



Claimed by the Alien Warrior Triad

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Description: This isn't real life. In real life, you don't have towering, broad-shouldered, Greek Gods of men stepping out of a portal and into your reality. Shirtless, in nothing but loin clothes, with every inch of their rippling, marble-hued muscles covered in tribal tattoos... You don't have men like that appearing out of nowhere; out of a rippling crack in the universe... Until three of them do exactly that...

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Aubrey

This isn't my life.

My life? My life is carefully planned out.

I'm going to make partner at the law firm by 32. I'm going to be married by 33. I'll have two kids by 36.

After I stopped getting my period, eight months ago, a visit to the doctor's office put a wrinkle in the kids part of that. Tests confirmed I was infertile – but Joshua and I agreed adoption was an ethical alternative.

But the first stage of my plan? I achieved it –today.

I've worked my ass off for the last ten years to make partner – and today it finally happened. I celebrated by coming home before 8pm for the first time in a decade; excited to tell my fiancé the incredible news.

The entire way home, as I pulled my jacket close against the chill November winds, I imagined his reaction: How his light blue eyes would sparkle when I told him that I'd just become the youngest-ever partner in the history of the prestigious New York law firm.

I gave the homeless veteran an extra dollar on my way out of the subway station, and

he grinned and nodded as he always does. My hands shook with anticipation as I fumbled my key into the lock, opening the door to greet the love of my life...

...and then the truth hit me like a crowbar.

While I was slaving away at the office for the last ten years, all in an effort to make partner, my fiancé had made a ‘partner’, too.

I met her that evening, when I let myself into the apartment much earlier than Joshua had clearly anticipated and found them tangled in a passionate embrace.

She must have been eighteen or nineteen – all perkiness, curves, and “fuck me” tits.

I stood there, stunned, for a moment. Joshua and I had always had a fairly bland sex life, reserved to the bedroom and preferably in the dark. Seeing him inside another woman – her pert bottom resting on the same kitchen counter I chop vegetables on – felt like I’d walked into some kind of sick porno movie.

To her credit, the girl didn’t seem any more enthused by the interruption. Her eyes shot open and she smacked at Joshua’s back to warn him that they’d been busted.

“How long?” I yelled, as I stood there in the doorway. No “how could you?” or “who is she?”

I needed the timeframe – to quantify the betrayal.

I didn’t make partner in the law firm for nothing. In times of crisis, my mind goes to fact-finding mode.

Joshua couldn’t even look at me. His eyes fell to the floor. He was still hard, despite being interrupted.

“Eight months,” he eventually replied, and the answer hit me even harder than walking in on him balls deep in some naive young slut, in my kitchen with the so-called love of my life.

His words replayed in my head, even as I stared hatefully at the two of them.

Eight months.

Eight months almost to the day since I’d gone through the trauma of being pronounced medically infertile.

I didn’t even say a word. I just backed away and closed the door of our apartment.

No, not ours any more.

His. He was welcome to it. This would be a place haunted by memories, filled with the ghosts of betrayal and the bitter taste of broken promises.

I stumbled back outside, past the same homeless veteran on the steps, and tumbled into the first E train that was headed downtown.

During the subway ride back, I was in a daze. When I finally got off at my stop, the coldness of the New York autumn – which was colder than winter in most states – assaulted me so sharply that it hurt.

But I didn’t care. I needed it. The pain across my chilled face was the only thing in the world that still felt real to me.

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I needed something real, because my world had just come crashing down around my ears; but all around me nothing seemed to have changed.

I was surrounded by the same bodegas, the same little coffee shops, and the same mass of anonymous people walking the streets on either side of me. It was as if everything remained the same – as if my carefully planned future hadn't just been cruelly snuffed out.

All those years I'd spent with Jason. Our love together – the laughs and tears.

They were lies. All lies.

I'd stormed out of the apartment I shared with Jason, and didn't have anywhere else to go. That's how I ended up taking the subway back to the same office I always returned to – the place I'd spent more time in over the last ten years than even my own home.

Ten years building our... No, my future now.

Just like outside, in the lobby of the office block nothing has changed. The world is unaware that it has come crashing down around my ears. The same security guard I always pass gives me the same respectful nod he always does, and the same button in the elevator produces the same 'ding' as the door closes like it always does.

It all seems, sounds, smells the same...

Except now, everything has changed.

Now, everything I worked for is gone. I've built a future and it's been snuffed out.

The doors open with a cheerfolding.

Marissa, our lovely secretary, greets me with a smile. It's hard to look at her right now. It's not her fault. The bubbly blonde has no idea that her age alone reminds me of the images I can't push out of my head – of Joshua, buried balls-deep inside that barely-legal slut.

Marissa's father founded this law firm – but no one can claim she got the position at the front desk out of nepotism. She applied for the position under a fake name, beat out the other candidates at an interview in which nobody knew her, and won the position fair and square. Marissa didn't reveal her true identity until after she had the job.

“How did Joshua react?”

Just like with everyone else – the homeless veteran, the security guard downstairs, even the damn elevator – she has no idea that my world has just been destroyed.

I stop in my tracks.

It takes me too long to figure out the meaning of Marissa's cheerful question. My mind is usually sharp as a whip, but right now I feel like I'm in a daze.

“He... He was ecstatic.”

It wasn't a lie. I remembered the sounds Joshua was making when I walked in on him – on them. He was in ecstasy, alright – he never made those sounds with me.

I remembered the noises he'd uttered, and then I remembered the words – when he'd

turned to confront me, the sweat dripping from his brow, stinking with the sweat from his passion with another woman.

“Eight months,” he’d said.

That’s what hurts the most. Eight months of Joshua telling me he’s working the same, long hours as I was – to get his freelance media and marketing company off the ground.

“Off the ground.”

It’s been on the ground for the last ten years – and it stayed there no matter how much money I poured into it. All my friends judged me for staying with Joshua, but I’d always thought that when we’d have kids, he’d be the perfect dad. There was something so youthful and vibrant about Joshua that kept drawing me in.

Like a moth to flame.

A sickening fist forms in my stomach – as though someone is playing with my insides. Of those thousands of dollars I kept giving Joshua every few months, how much went towards his business...

...and how much towards his little, teenage princess?

Oblivious to my thoughts, Marissa listens to my words - and brightens up even more, if that’s even possible.

