? She struggled to remember the exact words she had spoken before going through the ruby door.

A male! I asked for male companionship, someone strong, handsome, black haired, blue eyed stud! I did not ask specifically for a human stud!

It would seem that the universe had a sense of humor, and a perverted one at that.

Setta trotted up to her side. "I can't stop thinking of that stallion," she said.

"Neither can I," Abbia grumbled. "He ruined our entire mission."

Setta laughed. "He didn't ruin the entire mission, Abbia. The scouts didn't scent us out. They had no idea were perched right above their heads like little birds. The potion worked."

Abbia shook her head. "It only takes one cat man to scent us. That was a huge hunting party out there today. We needed to know for sure, and that hunting party would have been the proof we needed. Had all of them passed us by, I would have known without a doubt. "

"The potion worked! It's time to move ahead with your plan."

"I'll think about it, but it would be more prudent to wait until we are absolutely sure."

Setta sighed. "You're being unreasonable, Abbia. But I will stand by your side at the council no matter what you decide to do."

Unreasonable? Well, that was a first. No one had ever called her unreasonable before. She had

always been the most reasonable one of all, reasonable to a fault.

“Now back to that stallion,” Setta said with a wide grin on her face. “What an incredible animal. He’s nothing like these little ponies.”

“These little ponies are sure-footed and loyal. They work hard in our service. They deserve our respect.”

“And I do respect them, Abbia, but really, there is no comparing them to that stallion. That silky coat, that broad back. I could just bury my face in that glorious mane. Where do you think he came from? Do you think there are more like him?”

“I have no idea. I might have said he belonged to the Cains, had he not seemed to hate them as much as we do.”

“He’s not like these boney little fellows,” Setta said, lovingly patting her pony’s neck. “A woman would have to spread her legs wide to straddle him.”

“Can’t we discuss something else, anything else?” Abbia groaned, knowing it was useless. Once Setta got on the subject of sexual pleasure, it was impossible to get her off of it.

“We should try to catch him and bring him to Haven Home. Can you just imagine riding him? Naked with the wind on your skin, and that silky mane tickling your breast? Your legs spread across those marvelous muscles as he pounded across the flats? I can just imagine the rub those rock-hard shoulders of his would give a woman’s clit!”

“And that’s all he would be good for,” Abbia said. “That beast does not belong in Haven Home. How would such an animal make it up the narrow mountain trails? He’d fall off before he was half way up. Nor could he fit in the tunnels. And those hooves! I’m sure he’d leave a deep trail that the cat men could easily follow. No doubt he’d eat three times as much as just one of our horses. No, he completely useless. Leave him to the forest.”

“That’s so unlike you, Abbia. You’ve always loved animals, always had the best eye of anyone when it comes to horseflesh. Why do you talk against this one?”

Because I'm pretty sure this one can speak to me in my mind, that's why, and it creeps me out.

Because no matter how much I want to have a wild sexual adventure with a handsome, black haired, blue-eyed stud, I'm not into bestiality.

Because he represents something I want but can't have, just like my real life back home.

But she said nothing to Setta.

“It sure was a strange coincidence, that beast arriving right when the cat men did.” Setta said.

“More than you know,” Abbia mumbled.

They threaded their way up the confusing, narrow pathways of the foothills. At the entrance to the caves, they dismounted, greeted the guards, then slipped into the deep throat of the Great Mother. Safely entombed in the mountain, they began the single-file trek through her main arteries, twisting and turning, taking this fork here and that one there. Even if the entrance was discovered by the Cains, a near impossibility in itself, they would never find their way through the Great Mother.

Finally, they exited the caves onto a ledge high over valley through a small opening that allowed only one person or pony through at a time to come through. Haven Home nestled below then in the huge valley set inside the ring of an ancient volcano, and the site of it warmed Abbia to the core of her heart. The sun had set, and the houses below glowed with soft, welcoming lights. Four young runners, all girls, stood at the exit, welcoming them with bright torches to lead them down the darkening path. Abbia relaxed at last, knowing that a cold drink, honey cakes, a hot bath and a soothing rub-down waited for her and her women at bath chamber.

“How fares the council?” Abbia asked the oldest of the four girls as they started down the path.

“They convene in one hour in the main hall, after you have had time to bathe. “

One hour of bliss, then the work would begin in earnest. There was still much to be discussed and decided before any of them could curl up in their beds this night.

“We had better enjoy the next hour,” she said to Setta, “for it may be a long time before we have such a gentle retreat again.”

An hour later, clean, massaged, and wearing comfortable black robes over their naked skin, Abbia and Setta headed for the main hall. Supper was in full swing. Plates of steamed vegetables, warm baked buns, and cool fresh fruit graced the long wooden tables, along with jars of chilled Elderberry wine. The fare was simple, but delicious, and just what she needed after a hectic day.

Abbia and Setta settled at the nearest table and ate quickly, knowing that everyone was waiting for them to finish their meal before convening the council. Usually, council meetings were considered a bit of a bore, and were attended only by those that had business to discuss, but tonight was different. Judging from the crowded conditions of the hall, everyone had waited until now to sup, since they no doubt anxious to hear about her expedition.