“I’m sooo happy for you, Aubrey! And listen, since you’re back in the office already, your first meeting as a partner starts in five minutes. I... My God, this is so embarrassing... But, Aubrey... You inspire me. You made partner at thirty-two! That takes so much hard work and determination! It’s such an honor working with you.”

Marissa speaks so earnestly – her bright, red cheeks flushed with the embarrassment of telling me how much she looks up to me.

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Marissa means the words well enough, but they twist the knife into my wound. On the outside? I have it all. On the inside, I have nothing. I force myself to smile.

“That’s very kind of you. You’re going to take the corporate world by storm.” I force back my petty annoyance at her tender age. Marissa has the same drive as me – and the advantage of youth. She’s going to grow into a powerful force in the business world – and after walking in on Joshua, I feel a momentary pang of jealousy – worried that she’ll achieve the same dreams I just watched crumble around me...

But that’s not fair, so I reluctantly utter my sincere compliment, and it makes her light up.

That’s all the reward I need. Despite the pain I’m going through, I will not take it out on her.

I leave Marissa and walk the hall to my office. The second I close the door, I crumple to the floor. Silent sobs wrack my body.

My future was snuffed out. I still can’t believe it. Life presses in on me, and my office feels like it’s growing smaller by the second, closing in.

I’ve spent the last eight months since the doctor told me I was infertile feeling like less of a woman – inferior, somehow, as if my inability to bear a biological child was all that defined my worth.

Joshua had told me over and over that it was fine. He kept talking about adoption, and about how there are so many children in need of loving parents like we’d planned to

be...

But then the truth came out. All my eighty-hour work-weeks and my finely-tuned legal mind meant nothing to Joshua.

Over the last eight months, I'd shifted what I wanted. I imagined adopting a child whose real parents would have no idea of the gift they'd scorned – or of how the child they'd abandoned would be the light to bring me from the darkness.

I'd imagined being a mother – of a future filled with laughter and joy. Christmas presents. First reports cards. First steps.

Oh, God. It's all gone!

I clench my fists so hard my fingernails dig into my palms. The pain centers me – reminding me of similarly dark days during high-school and college, in which I'd taken a Swiss Army Knife to my thighs and carved myself with the tip of the razor-sharp blade. The intense, but controllable pain would take me out of the stress – if only for a minute or two...

...but it left disgusting marks on my legs. Thin white scars that I hate to look at to this day.

"I won't fall apart," I promise myself, my voice raw.

I try to ground myself of thinking about the first time I went into a courtroom, as a junior lawyer.

I had a full-blown panic attack that day. My heart hammered, and I thought I was going to die. Through the grace of God, the panic happened moments before a break in proceedings. I rushed to the bathroom, ignoring my colleagues, and

hyperventilated for thirty minutes in the stall before I could finally compose myself.

Then I came back, and I won that case.

It still haunts me to this day. If that panic attack had hit me a minute earlier, I'd have lost all credibility – and my chance at a career.

A career that had now seen me make partner.

I pull myself up from the floor and fix my make-up in my handheld mirror. Seeing my own mascara-smeared face forces me to involuntarily compare myself to the woman I'd walked in on, moaning in my kitchen.

My logical brain kicks in.

When you go to the court, emotions are the enemy. Stress, fear, and anxiety? All of that will lose you a case. You need to be robotic. Precise. Controlled.

How did Aristotle define law? "Reason, free from passion."

Trying to stick to that maxim, I intellectually work through all the legal ramifications of my separation with Joshua. He'll argue that the combination of his work from home, his precarious financial situation, and the fact that he was the original renter of our apartment entitles him to the place. The judge will agree. Therefore, there's no reason to fight for the only home I've known for the last decade.

Reason. Free from passion.

I must remember that. Live by it.

I reapply my lipstick and attend to my mascara. My battle armor is on. I fix my hair,

make myself presentable, and leave my office for the partners' meeting.

I'm a minute late, and I take my seat to polite, reserved applause at my new position in the firm. It isn't every day that a new partner is recognized – and never before one as young as me.

I sit at the boardroom table – the place I've been working towards for the last ten years. I see myself reflected, mirrored in the sallow faces sitting all around me. The five other partners, all male, range from mid-forties to their early-seventies; with hair ranging from bald to ashen white.

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Sitting amongst them, I feel decidedly unfeminine.

It's ironic. I should be in my moment of triumph. The men I've looked up to for the last decade are now my peers. I envisioned this moment through every long hour I've worked into the night, through all the friends I've sacrificed. It's sustained me as I abandoned my social life... Then my activism...

...and now, even my relationship.

For this.

Now that I triumphed, success is empty. The betrayal sits heavy in my soul.

"Please excuse me," I say, interrupting my first partners' meeting almost as soon as I've sat down to it.

I recluse myself. Earlier this morning, I'd never have imagined slinking out of a partners' meeting – let alone my first.

But I do. I leave quickly, my heels clicking against the floor as I walk, in a daze, towards the elevator.

Marissa gives me a confused look as the doors shut with a 'ding'.

I exit the building into the bustle of New York, finding delicious anonymity in the busy sidewalks. Here, I'm just another career girl - making her way in the Big City.

No one who sees me can guess that I'm a failure – as a girlfriend, a lawyer, and worst of all...

...as a woman.

Partner by 32.

Married by 33.

Two beautiful kids by 36.

Those were the goalposts I'd built my life upon.

The rest was fluff – where I lived, where I shopped, how I dressed. I'd always imagined I'd figure that out once I got there.

A dog, maybe... I'd thought that far ahead – although I'd never liked the idea of cooping one up in a New York City apartment.

I shake my head and look around.

Immediately – trained by my criminal justice degree, law school background, and passing the bar - my mind starts focusing instead on the seemingly inane details of my surroundings:

I focus on a woman's hat. The crook of a man's nose. My attention is taken by a floating grocery bag, discarded and used. In a courtroom, these are all clues...

But out here? They're distractions.

But they cover up the pressure boiling up in me.

Once again, I'm brought back to my first case – when the panic attack had almost cost me everything. I feel like I'm about to explode just like that again – my conscious mind rebelling at the shock of my new reality.

Then, suddenly, a crackling sound makes me turn my head.

One of New York's many dark alleyways stretches off to my right. People walk past me – grunting irritably as they have to walk around me – and I just feel like a stone in a river; changing the teeming flow in my own minute, meaningless way.

Yet I stand there, and look.

I've walked past the alley a thousand times and never spared it a glance.