As soon as they finished, the council convened in the open, circular center of the hall, with one Head Woman from each clan – Spirit, Warrior, Witch, Farming, Builder, Husbandry and Tinker – taking a seat in the circle. The other six seats turned to her, the Warrior, with questioning faces.

Abbia quickly gave them an account of the day's events.

“The potion worked!” the Witch Woman said.

Abbia shook her head. “We should not become over confident. It worked on a few cat men, but because of that damned black beast, we are not completely sure that it will work on all of them. Still, I believe it was enough of a success for us to move ahead with the rescue plan.”

As was their custom, the debate was opened to the floor for comment. Surprisingly enough, most of the women, old and young, agreed with the plans to proceed.

There were no men in the room, and none have a voice in the council. Confined to the men's chambers, they were more like pampered pets than members of the society in which she now lived. Simple and soft, they had little or no opinions, and cared only for food and sex.

Abbia shook her head. Apparently, that was the way it had been for many years now. Though the males had cocks and could make love well enough to conceive children, there was very little

“maleness” about them. It had been accidental, this breeding out of the aggressiveness that was a man’s birthright, the very thing that made him a man. When she had first come to Haven Home, the Spirit Woman had explained it to her quite well, how the men were soft and almost women-like, while decade after decade, the women were becoming more male-like. The Cains, on the other hand, had too much maleness to the point of being animals, and thought nothing of capturing and enslaving any woman they could catch. They were, however, said to be wondrous under the covers, so aggressive in their lovemaking that women screamed and begged for more.

If it was not for the aftermath of sex, where women were beaten and treated like slaves, the two sexes could probably do well together.

Abbia laughed quietly to herself. Was it really so different in Abby’s world? Suzette had been right when she said that except for rape, men could do almost anything sexual and be forgiven, but not women. And weren’t thousands of women world-wide still dominated by men to a point of slavery? Was the Haven Home solution the only answer? To completely emasculate men and keep them as pampered pets?

She bowed her head and closed her eyes for a moment, remembering her first meeting with the elderly Spirit Woman, a meeting that Abbia remembered taking place over a year ago, even though by Abby’s reckoning, she had only been the fantasy for one day.

“It was not so before the great wars many generations ago,” the Spirit Woman had told her. “Men and women lived together in great cities. They worked together, built things together, raised children together. It is still like that in the place you come from, isn’t it? Yes, it is, I see it in your eyes. The great war destroyed everything, and the suffering that followed brought out the worse in men. It is said that after the great wars, the men became mean and aggressive, leaving the responsibility of rebuilding to the women. They grew apart, but it is time to bring them back together, now before it is too late. Now, before both sexes are lost in their own worlds, and their new wars.”

Abbia shook off her meditative moment and realized that the room had become silent. She

looked up. Everyone was looking at her, respecting her moment of inward silence.

Spirit Woman nodded to her. “Everyone has spoken,” she said, “you have heard all, Abbia. It is now up to you to make the final decision. What should we do?”

“Why me?” Abbia said. “What right do I have to make such a monumental decision for all of us?”

Spirit Woman smiled. “When you came to us from the mist, I knew you were the one to help us. You come from another world, where men and women are not as different as they are here. It is your nature to help people, and you were sent here to help us. Do so now. What should we do?”

“We enact the plan,” she said without hesitation, knowing in her heart that it was the right thing to do, even though it was a very dangerous course of action. “The Cains are becoming a great danger to us. In the last few months, twenty of our women have been taken by them, and if they are alive, they must be taken back. On that we all agree. But I propose taking more than our own people from the city of Cain. I propose kidnapping the Cain Lord, and bringing him here to Haven Home.”

Loud mummings of surprise erupted from the room. Only she and Setta had discussed this part of the plan and what needed to be done, which would work only if the potion worked.

“To what end?” asked the surprised Builder Woman.

“To have a hostage, what my people call a bargaining chip. I propose peace with the Cains. I propose that men and women should not live apart, that they need each other, compliment each other. Too long have you all lived without your other halves. Perhaps if we lure them to the conference table, we can form a truce, and a plan to reunite the sexes.”

“It is too risky,” said the Tinker Woman, and all but the Farmer Woman shook their heads in agreement. “We cannot bring the Cain Lord here, to Haven Home. We are safe here. They cannot find us.”

Spirit Woman stood. “You mean they have not found us yet. But they will. The cat men are becoming more aggressive every day, and while the Cains are still more or less men, the cat men are

becoming... something else. Something evil. Even the Cains are in danger from them, though the stupid males don't yet know it."

Abbia stood beside Spirit Woman. "And it is my suspicion that they are preparing to overthrow the Lord and take over Cain City. If that happens, if they are not controlled by the Cains, the cat men will be relentless in their search for us. And they will find us. It is only a matter of time. You wanted me to make the decision, and I have made it. It is time to take the risk, now, before it is too late."

A thrill of power shot through Abbia. She had never been much of a risk taker, and it felt good – no, wonderful – to let go of her inhibitions and do what she felt had to be done.

There was silence for a moment, then the rhythmic clapping began and grew in intensity until the hall thundered with it.

The motion was approved.

Tomorrow she, Setta, and four volunteers would go into the woods, and allow themselves to be captured by the cat men and taken into Cain City.

Setta jumped to her feet and grabbed Abbia's hand. "Come on, we still have time to make it."

"Make what?" she said as she stumbled out of the great hall.

"Chambers. I'm sure some of the males are still awake."

Abbia groaned. She'd completely forgotten her promise to Setta to go with her to the men's chambers for pleasure this evening. Following behind Setta, she wondered why she had ever agreed to this.

Then she brightened. This must be it, the fantasy sex-without-consequences she had asked for. With renewed enthusiasm and growing excitement, she drew aside the curtain and entered chambers.

Almost immediately, her hopes dissipated. The men, all frail and pretty, bore no resemblance to the virile and powerful male she had envisioned. Setta grabbed the nearest male and tossed him on a bed of cushions. He just lay there, spread-eagle and compliant, while she did all the work. No foreplay, no deep, passionate kisses. She sucked him until he was hard, then mounted him almost

casually and rode him hard. The same passionless scene was taking place throughout the chamber, women on top, satisfying themselves with a willing but slave-like male. There was no passion, no sharing, nothing but self-gratification that could just as easily have been done with a dildo.

Without a word of explanation, she turned and headed back to her hut where she pulled off her clothes and crawled into her bed, naked, alone, and frustrated... as usual.

Before sun-up the next morning, Abbia, and her troop set out for the forest. She had slept poorly, and woke even more sexually frustrated than when she gone to sleep. Disturbing dreams plagued her sleep, dreams of the fantasy man she had asked for – wavy black hair, blue eyes, stud-build, sexy – and he had done things to her in the dream that has made her body wet and wanting.

Then suddenly, the stallion stood before her, too massive to be ignored, so close she could touch his rippling muscles, smell his animal musk, feel the gentle puffs of his breath on her skin. His hypnotic blue eyes held her entranced.

“I am naked,” she'd said, feeling much more daring than embarrassed.

“Delightfully so” he'd said.

“You're a horse.”

“Then ride me, he'd said, his seductive voice deep in her mind, and I'll promise you pleasure the likes of which you never believed possible.

She rode him naked across an endless plain, with the wind tearing through her hair and the silk strands of his mane whipping at her bare breast and belly. Her naked thighs clenched tight around him, skin to skin. Her clit rocking erotically against him as he thundered toward the mountains, so close to an exploding climax that her whole body surged with the electricity of it's approach.

The man reappeared. He'd literally swept her off her feet, carried her to a shaded area under a large tree, laid her on the soft sweet-smelling grass...

A flash of lightening and the resulting roll of thunder rumbling through the mountain range

abruptly tore her out of the dream, leaving her alone in her empty hut. Her body burned for release, and there had been no fantasy man in sight.. Her own hand had been a poor substitute for the daring promises made in the dream.

And now, instead of sharing a fantasy with a hot lusty male, she was riding through a wet forest with a bunch of female warriors.

Some fantasy! She'd have a few choice words for Madame Claudine when she got out of this mess.

They rode in silence. A fine rain fell from gray skies, adding to her restless and irritable mood. She almost looked forward to running into a band of Cains or cat men. Maybe a good scrap was just what she needed to leach the acid out of her blood.

Leaving their ponies hidden in a glade and tended by a heardswoman, they entered the forest and headed south. They traveled light, dressed not as fighters, but as spirit women on a search for sacred herbs. Only Abbia dressed as a fighter, a pretend guard for the pretend herb gathers. Each woman carried several tiny vials of the precious potion hidden in the waistband of her tunic. It only took a drop to make someone's scent "invisible" to a cat man. There were enough doses in the vials to anoint all the rescued women, and the Cain Lord as well. Once they made good their escape from inside the walls of Cain City, they would take to the trees leaving no scent or trail for the cat men to follow.

Or at least, she hoped that was what would happen.

A slight rustle overhead made her look up. Setta, not being particularly careful to conceal her movements in the trees, dropped down through the branches and landed before Abbia. For the first time since this fantasy began, she realized just how cat-like her own women warriors were.

"A sizable band is about two miles ahead, heading in this direction," Setta said. "I left a bit of a scent trail, just enough to keep them heading this way. Only one cat-man, though, that I could see. The rest seem to be all Cain warriors. They carry iron chains with them. I'm not sure what they are

hunting, but I don't think it is women."

"And yet it is women they shall find," Abbia said. She turned to the rest of her party. "We'll stay here and wait for them. And remember, we fight, but not as warriors, only as frightened women. Keep to the story of being separated from our band and becoming lost in the woods. Do not play your battle hand or give yourselves away until we need to on the way out of the city."

"And when they try to rape us?" one girl asked. Ash was her name, petite with silver-gray hair and a tiny build that completely disguised her deadly skill with a short sword. Her words were frightening, but Abbia was certain she detected a bit of anticipation in her voice.

"It will be a few days before they even attempt a mating," Abbia said. "First they must bid on us, then the winning bidders must fight for the right to mate. We will be long gone before the rituals are completed."