Danger.

The thought bubbles up in me. And yet... Somehow, the dark alley calls to me. Other people walk by, as if they can't hear the same subtle, tingling, crackling sound that I can – like twigs crunching underfoot in the midst of a forest.

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I stare into the darkness of the alleyway, and I feel the call of the...

The void.

There's no other way to describe it. The void.

The sickening sensation of letting go.

This morning? I was logical. Precise.

But now, I feel insane. There's a dark undercurrent that flows beneath the day-to-day life we breeze through, and it's as if I suddenly detect it for the first time.

That taxi? It's driving by just a little too close. The slick patch of ice? You could break your neck on that.

Suddenly, I see it all – the teeming danger, poised all around us. We all like to pretend there isn't danger in our modern, sanitized world – but suddenly I'm tuned into it. It's constant, lurking everywhere around us, yet flowing beneath the surface where most people don't detect it – or willfully choose not to.

I don't know what I'm doing, but I do it.

I take a step forward, into the alleyway, toward the unknown.

My high heels click against the cobblestones. I enter the alley, stepping away from normalcy and into this insanity I suddenly feel.

“I’ve gone mad,” I mutter under my breath.

It’s the only explanation. The stress of the day’s trauma has turned me insane. What other reason could I have for walking into a dark alley, knowingly pulling myself away from the safety of the world?

My jaw drops as reality suddenly splits in front of me. The dismal alley’s defining feature had previously been the stink of piss and garbage. Now, suddenly – hanging in the middle of the air – there’s a slit opening in reality.

I stare at it, rippling and crackling, and I know with complete certainty that I’ve truly gone insane. The alternative? The alternative is impossible.

In real life, a portal doesn’t open in front of you.

In real life, you don’t have three towering, broad-shouldered, Greek Gods of men stepping out of said portal, and right into your reality.

Shirtless, in nothing but loinclothes, with every inch of their rippling, marble-hued muscles covered in tribal tattoos – stepping onto the cobblestones of that piss-strewn alleyway like the crackling portal was somehow birthing them.

The dark light of the alley, combined with the ripples of the portal, reflect against the marble skin of these... these interlopers.

I gasp. Bright green blood vessels snake beneath the surface of their skin, contrasting against their pure, ivory musculature. These... these things are both hideous... Terrifying... And yet beautiful...

I can still see the rippling slits of the tear in reality, past the huge, bulky bodies of these three towering strangers, and through it I see bright, vibrant light. The smell of

jungle – warm, sticky and verdant – drifts from their side of reality – or unreality – to mine.

“What... what’s happening?” I demand out loud.

But I know what’s happening. I’ve gone mad.

I know with one-hundred-percent certainty that I’ve truly lost it.

I’m suddenly taken back to the panic attack I had in that courtroom – how everything seemed to disappear, and all I could feel was a deep, primal fear. Right now, my heart is pounding just as fast as it had on that day.

I’ve finally broken down.

I know, because I’m seeing things. What’s unfolding in front of me can’t be happening.

It’s all a figment of my fractured imagination – no matter how vivid it seems.

The figment of my imagination that is the leader of these three, beastly men has a dark shock of hair – as black as obsidian. His features are the polar opposite of my former fiancé, Joshua. Whereas Joshua has an almost feminine, playful face, this man is all hard lines and a strong jaw. His eyes are a deep, dark green – so green that it’s impossible, and yet so bright that they could almost be radiating light. This towering stranger stares down at me – as though he’s been lost in the desert for days, and isn’t sure if I’m an oasis... Or a mirage.

I almost laugh at that. He should talk!

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Only he doesn't talk – and neither do the two, huge men standing a foot behind the leader.

They share his brilliant green eyes – but only that. One of them has short, buzzed hair and a vicious scar running from his chiseled abs all the way up to an inch beneath his heart. A hefty solid gold chain dangles down across his chest.

The third otherworldly stranger has a trimmed mohawk, and he licks his lips as he stares at me; like nothing else exists in the world.

“Aubrey,” rumbles the leader, in a thickly accented voice.

His words are drawn out, as though he speaks in a dialect I've never encountered before. His voice sounds out of this world.

I'm transfixed. Paralyzed. I can't even run – not even as this huge monster of a man strides towards me – his powerful leg muscles flexing as he steps forward.

Why should I? None of this is real, right?

In the face of the loss of my relationship, and the disintegration of the future I'd so carefully planned, my mind simply snapped and conjured a fantasy.

I've just imagined these three, impossibly-muscled, sexy barbarian men; all covered in tattoos and scars.

Either that, or the leader of the triad really does just step forward, scoop me up like I'm

a ragdoll, and throw me over his broad shoulder.

This isn't happening, right?

Only I suddenly realize it is.

I feel like a sack of potatoes as the looming stranger hoists me back through the crackling portal, and suddenly the cold air of New York City disappears as instantly and thoroughly as my sanity.

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2

Stryker

Joy.

I now know what this word, so foreign to me, actually means.

The moment I set my eyes on her, I felt in my heart. The brackish air of her homeworld could not tarnish the clean scent of my mate.

She smells...right.

My triad earned her. We risked our lives to kill the great beast that lurks in the caves – the Scorp Queen whose warriors had endlessly harried our tribe. We brought back her poison glands for our tribe – but her severed head was an offering to our God.

A sacrifice – to prove our worth. And, in return, our Orb God rewarded us with perfection.

Despite my joy, I frown momentarily as I walk forward – through the rippling portal, and back onto the ground of my home world.

Aubrey's world had an unnatural ground in it – one with no give underfoot.

As I step forward back into my own world, I feel her banging against my back with her tiny fists.

It doesn't hurt – but I am annoyed that she's fighting her destiny.

That we'll take care of soon enough. The elders of my tribe often brag about how quickly they tamed their mates. My cock surges as I imagine the ecstasy of the taming process – of bending this fertile young woman to my desires, and then seeding her.

And what if she rejects you? What if she decides she wants no place in your cave? What if she demands the portal take her back to her world?

I push back these thoughts, breathing in her scent instead.

Thoughts of defeat have no place in a warrior's mind. There's no worse fate than to be scorned by your mate. One who loses their honor in such a way loses all respect among the tribe.

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But that will not happen – no matter how much she fights and struggles right now.

My mate says something in her foreign language, her voice lilting and high pitched – so unlike my own. Everything about her fascinates me. She's so soft against me – so small and vulnerable.