"Unless you want to be bedded by one of them," Setta teased. "These are warriors, not puny cat men. They look quite interesting to me, maybe even worth bedding, though I could do without their smell. Perhaps we should capture more than just their Lord. Perhaps we should capture several of the more virile ones and take them back as breeding stock."

"Ay!" laughed another young woman named Lila. "We shall bring them back tied hand and foot in ropes, then bid or fight over the right to mate with them! I bet they have powerful butts, just right for driving their cocks into a woman. Not like our males, more like girls than men."

Abbia smiled as the women began to jest in earnest, discussing everything about the male warriors from their manes of long hair and broad shoulders, to their virile hips and large cocks. She leaned against a tree, letting them have a bit of fun to relieve the stress.

It was true about the men at Haven Home, though it was no fault of theirs that they had become somewhat effeminate. Raised only by women, never allowed to show their rougher nature, never allowed to train in weapons, no male role models... how could the males of Haven Home be anything else than gentled and kept pets?

Setta joined her, laughing at some jest made by the group. “They are nervous, but in good spirits,” she said.

Abbia nodded, but said nothing. They were more than nervous... they were afraid, as they should be. An overdose of bravado could easily get them killed.

“You are unusually silent, Abbia. What troubles you?”

“None of this should be happening this way. Men and women should not be separated like this. They should not be at war with each other. One cannot live without the other. I just don’t think it is right that we have no contact with men.”

“And what of our own males at Haven Home? We have all the contact with them that we want.”

Abbia shook her head. “They are males, but they are no longer men, as everyone knows. Just listen how the women are talking about the Cain males.”

“but our men are--

“Safe and tame,” Abbia argued. “They are now only women with a penis. We have turned them into something they should not be.”

Just like the way my father is turning me into something I should not be.

And I am letting him do it.

They were still laughing about men when the Cain warriors burst upon them. What men they were! Nothing like the slinky cat men, these Cain warriors were something be admired... almost. They were an unlikely combination of a Neanderthal and a professional wrestler. All were at least 6 feet tall, well muscled, and totally sexy in a stinky barbarian sort of way. With a good scrubbing, washed hair, decent teeth, and clean tunics, they might even make reasonably good mates.

There was that word again... reasonable.

Fuck reasonable. Maybe she should have a nasty roll in the hay with one of these fellows just to prove to herself that she could be unreasonable any damned time she wanted to be.

To be too easily captured would seem strange, so as planned, her band put up a brave front and a good enough fight to keep the Cains from being suspicious.

As quickly as it started, it was over. Their weapons lay in a pile on the ground, and the women stood in the center of a circle of jeering warriors. They pretended acquiescence, but Abbia knew that, just like her, the women were itching to fight.

Once they were securely captured and bound in leather thongs, a blond warrior – the only one mounted – rode forward on a stocky horse that might have quarter horse in its lineage. He scanned the bound women, then grinned at his men, his sneer showing somewhat worse teeth than the others.

“Not the intended prize, but it will do for now.”

A pounding sounded in the distance, deep and rhythmic, growing louder, shaking the ground.

Not again, she thought.

“Can’t you stay out of trouble for at least a few days?” sounded a deep male voice in Abbia’s head. She knew the speaker this time. It was the black stallion. and he was thundering into the fray

Thundering. Thunder. That was what he was to her... rolling black thunder. Huge, dark and dangerous. Massive and male. Powerful and unpredictable.

And once again, he was ruining her plans.

She did not speak out loud. If she could hear the horse, then maybe it could hear her.

“Get out of here, you fool! You’ll ruin everything. You’ll be caught. And get out of my head!”

“I’m trying to save you,” came the disgusted response. “You could at least show a little gratitude.”

The stallion burst into the clearing and charged. Issuing a shrill war cry, he reared and came down hard, his massive hooves making deep dents in the forest floor, scattering half the men into the underbrush. A few well-placed kicks sent the rest of them flying after their comrades.

Without warning, dozens of well-hidden cat men jumped from the bushes, some landing on the stallion’s back while others surrounded the beast.

Abbia quickly loosed herself from her bindings, snagged a short sword from the pile of weapons on the forest floor, and jumped in front of the stallion, slashing at the nearest cat-man. _

“Don’t do me any favors! I want to be caught, and you’re running my disguise. Now get your big black ass out of here, before they get you too!”

Her warning came too late. The cat men were ready for him this time, and apparently, had been searching for the horse when they had come across the women. The mounted warrior fell back, barking orders to the cat men. Ropes flew through the air, landing over the stallion’s head. Still more ropes lashed out and caught his feet. They pulled the stallion to the ground, his own weight knocking the wind from his lungs as he landed. Despite his powerful struggles, they swarmed over him like ants, overpowered him. They clasped an iron collar around his neck, and hobbled his feet together. With ropes The stallion would be able to walk, but nothing more.

While the cat me were busy with the horse, several of the warriors surrounded Abbia, brandishing their long sword, teasing her as she tried to defend herself and the stallion with her smaller weapon. She longed to plunge into battle, to unleash her fury completely, demonstrate her true skills by cutting off a few balls and any other body part that got in her way, but her disguise had already been seriously compromised as it was. Feigning fear, she swipe ineffectually several times at the taunting men, and allowed herself to be disarmed.