"She is exquisite." Telepaths Brigg through the bond. We're a warrior triad, not blood-related but bonded by something far greater; by the violence and blood of battle.

He is my blood-brother. We felt the connection at the young age of one-hundred-and-thirty, and our minds merged when we killed our first Scorp together; during an ambush while we mined the precious metals that Brigg later forged into his treasured chain.

That day, he and I earned our first tattoos and became marked men – no longer just boys within the tribe. I remember it well – seared as indelibly in my memory as the ink is in my skin.

I remember the feeling of when the Scorp venom within the ink first went coursing through my veins. I remember the barely controlled rage and anger that bubbled up beneath the surface of my being.

The price of great strength and the ability to sire children is high. That price is your very mind.

"Our mate is taller than most. She'll bear us an army of sons – taller even than us!"

The voice is that of Haleon, boasting, preferring to articulate his thoughts out loud than telepath them through our bond.

Haleon runs a hand through his mohawk. He wishes deeply that he was the one carrying our beautiful mate right now. Yet, I dealt the killing blow to the Scorp Queen. I earned the duty to lead us into battle, and the right to carry our well-deserved reward.

Besides, such thinking is so...Human.

We are one, Haleon, Brigg and I. One soul in three warrior's bodies. And, soon, we'll have our reward to share.

The minute – no, the second I have this woman in the safety of our caves, I'm going to make her mind melt from pleasure. I'm going to make her moans echo throughout the cave. I'll teach her my name, and she'll scream it out in ecstasy time and time again.

The lust of Brigg and Haleon pours through the bond. It mirrors mine. This female may be tall for a human woman, but she'll still be tiny compared to us – when our three bodies are ravishing her.

My mate speaks again in my ear – her voice like music, even though I can hear the complaints in her words. I know she's complaining, despite not understanding her language. About what, though... That's another question.

We'll have to negotiate with our tribe for use of the amulet we share – the one which allows us to understand those who do not speak our tongue. The owner of the amulet, Reep, will drive a hard bargain, but it is essential that our mate understands us if we want to keep her. There is always the thin tendril of worry in the background of my mind that my mate will reject us.

Yet, even if her words are meaningless, I could never grow tired of her feminine, lilting voice. I picture her with her belly swollen and her breasts full of milk – plump with my seed and siring my heirs.

That is her destiny – whether she knows it or not.

Aubrey eventually stops hitting her open palms against my back. Good. She has accepted the inevitability of her situation.

She will find joy in being our mate, and I will give her everything I have to ensure that.

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3

Aubrey

“Let me down you muscled oaf!”

Did I seriously just call him an oaf? That’s the word I picked? I’ve been pulled into a strange new place, not 18th century England.

I’m yelling, but the leader of these three towering creatures – who has me slung over his huge shoulder like a sack of potatoes – just grunts and readjusts me.

The heat of this place hits me as he carries me through this... This jungle?

Yes, I’m near a jungle, or at least it feels like one. The same one I saw and smelt on the other side of that portal; back in the alleyway, in New York. Though from the glances downwards I can see lush plains and verdant grass, the smells are amazonian.

No wonder I'm hot. I'm dressed for early New York winter – and now we're on the other side of the portal, it suddenly makes sense why these three, huge men are wearing tight clothes that are a cross between shorts and a loincloth; fashioned out of animal skin.

“Put me down!” I demand again, and realize the futility of it.

I'm crazy, remember? And I can't argue with myself.

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Besides, if this figment of my imagination even understands me, it doesn't seem to care what I have to say.

At first, I struggled, and smacked my fists against his back. Then I realized I might not want to piss off the leader of these three, seven-foot-tall warrior beasts.

After all, what might they do to me?

Then, I asked myself that question in a different mental tone...

What might they do to me?

I shivered. My mind chose a rather...pleasant way to go insane. The skin of the man carrying me feels so real against my hands as I grope for purchase on his shoulder. With every breath of humid air, I taste this warrior's musk in my nostrils. I usually hate the smell of sweat on a man – but somehow, this one's scent doesn't disgust me. It's a manly, yet faint smell that I'd be lying if I said didn't affect me.

At least my subconscious mind doesn't hate me – or these three, imaginary men would smell rank.

The firm hand of the warrior pats my bottom, and my cheeks burn bright red. I'd clearly praised my subconscious too soon. My mind apparently wants me to experience the true humiliation of powerlessness.

I return to slapping the beast's broad back in protest, and he just laughs - a low, deep rumble that I feel throughout my body. Then, he gives me a hard spank across my

bottom, and I bite my lip to stop myself from hitting him again. I'm not going to play this game.

"I get it. I smack you, you smack me. Find another woman to play your stupid little game with," I mutter under my breath. I can't tell if this beastly warrior doesn't understand me – or simply doesn't care. Either way, it makes no difference to the end result. He doesn't put me down. Each step he takes, I bounce on his huge shoulders – sweat forming on my brow from the heat of this... this place.

This planet.

I say planet because, somehow, I know this isn't any jungle climate on Earth. And why would it be? Why would my imagination keep me tethered to Earth, when there is a whole imaginary universe to explore?

I laugh silently, and resign myself to the situation. There's no way I can overpower this huge, hulking creature – or his friends.

I look down. I've got a front row seat to study his muscled, heavily-tattooed back.

Up close, I can see every vein in this monster's body – spreading out like roots beneath his marble skin. The veins are bright green; as if the very blood pumping through them is venomous. His tight loincloth-style shorts are tight on his athletic backside – and I study each muscular bun and the way that they move with each powerful step he takes.

Heat warms my face as I realize that I'm actually imagining what his muscled buttocks would like, moving with each step, if he didn't have that pesky loincloth on. To avoid the thoughts, I turn my head right.

Big mistake.

The second barbarian is staring at me like a hungry wolf. His eyes are a duller shade of green than those of his leader. They don't sparkle the same way, but they still have a deep, green hue to them – this time flecked with gold flakes. Unlike the leader of the trio, who has long black hair that falls nearly to his shoulders, this second figure has a closely shaved head. A dangling chain of gold hangs from his neck, bouncing silently with every step. It brings out the color of his eyes, though I doubt a barbarian notices such details when he is accessorizing in the morning. Around his belt is the dangling hilt of a weapon – a wooden stick with a blackish-blue orb in it. The weapon looks strangely incomplete – almost as if it looks like it should have a barb or mace at the end.