The blond warrior smiled again, his bad teeth showing in the dim light. “Bring her to me,” he said, once she was bound again, much more tightly then before. He reached down and traced her jaw line with his dirty finger. “I like this one,” he said. “She will be mine. Perhaps she will not lie still like a dead thing when I fuck her. Perhaps she will fight a bit, or even a lot. I would like that.”

Abbia knew she should keep quiet, but the words just spilled out.

“What an arrogant bastard! You claim me without a bid?” Abbia said. “I have heard of your ways, and you may not be worthy of a woman like me. I have a right to be bid upon, to have the best of the best. I have a right--”

“You have no rights!” he bellowed, then he backhanded her hard, knocking her to the ground.

Her jaw burned, and her anger burned hotter, but instead of launching an attack, she pretended to cower on the ground.

“I’ll kill him for that!” The stallion tried to charge but stumbled. Head lowered and ears flat, he glared at the warrior, his blue eyes full of crystal fire.

“No. It’s OK... I’m OK. Stay out of it.”

“The Lord of Cain fights for nothing,” the warrior said. “I take what I want. And now I want you more than ever.” Laughing, he turned his horse and started back down the path.

The Lord? The ruler of Cain? He’d been within her grasp the entire time! Had they been able to capture him, none of this had been necessary!

“That was never a possibility,” a voice in her head said. “You were greatly outnumbered. even with my help.”

“I wasn’t talking to you. Get the hell out of my thoughts.”

“This is not the time to argue with each other. You do not seem to realize how much trouble we are in.”

Abbia did her best to project a sense of anger toward the beast. “Of course I do. I planned it. This is a rescue mission, to get our women out of Cain City. We came prepared for this. Getting captured is part of the plan. What I didn’t plan was you.”

“Still, we will have to devise an escape plan.”

“Already devised,” she answered, “and since when does a horse talk so well? For that matter, how does a horse talk at all?”

They began the trek to Cain City. Bound hand and foot, one to the other, the women could do little more than shuffle.

“Do you care to tell me about your escape plan?” he asked.

“I’d rather know how a horse can talk telepathically to me. Can anyone else hear you?”

“Only you can hear me. I was told it was because we are soul mates, destined to be together.”

With that declaration, Abbia stumbled to a halt. “No way, Big Boy! I’m not into bestiality. I’m not having an affair with a beast!”

The snap of a whip on the back of her bare legs got her going again.

“I am not an animal!”

Abbia could clearly hear the indignation in his voice. She glanced over her shoulder at the animal, who was being dragged along by the iron collar, securely leashed and held by several cat men. He flattened his ears and glared at her.

Abbia snickered and turned away. “If it looks like a horse and walks like a horse, it’s a horse!”

“Looks can be deceiving. This is not my true form. I am as much a human as you are.”

“And you’re only wearing a horse outfit for a costume ball, right?”

Abbia heard him snort in disgust. “I don’t know why, but I can change at will from one to the other. It is a very curious thing. I only changed to aid you, as I am more powerful as a beast than a man.”

She stumbled and nearly fell, earning herself another flick of the switch. “Why don’t you change back, then?”

“I have tried. Something prevents me. I believe it is the iron collar. I think—“

“How convenient. Can you just be quiet for a while? I’m the one that needs to think, about how I’m going to get you out of this mess along with the rest of my woman and the people we came to rescue. Our potion will work on us, but I’m not sure about a horse.”

“As you wish,” he said. “I, too, feel the need to think things over.”

Just like that, he was out of her mind, leaving her alone with her thoughts. In a curious way, Abbia suddenly felt very lonely, and even a little bit afraid. No, very much afraid.

Any sense of control she’d had was completely eroded. This fantasy was not going the way she had envisioned it. Everyone was depending on her to solve their problems and to save them, but

she wasn't sure she had the skills needed to save anyone, not even herself. She was a captive, being-dragged in chains to a city full of crude men, and her fantasy romp with a sexy man seemed to be heading in the direction of being raped by a smelly barbarian.

But no, it couldn't be! She had specifically asked for a handsome, black-haired, blue-eyed male. The barbarian was blond, with brown eyes, and from the neck up, certainly not handsome!

And she'd had her fantasy for a while, in her dream. Just the thought of her dream lover made her feel damp and not with need.

Abbia perked up. She stuck out her chest and walked proudly, despite being bound in such a humiliating manner.

Giselle would never mislead her. Surely, the best was yet to come.

She certainly hoped it was.

An hour later, the rain had stopped and the sun had come out, bringing a sultry heat to the forest. A strange electric ripple kept running up and down her spine, occasionally dropping to her nether lips where it made her sizzle. She had to take her mind off the weird vibrations plaguing her, as well as the sheer boredom of the endless trees. Talking between the captives was not allowed, leaving her only one other option.

"You there, horsy?"

His frustration hit her as solid as if she had a rock smashed into her head. "You are being very insulting. I told you I am not a horse."

"OK... if you are not a horse, who are you and where did you come from? What's your name? Where do you live? Why are you here?"

"I'm not sure, not even of my name. What's yours?"

"I'm---" Warning bells went off in her head as her sense of reason returned with a vengeance. She was in a strange place with a lot of very strange people. It might not be prudent to tell them who she really was, thought she couldn't say why she felt that way.

“I'm Abbia, at least for now. You have to have a name. How about Thunder? Yep, Thunder fits. So... what do you remember?”

“Not much. I clearly member arriving here – wherever “here” is – naked but quite human. A herd of ponies were racing down the valley, heading straight for me. I started running – I had to or I would have been trampled to death – then I wasn't on two legs anymore. I had hooves, and a deep chest. I was running faster than the wind, and relishing every second of it. I love horses – I don't exactly know how, but I'm sure they are a very big part of my life – and had always wondered what they felt when they charged from their confines out into open ranges. I sucked in the freedom, the magic, and I ran.. Finally, I swerved away from the herd and caught my breath. Only then did I panic at the fact that I was in a horse's body. Without warning, I was a man again.”

“Just like that?”

“Apparently, I can change at will. At first, I though I was having some kind of insane nightmare. Just one problem... I couldn't wake up.”

“I know the feeling,” Abby thought.

“What do you remember before coming here? Who told you we were destine to be together.?”

Abbia could feel the beast's struggle to remember. Images flashed into her mind... a busy street of very old buildings, wrought iron railings, a blood red door.

“That door... I remember something about a deep red door. Bourbon Street...”

Abbia perked up. “Bourbon Street in New Orleans? That's where I'm from! That's no coincidence. That's where our connection is. Try harder! What else do you remember?”

The horse shook his head and snorted with irritation, as if any attempts at recall were a major struggle to his beastly brain. “Friends... I had friends over from Spain and was showing them the town... I'm not Spanish though, I'm from England, I think.

“That explains your accent. Go on.”

“We were on Bourbon Street, and I saw this strange building ... very narrow, the width of only a

single room, so flush against the buildings on either side of it, almost as if it was part of those buildings, but separate at the same time... with brick wall painted gray, an intricately-carved blood-red door, two stories, no windows. I've been on Bourbon many time, and I've never noticed it before. It seemed so out of place, such an elegant and dignified space in the middle of so much decadence. No windows, just 3 small steps with wrought iron railings, and that intriguing door. My friends had wandered off to still another pub, and that door... I was compelled to go up those steps and open it. That's it...that's all I remember. “

“I also came here through a red door, in a shop on Royal Street!” The electric tingle ran down her spine again, much stronger this time, settling on her clit like a hot coal. Excitement... it must be excitement.

“Definitely no coincidence,” he agreed. “As to the destiny part, perhaps we are meant to be together in this place. I only have a vague memory of an older man saying that to me. I do recall feeling down, not depressed but not happy. My friends were all couples, and I remember feeling alone, like I was missing something, like I was supposed to be doing something... different. That man seemed to understand all of that without my saying a word to him.”

Abbia laughed mentally. “I know that feeling all too well.”

It amazed her how fast she'd adapted to the mental communication between them, how much at ease he felt with him. And he really was an incredibly handsome animal.

“Thank you... I think,” the horse thought back. “Still, I'll thank you to remember that I am not an animal.”

“So why don't you change back now?”

“Can't. I think it's the iron. Besides, what good would it do? They outnumber us, plus I would trip our hand by letting them know I can change. It would be better for our plan if they don't know that.”

“Our plan? Since when has my plan become our plan?”

“Since now. Since we are connected somehow. We're partners, like it or not. There are some difficulties, though.”

“I'm bound hand and foot, being dragged through the forest by filthy barbarians who are arguing about who gets to rape my warriors, and I'm mind-talking with a horse. How much more difficult can things get?”

“Much more difficult, I'm afraid. We're in each other's minds, Abbia. Can't you feel my agitation? Can't you feel how hard I am trying to remain calm and in control? I want you. Desperately! The need to make love to you is so strong I feel as if I could easily kill to get it.”

“What?” Abbia realized she'd screamed it out loud when everyone suddenly looked at her. A lash came down on her back, and she stumbled. Regaining her balance, she hung her head and feigned a dejected attitude.””

“You! You've been sending those weird pulses to me?”

“More like you have been picking up on them. While in this equine form, well, there's no polite way to say this. I smell you. You smell of sex, Wet, hot sex. And you've been getting... well... hotter by the minute. The aroma is very nearly overwhelming.”

“Well stop smelling me this instant!”

The stallion nickered, a definite horse-laugh by anyone's standards.

“No. I rather enjoy your scent. It's absolutely intoxicating. True, it's about to drive me insane, but we may yet have need of the extra strenght it seems to give me.”

Before she could respond, they rounded a turn in the bend, and Cain City came into view. It was hardly a city. She studied the situation from every possible angle. Rough-hewn logs had been planted in the ground and lashed together to form a fort-like wall that extended across the mouth of what seemed to be a valley surrounded on all other sides by shear cliff-like walls. A rickety gate swung open to admit them, closing behind their entry with a thud.

Abbia caught Setta's attention. “Easy to break out of.” Abbia signed. “Stay with the plan.”