I glance down – and then wince. I shouldnothave looked at his belt.

The huge, beastly warrior is wearing the same type of garment as his leader. Considering the man's towering stature, I was expecting a sizeable bulge. I wasnotexpecting to see the vividly-clear outline of his rock-hard cock, snaking parallel with his right leg.

It's too big to be real. It's fuckinghuge.If his hybrid loincloth and shorts were an inch shorter, the massive bell head of his cock would be clearly visible.

Guilt and shame well up inside me. Over the last ten years, I didn't think about any man other than Joshua. I have to remind myself that I'm not in a relationship anymore. In fact, I'm probably lying on the filthy ground of that New York alleyway, having a psychotic episode.

I realize I'm still staring at this warrior's dick. My cheeks redden, and I turn my head left. The last barbarian is staring right at me as well – a slight smile on his face. He looked so ferocious at first glance, but now the mohawked warrior's stern face is ever so slightly softened by the hint of a smile.

The leader's eyes are emerald, and the one with the buzzcut has deep jade to them, flecked with gold. This mohawked warrior has eyes that are almost grey - the light hint of green looking more human than his brethren. His skin enthralls me. Where the men are not covered in green tribal tattoos, their skin is the color of marble - contrasting beautifully against their green veins. I gasp as I see a fresh wound on the mohawked warrior's shoulder, still dripping blood.

It isn't red blood.

It's green.

If these warriors are human, they're like no other human I've ever seen. The mohawked warrior strides powerfully on muscled legs, his skin so unblemished, unlike the faint scars on my thighs that make me hate being naked – especially in front of other people. I sigh as I see that the third warrior's cock is rock hard as well.

There's nowhere safe to look! Every which way has sinful sights that are making my breath quicken and my nipples harden uncomfortably. I squeeze shut my eyes, trying to take stock of the situation.

These three, huge, impossibly-muscled Greek Gods are reaching for me. I've never felt so desired in all my life. I open my eyes and drop my gaze across the leader's enormous back. I'm frustrated at my own helplessness.

Helplessness in this situation – the prisoner of these three enormous men – and helpless within my own mind. Because this is all a hallucination, right? I'm completely fucking insane.

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In real life, I'm probably in an ambulance right now – being shipped off to a mental facility after being found convulsing in the alley.

I didn't just lose the love of my life today... I lost the career I'd worked so hard for the past decade to achieve. You can't be a high-level lawyer and have a mental breakdown. The firm would become a laughing stock if they employed a lawyer who wasn't balanced, sober, and respectable.

“Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!”

I yell the words to myself, slapping myself hard enough on my cheeks to see stars.

The huge man carrying me stops so abruptly my head smacks against his bulk. I bite my tongue by accident.

“Ow,” I say to myself, shocked by hitting myself. With surprising gentleness, the enormous man slowly sets me down and stands before me – a towering figure who makes me feel tiny in his shadow. The moment my feet hit the ground I realize I feel lighter – as if gravity just turned itself down a notch or two, or I finally lost that stubborn ten pounds that never seems to go away.

I should be terrified. I'm either having a mental breakdown, or I'm in a lush climate – an alien one, if the gravity is any clue – with three huge, savage men covered in tattoos and scars. I don't know which situation would be worse.

Despite that, I'm at least somehow comforted by the huge man in the front of me. His brilliant, emerald eyes drink me in. He reaches out his massive hand towards me. I

don't flinch as he gently strokes my cheek, still stinging from where I slapped myself. The tenderness in his gaze contrasts to the obvious lust in his pants. I'm made very aware of the power difference between us. If he wanted to, there could be nothing I could do to stop him from just taking me hard in the grass.

I shiver at the thought. A lightning frisson trembles down my spine from his touch. My body is betraying me, responding involuntarily to his fingers tracing the contours of my cheek. My nipples harden to sensitive peaks, and I'm glad I still have my jacket on, despite the warmth – if only to keep a layer of protection between my naked desire and this beastly man.

He doesn't look at me like I'm a lawyer. He doesn't look at me like I'm a respected professional.

He looks at me like he's consumed by my essence. Like he's utterly obsessed with engraving every detail of my being into his memory. I've never felt so wanted in my life. The two huge warriors step closer, and their bodies make me feel so tiny and helpless. It would be so easy to surrender to these three barbarians – to let them use me for their pleasure. I bite my lip, trying to control my lust as the stranger leans forward, his lips aching for mine.

Oh, my God! Is he going to kiss me?

Then his face changes. All the kindness disappears, leaving only stern violence. My eyes widen as he clenches his jaw tightly.

The three men move in unison, as if they share a single mind – surrounding me, their immense shoulder turned against me. I'm suddenly right in the middle of their three, broad backs. Their bodies are tense and ready. As one, they reach down and grab the hilts of their weapons, as if the stubs could somehow do something.

And then the warrior with the buzzcut and the gold-flecked jade eyes activates his weapon. Where before there was only a thin, wooden stick in his hand – something that looked almost incomplete – a spiked head suddenly appears at the top of it, emanating a low buzz that I can't tell if I'm hearing – or feeling.

I'm transfixed by the weapon. The dark head of the mace is blacker than the deepest blackness. It instantly triggers to the memory of a field trip I took when I was a kid. We went deep into a cave and the guide told us to turn our flashlights off. The pure absence of light scared me so badly I shivered and instantly turned my flashlight back on. Kids at school teased me for being scared of the dark for months – but I couldn't have stood being in that pitch blackness a second longer.

That darkness, that absence of light, is the color of the mace head; or lack of it. It's like a fault in reality – an absence of being. Black tendrils drift from the mace-head, so faintly I can't tell if I'm imagining them or not. A strange blue light emanates from the weapon – an impossible contrast against the material's lack of light.

The leader activates the hilt of his own weapon, and a long black sword appears. I swear it looks hungry, as if a blade can thirst for blood. The long, deadly blade apparates from nothingness to existence, and if I hadn't already – I now truly realize how dangerous these three, beastly men are. The mohawked warrior with the flint eyes is the last to activate his own weapon – a cruel and deadly-looking battle axe.

“What's going on? Are we in danger?” I ask, though I know I'll get no answer. The three of them ignore my voice completely, focused on something I can't see. It's tough to glimpse past their ring of powerful, broad backs, but I search frantically for sight of whatever caused these three terrifying warriors to go on full alert.

Then I hear it.

Thump.

Thump.

Thump.

The sound triggers a reflex in my primordial brain. My animal instincts awaken – long ignored in the safety of those pristine law offices and courts; where I was the apex predator.

Now my fight or flight instincts flare up – and flight tells me to run.

I step back, panic gripping me – about to try and break out of the protective circle I'm surrounded by. Then, suddenly, the warrior with the mohawk wraps his huge hand around my arm. His flint-grey eyes, with that light touch of green, meet mine, and I feel his aura of protection encircling me.

Thump.

Thump.

Thump.

I recognize the sound. I once went to an aviary, and watched the handler with an eagle. It screamed out in distaste and flapped its wings ferociously. The sound I'm hearing is the beating of wings.

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I look up.

The sun blinds me, but I blink it out of my eyes to focus on the threat.

If I'm still on Earth, it certainly isn't the 21st century any longer. The only thing that makes sense is my psychotic episode has led me to hallucinate that I'm in a prehistoric era – back when animals were huge. The thing flying towards us is an eagle; but only if eagles had wingspans the length of a bus, and cruelly hooked beaks that were longer than my arm.

The bird screeches out imperiously as it swoops down towards us, and terror washes over me.

The only thing keeping me from crawling into the fetal position is the strong hand steadying me. The mohawked warrior's eyes track the eagle as it flies towards us, and there's not a hint of fear in his gaze.

His arm moves so fast it can't be real.

That eerie black axe whistles through the air, cutting towards the flying death that wants to rip us to shreds. The head of the weapon smashes against the breast of the bird, and scarlet blood arcs out. At the last second, the eagle opens its wings wide and pulls away, blood splattering down and soaking against the warrior's arm. The bird veers off, screeching in pain, and the rush of wind from its beating wings nearly throws me onto the ground. Soon, the monstrous bird becomes a dot on the horizon, and then disappears into nothingness.

The warrior's hand is still around my wrist. For a moment, I wish I knew his name – so that I could thank him. Then I realize the stupidity of that thought. These men, whoever they are, are the whole reason I was in danger in the first place. I yank my arm in a huff, but I can't escape the looming stranger's vice-like grip. I'm reminded of how powerful he truly is. If he wanted to, I'd never be able to escape his grasp.

The mohawked warrior squeezes, and his face changes and becomes brutal and terrifying. His veins bulge, pulsating with green venom, and as he snarls his face contorts into a beastly mask.

"You're hurting me!" I yell, trying to pull back. His eyes clear, and then he reluctantly releases me. I wipe cold sweat from my forehead. Finally, the mohawked beast speaks to me in his guttural language – but the only word in the string of speech I understand is "Aubrey".

How does he know my name?

I'm incredulous the thought crossed my brain. It's so mind-numbingly obvious.

Because you're having a psychotic breakdown, Aubrey. He's a delusion! Of course he knows your fucking name. Be smart. You didn't get made partner because of your looks.

A shiver runs through me as the warrior reaches forward, brushing back a strand of my hair. I've always found a man touching my hair to be strangely intimate, and I shudder as part of me aches for the beastly man to do much more than just touch my hair. I ache for him to rip these stuffy, warm clothes off my body and claim me. I rub my arm where he held me too tightly, and I can see his handprints on my skin. I don't know what came over him. It's as though he changed for a moment – lost himself in anger.

Then he swallows hard, and I stagger back from the beastly man. He strides to retrieve his axe, and the moment between us passes.

The leader of the three – at least, that's what I assume he must be, since he was the one who picked me up and flung me over his shoulder – kneels down in front of me as though he's proposing. His veins are pulsating as well, his heart clearly pounding from the battle, but he seems to have more control over his emotions than his mohawked companion.

The beast of a man is kneeling down before me, and I get a sickening flashback to the mortification I felt when Joshua proposed to me, back in that crowded restaurant in the Upper East Side. I still said yes – but I'd wished dearly that he'd asked me in a more a private place.

Instead of a diamond, like Joshua had offered me, this towering, long-haired stranger plucks a huge, golden feather from the ground and offers it to me. It shimmers in the sun, and I gasp.

The sun.

How did I miss it? I guess being flung over this monstrous man's shoulder, and then being terrified for my life as he hoisted me through an alien jungle, offers a fair excuse...

...but now I pay attention and look at it, I notice what's wrong immediately.

The sun is too big.

Too red. Too hot.

That confirms it. I'm not on Earth any longer.

I tremble as I take the golden feather, tingles shivering through me as my hand touches that of the ridiculously huge, long-haired warrior.

For a moment, this feels surreal.

For a moment, I almost forget that my career, the last thing of value in my life, is over.

Dead.

I walked out of a partner's meeting on my first day in the position – one I'd worked an entire decade to get.

Now? I'm probably strapped to a bed in a psych ward.

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I pull my jacket off, my armpits sticky. The eyes of the three aliens – and I’m convinced now that’s exactly what they are – widen as they drink in the sight of my exposed arms.

“It’s just an arm, don’t act like you’ve never seen one before,” I mutter, shaking my head in disbelief at the situation.

The leader stands easily, and points to himself. “Stray-ker,” he says slowly, in his rumbling voice.

It takes me a second to realize he’s telling me his name.

“Stay-ker,” I reply, and his stern face softens for a moment in the hint of a smile.

“Stryker,” he says again, quicker.

“Stryker,” I answer, and his smile broadens.

The one with the buzzcut points to himself, his finger touching the top of the vicious scar that somehow doesn’t mar the perfection of his body – only enhancing his physique. It’s so proud and distinct; utterly unlike the pitiful, tiny little scars that shamefully crisscross my thighs.

“Brigg. Kara dum maka, Brigg.”

I have no idea what ‘kara dum’ means, but I’m glad his name is simple.

“Hello, Brigg,” I reply.

He shakes his head. “Brigg. Noda hello Brigg.”

If the situation wasn’t insane, I’d laugh. I nod. “Brigg,” I reply, omitting any other pleasantries – so he knows I can at least figure out his one-syllable name; and that I’m not a complete idiot.

Out here on this warm, luscious planet, I guess I don’t have my law degree or prestigious position in the firm as proof of my intelligence. Out here, if I’m not careful, my abductors might think I’m stupid.

Abductors. That’s how I have to think of them. Because if they’re real, that’s what they did to me. It doesn’t matter that they’re so fucking gorgeous it’s not fair.