“I've been listening to them talk”, she signed back. “We are going to the slave compound as expected. You are being taken elsewhere. Some of the men are not happy about missing their shot at you. Perhaps we can use that to our advantage?”

“Most definitely,” Abbia signed. “Stick to the plan. I will escape from this pig and find you in the compound tonight. Keep your eyes open, and get the layout of the camp as we discussed.”

Once inside, Abbia and her women covertly scanned the compound and, as planned, took in every detail possible. It would have been much easier if Thunder could control his lust and stop sending waves of energy into her body. They passed several hovels, apparently occupied by the dregs of the camp. Scrawny men lounged about while women did the work. Dirty boys of all ages played in the streets. Girls were all hard at work like their mothers. Like the men, the women and girls were dirty and seemed ill-fed. None of them even looked up as they passed.

The closer they came to the center of the city, the more conditions improved. Though everything was just as dirty and ill-kept as the property on the outskirts near the fence, these huts were bigger and of better construction, and the men were larger and much better fed. The women, however, seemed the same.... downtrodden, half starved, helpless, riddled with hopelessness.

There were so many of them! She had come here to rescue 20 of their own, but how could she leave the rest of these women behind?

“You can't save them all, Abbia. You may not even be able to save yourself.”

“That's what you think, buster. I'll just have to alter my plan a bit.”

The stallion snickered again. “Much more than a bit. You can help them, Abbia, but not this time around. There are other ways, better ways, to help, and you do not have to do it alone. I will help you.”

Such simple words, yet they bore deep into her heart. Others had offered her help, – Giselle and Suzette and Raven in particular – yet she'd politely but firmly turned them down, insisting she could handle things on her own.

But she couldn't. She needed help. Now, and back in the real world.

Lesson learned, Madam Claudine, or The Universe, or whatever sent me here.

“I accept your help, Thunder.”

“That's good, because you don't really have a choice in this matter.”

“Oh, but I do, Thunder. I do have a choice. I've always had choices, thought I pretended I didn't. I just elected not to make them, to let someone else make my choices for me. Not anymore.”

Abbia pulled herself together and refocused on the task at hand. Here, near the center of the compound, several women wearing heavy shackles on their ankles slowed their work to watch the parade go by. These women were different. Though they pretended to keep their eyes downcast, she caught glimpses of their expression. These women had not yet been beaten into submission. They still had the fire of life in their eyes, strength in their step. They were the women from Haven Home!

“Hold on, sisters,” she covertly signed to them, “We're here to get you. Watch and be ready when the opportunity to escape presents itself. Tell the others.”

The nearest woman smiled slightly and nodded.

A fresh wave of lust from Thunder washed over her, nearly sending her to her knees. Her clit, responding to his passion, grew wet and began to burn with a growing desire of its own.

“Thunder! Please control yourself!”

“I can't. Our connection is getting stronger. Despite the seriousness of this situation, I'm about to go insane with wanting you. I feel like I'm burning inside!”

“Then think of something else! Something cold. Ice cream.. Iced spice coffee. Cold wind. Chilled watermelon.”

“The creaminess of your skin. How spicy your kisses must be. Cold wind on your naked skin. Your cunt, as sweet and pink as a melon. And just so you know, right now I want to kill these bastards, bash in their skulls just to get to you. Well... that didn't work. Any other ideas to divert my mind from your body?”

Before she could respond, they stopped in a clearing near a large, solid building, the only one of its kind she had seen since entering the compound. Two stories high and made of solid stone butted up against the side of a mountain, it was a fortress within a fortress. A massive door made of solid iron seemed to be the only way in or out.

As she looked up, the mountain began to move. Dozens... no, hundreds of cat men slunk from the shadows, many hundreds more than anyone at Haven Home had suspected lived in Cain City, and very different than the ones she had been exposed to in the forest. Those had been creepy, but still very much human. These were terrifying in their animal-like movements, in their glittering hungry eyes. These were more cat than man... and they were hungry. Heaven help her, she could feel their raging hunger... for meat. For the horse. For her.

A slap across her cheek snapped her neck back and drove her to her knees. Snaggle-tooth, as she had come to think of Lord of Cain, grinned down at her. "I will enjoy fucking you. I hope you are not too tired to put up a fight." He grabbed the ropes holding her bound wrists, and began dragging her across the compound toward the iron door. At the sight of a prospective meal being hauled away, the cat men began keening like wounded animals.

“

Panic rippled through her. She hadn't planned on a store fortress. Once inside, once that iron door slammed shut, she would have a hell of a time getting out again.

Sonofabitch! Doesn't anything go right in my life? Not even a fantasy of my own making?

“Silence!” the Lord commanded. “You may have what is left of her when I am done! And you may have a dozen more women in the bargain.”

The keening ceased, but not the hungry glares. How many of women had he fed to these hideous creatures?

“Many,” Thunder said, “and men that go against the Lord have been sent up into the mountains as well. It's how he keeps those creatures in control. They obey him because he feeds them human

flesh, but they are close to breaking free of his control. I sense them, Abbia. The mountaine caves are crawling with them, many more than even the Cain Lord knows of, and they are truly evil creatures. When the do break free, all humans will be in terrible danger.”

Sure of himself and his control over his city, the Cain Lord once again began dragging her toward the iron door, which was not creaking loudly as it began to swing open.

“If you want help, Thunder, now would be a good time!”

Snaggle Tooth yanked her hard, and she yelped in pain as a sharp rock dug into her knee.

The fury of an enraged horse sounded over the din of the camp. She felt as much as heard Thunder's rage at the Cain Lord's treatment of her. Her captor dropped her ropes and crossed his arms, enjoying the spectacle as his men dragged the horse down and began to beat him bloody.

“Leave him alone!” she screamed, trying to struggled to her feet. The Lord only laughed and grabbed the ropes, and once again began dragging her to his bed.

The stallion suddenly went quiet. Dear God in Heaven, had they killed him? She struggled to turn her head and see what was going on behind her. Abruptly, they came to a halt.

Halfway there, another barbarian, nearly large as the Lord but not nearly as dirty, stopped their progress.

“I claim the right to fight for this woman,” he growled.

The Lord dropped her ropes and smile at his opponent. “You have always wanted to challenge me, Vargas, but have always known better than to step forward. Is this bit of cunt so desirable to you that she has muddled your good senses?”

“I have made the challenge. You must meet me in the arena.”

The Lord nodded. “So be it. After I have had fun with the bitch, I will kill you.” He grabbed her ropes again, but Vargas yanked them out of his hands.

“Now, Lord Cain, or will you want to be seen as the coward you really are?”

The Cain Lord went ram-rod straight at the insult. “I believe I will let you live, Vargaie, and

while I fuck this cunt, I can enjoy your screams as the cat men eat you alive.”

Abbia suddenly realized that Thunder was standing perfectly still and totally quiet, and was staring intently at the conflict. No, not at the conflict I general. He was staring hard at Vargas and the Cain Lord. His lowered head may seem to everyone else as a sign of submission, but she could feel the intensity of concentration surging from him, and every bit of it was focused on the two barbarians.

“It's you! You're projecting your desire for me onto that Vargas brute!”

“And it's working, so be quiet and let me concentrated!”

Lord Cain smiled again, as evil a smile as Abbia had ever seen. He retrieved her ropes and threw them to a man on the sideline. “Since she likes animals so much, tether her in the stables with the black beast. I will return for her after I skewer this bastard and hand him his guts.”

Abbia and Thunder were dragged off in one direction while the rest of the men followed the two combatants to the arena. Thunder was shoved into an empty stall, but Abbia was not so lucky. The ropes on Abbia's wrists were thrown over a beam, and her arms pulled over her head. Her feet were tied to a ring in the floor. She could stand, but not move or turn. Without a backward glance, the men hurried off to watch the battle.

“Are you injured?”

“No,” Abbia thought back. “You?”

“I'm fine.”

Abbia heard a thump and the grinding of metal behind her.

“What are you doing?” she said.

“Hush,” he thought. “Don't talk out loud.”

The stallion appeared in front of her. He had a ring of keys in his mouth.

“This was almost too easy,” Thunder thought. “Getting my collar unlocked will be much harder. You can't reach it with your hands, so you'll have to use your mouth. It's the big key without any rust.”

Thunder dangled the keyring near her face. Feeling foolish, she leaned forward and tried to grab the right key. After several tries, she finally snagged the desired key. She maneuvered around in her mouth, trying not to think of where the key had been, trying not to vomit. Finally, she got the top of the key between her teeth. Carefully, she aimed it at the lock on the iron collar, and on the first try, managed to open the lock.

The collar fell off. Thunder trotted out of sight.

“Where are you going? Why don't you change back to a man?”

“I'm not sure what the process looks like. I don't want to scare you.”

“Scare me? After what I've been through, not much of anything can scare me! Change and untie me!”

“No,” a deep male voice said in her ear, as warm hands slid slowly up her bare arms. “I like you just the way you are. I have no intention of letting you go yet, and in a few moments, you won't want me to let you go.”

Abbia struggled frantically against her bindings. “Are you insane? We don't have time for this! Get me out of these ropes... right now, damn it!”

“No,” he said, simply and without any room for argument. “It has gone beyond wanting you, Abbia. This must happen, right now, or I won't be able to think straight enough to get us out of this mess. And from the feel of you moving under my touch, you want this just as much as I do.”

Heaven help her, she did. His hands found the ties on her tunic, undid them, and slid it down her body. A moment her leather pantaloons followed, leaving her naked except for her soft moccasins, still laced up to her knees.

“What is your name? I want to know who is fucking me.”

“Tristan. My name is Tristan, and yes, this will be a fucking, because I want you like no man has ever wanted a woman. Later, my Abbia, we will make slow and tender love, but this will not be gentle.”

She didn't need a mind connection to feel his lust, and suddenly, hers rose to meet him.

The fantasy come true at last, she gave herself over to her stud.

Tristan moaned against her bare neck. At the sight of her bound nakedness, his cock went so hard that it pained him. Abbia was the only cure.

And she was as ready for him as he was for her.