The huge warrior with the mohawk – the one who fought off the enormous eagle – returns from retrieving his axe, deactivating his weapon as he nears. The blade disappears into nothingness, and the eagle’s blood that coated it suddenly splatters on the ground; with nothing to hold it up any longer.

“Haleon,” he says, his voice dripping with need for me. His name fills my mind – like dark, sweet molasses. There must be some evolutionary instinct deep inside of humanity, born from prehistoric times, to instantly get turned on when a guy saves you from a gigantic fucking monster – because despite him being my abductor, the way he’s looking at me makes me shiver.

“Thank you, Haleon. Haleon,” I say again, making sure he knows that I understand his name.

I’m grateful for the mohawked warriors’ protection for a second – before I remind myself, again, that he’s one of my abductors. That these bastards are the reason I’m on

some jungle planet far away from... Well, if I'm being honest, far away from nothing but the tattered ruins of my former life.

Haleon just keeps looking at me, licking his lips. Whatever culture these aliens come from, they obviously have no social norms against leering at women there – since the three of these magnificent bastards have had no embarrassment about the obvious situations in their loincloths.

By situation, of course, I mean their enormous and barely-concealed erections.

I narrow my eyes. I need to give at least some indication that I don't appreciate being pulled away from New York and into their reality.

Then I sigh, letting some of the tension out. Whether I'm imagining this, or it's real, it feels as real as anything I've ever experienced before – and if I want to stay alive, I better damn well treat this as real. The thought is rebellious in my mind; and I force myself to nip resistance to it in the bud.

Don't for a second entertain the possibility this is real. Crazy people have no idea they are crazy. As long as I understand that this is fucking insane, I'm still a sane person who's just hallucinating. The moment I accept this as truth, I'll be lost forever.

I gaze past the warriors, trying to find an indication of a way back to Earth. All I see are rolling plains and a verdant jungle, miles away. The grass we are standing in is tall and lush, grazing against my legs gently in the warm breeze.

"Aubrey," says Haleon, his flint-grey eyes – speckled with that beautiful green – lighting up as though my name is his favorite word.

Brigg, Haleon, and Stryker. My subconscious sure came up with some interesting names.

Alright. Think, Aubrey! How do I get out of this? Piece it together logically. Could it be that my brain is somehow... Testing me? If I can find out what my subconscious wants, then maybe I can get out of this delusion! Oh, God – this is insanity...

I fight back despair. It isn't just the names of the warriors that are so out-of-this-world. Seven-foot-tall humans exist, but they end up playing basketball; and they sure as hell don't look likethesethree.

There's no possible way for a human to have that much marble-colored muscle packed onto their frame, even if they injected themselves with all manner of harmful steroids to get it.

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Plus, no-one I've ever seen has such light, marble-colored skin. They aren't albinos, without pigment. No, the skin of these three looks exactly that of the like statues I've seen in museums; smooth and polished. But the thing that really stands out about them isn't their tribal tattoos. It's the green in their veins – that venomous fluid that pulses beneath their skin.

It's starting to make sense. My mind conjured up the polar opposite of Joshua. His boyish good looks are the antithesis of the manly, hard features and diamond-cut jawlines of the three men looming in front of me. I can practically smell the pheromones and testosterone dripping off them.

The whirling, ornate tribal designs of the tattoos that cover their chests and arms draw my eyes. Joshua would never have dared to get a tattoo – which was once something I liked about him. I might be a shark in the boardroom and the courts, but I've never felt comfortable being around the kind of clients that were particularly buff or tattooed up. They intimidated me.

Yet, the danger radiating from those men is a candle compared to the burning bonfire of raw, potential violence that smolders off from these three, huge, beastly men in front of me.

These guys don't just have a few little tattoos. They're covered in them – their enormous muscles a gallery of intricate tribal designs, seared into their skin with a green ink that almost glows.

Stryker steps forward, and I realize his plan before he can act. He's about to grab me and flip me over his shoulder again – which is a convenient, but undignified way of

travelling. I remember his huge palm patting against my bottom, and my cheeks flush at the humiliation.

I leap back.

My heel is stuck in the damp ground and stays in place. The rest of me? The rest of me goes flying.

If I wanted to portray myself as a smart, classy businesswoman, that chance has now gone. Instead, I land awkwardly in a pile on the ground; my professional, black skirt soaked and ruined in the mud.

The three men laugh – emitting deep rumbles that make my cheeks burn red with indignation.

“Don’t laugh!” I scold, knowing they won’t understand my words – but hoping my tone is clear.

Stryker holds out his wide hand, but I ignore it, getting up and refusing his help in a huff. I kick off my other heel. They might be a necessity in the office, but on this alien planet these towering stilettos are wildly impractical.

Alien planet.

It hits me again. These warriors aren’t human.

They’re aliens.

The realization still shocks me to the core. I put the pieces together once again – the ones that had originally led to this incredible conclusion. It still makes sense.

Gravity feels lower here. Animals are infinitely larger. The sun is a deeper red. Over my 32 years of life, I've never had much time to consider aliens. For the last decade especially, my thoughts have orbited around the two most important things in my life: My relationship with Joshua and my career.

In the back of my head, I've always thought aliens were a possibility – especially considering the enormous size of the universe. If aliens did exist, though, I thought they'd be too far away to ever find us. If we did take to the stars, maybe we'd only ever find the derelict wrecks of long-gone cultures that had risen and burned out long before we conquered space.

But apparently, I'm wrong. And now that I think about it, is it so far-fetched that aliens could come to Earth and take women?

I once watched a documentary on alien abductions, having no idea I'd one-day be subject to one myself. At the time I'd felt so much pity for the poor, confused souls who I'd thought just wanted to feel special by making up an incredible tale.

But now... Maybe those tales weren't so incredible after all.

Alien abduction... But why? And why me?

My cheeks redden. Haleon, Brigg and Stryker might not be hard as rock any more – not in the aftermath of battle – but if they are aliens, then it's clear there's only one reason they came for me. The huge, throbbing erections they had in their tight loincloths showed those intentions very clearly.

The three huge aliens want my body.

They abducted me to mate with me. To breed me.

What a horrible surprise they'll get, when they can't get me pregnant!

And then that realization sobers me.

That's the reason for this specific hallucination. It all makes sense now! My mind is torturing me.

It's logical. The day my fiancé realized I was infertile, eight months ago, he'd stopped being attracted to me and chased a younger woman instead.

Now that I've comprehended the shock of his betrayal, and how it was centered around my biggest insecurity and vulnerability, my mind apparently gave up processing reality and filled itself up with these shameful and guilty hallucinations instead.

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My mind devised the cruelest scenario possible: It imagined three huge, sexy men who want me so fucking badly they'd travel to another world to abduct me.

Me, specifically. They even know my fucking name!

My mind imagined that these three, seven-foot tall, Greek Gods of men wanted to breed me, and make me sire their children.

But they'll have me, and when I can't produce a heir, they'll throw me out. Apparently, that is my mind's way of dealing with this tragedy. My mind's way of dealing with Joshua's betrayal. My mind has decided to concoct a scenario in which my only worth is to produce children; highlighting the bitter failure that I can't.

"Oh, God..." I mutter, tears coming to my eyes. I'm trapped in this horrible fantasy – this torturous falsehood, designed by the one person who knows how to hurt me better than anyone else.

Myself.

Stryker points, and I sniff, forcing the tears back before he can notice. I turn my head. He's pointing to a mountain far in the distance. It's at least a ten-mile trek, and it's going to be hell without proper footwear. I look longingly at Stryker's broad shoulders for a moment, knowing how easy it would be to let him carry me.

Apparently, he noticed. Stryker slaps the flesh of his shoulder, indicating he's more than willing to carry me.

But I have my pride.

My mind might be able to torture me, but it can't break me.

I brush myself off, jut my chin up, and start walking.

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4

Haleon

"Aubrey is strong and prideful," I say to my triad. She saw how far it would be to walk to our home, and yet she chose to make her own way. It will not be an easy task for a creature with such small legs to make it that distance – not at the pace we set.

Aubrey looks back, her eyes flashing at the sound of her name. She knows I'm talking about her. I could have telepathed the thought, but seeing her riled up is a pleasure. When she fell into the mud, I couldn't help but relish the flush of her cheeks as they reddened in embarrassment.

Her body's reactions are like nectar to me. I ache to claim her, to taste the luscious gift between her legs, to turn her bottom red with my hand and finally enter her.

I don't care that she doesn't speak a word of our language. She knows my name, and that's the only word I want to hear on her lips. My cock surges as I stare at the curves of her bottom, so different from the male form. Her hips roll with every step, hypnotizing me as she walks.

"Strength and pride are good assets. She'll bear us a hundred powerful sons," answers Brigg, his own pride surging through the bond as he drinks in Aubrey's being.

My triad left the safety of our tribe thirty years ago to make our own way. We found a safe home in the mountains and trained for decades, honing our battle skills until we knew we were strong enough to kill a suitable offering for our Orb God.

Our Orb God rests in the deep caverns of my tribal home. It's larger than I am – a huge sphere that grants our tribe what we need more than anything – for a price.

And what is it we need? Well, all Aurelians like us are born male. Our only chance to sire children is to bring a powerful sacrifice to our Orb God. We give the Orb God a blood sacrifice, won in dangerous battle, and if our God deems the sacrifice worthy, it will open a hole in reality for us – a rift in time and space leading us directly to the woman destiny has chosen as our mate.

Ten years ago, my triad fought and killed a fifty-foot crocodile. It was a battle that lasted nearly an hour, and left a long scar on Brigg's chest. We brought the head of the crocodile to the Orb, and it rewarded us with a vision of our mate.

Aubrey.

The Orb sang her name and showed her in a huge structure – a massive home so tall it would dwarf the biggest tree. She was surrounded by men in stern, black clothing.

I hated seeing her around other men, even puny humans, who had not even earned their first markings. We tribesman earned our ink early in our lives – at a mere one-hundred-and-thirty years of age; when a Scorp found us mining precious metals close to our home. Women and children were watching us. The young were enthralled by the gold we found, enticed by the shimmering metal.

The Scorp rushed for them. We got in between the beast and our tribe, defending the women and children while the older men of the tribe were out hunting. We defeated the Scorp, and our youthful exploits were recognized as those of men. The tribe

rewarded us with our markings.

Brigg also forged a golden chain to commemorate the event, but for me, the markings on my skin were enough.

The tattoos the tribe gave me, as a sign of manhood, changed me irrevocably.

I have to force back the anger and bloodlust of combat almost constantly. The ink they used is made from Scorp venom itself; and it rages beneath my skin like lava, even decades after first being administered there.

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A Scorp earned us our manhood and markings. The crocodile offered us a glimpse at our fated mate. Yesterday, we took the final step towards our destiny – and nearly died as a result.

We descended into a Scorp nest to kill the Queen and bring back her head.

Many Aurelian triads attempt to go into those caves. Few return. We came back bloodied, but victorious – and offered the sacrifice we'd earned to our Orb God.

The Orb God had accepted it, and opened a portal in the plains for us.

When the portal opened, into a frozen and teeming world of towering concrete spires, it opened exactly where Aubrey was standing.

The moment I caught sight of her, my heart pounded faster than it has ever done in any battle.

She was –is– soperfect.

Curved in all the right places, with a fire that burns deeply in her dark, brown eyes.

And now she's here, with us – marching towards our mountain home with a determination I didn't expect from such a small, achingly human woman.

I watched her stride, and I ache to pick her up and carry her. Her tiny human legs are too small for such a long trek.

The Scorp caves are the graves of many Aurelian warriors. The ones who succeed at gaining a mate never stop going back into battle, to earn even more women. The chief of my tribe has four wives, and many sons. It's our duty to amass a similar harem of women; to secure the future of our tribe.

But damn my duty. When I look at Aubrey, I can't imagine wanting more than her... anything or any woman other than her. I need her, desperately. My cock twitches, throbbing with desire for her body. Every instinct in me tells me to rip Aubrey's clothes off right now, and take her hard; to seed her over and over until her breasts fill with milk and her belly swells with my heir.

Soon.

The moment we're safe in our cavernous home, I'm going to sate my hunger inside her perfect, wet little cunt.

Aubrey glances back at me, and her eyes drift down to my rock-hard cock. I know she can sense my need. There's no shame in my utter desire for her.

I can see the lust plain in her eyes, too. She can't hide it.

She wants me –badly. And I will have her.

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5

Aubrey

Oh, God. These three aliens are looking at me like they're starving, and I'm the only thing on the menu.

It isn't just their ravenous stares that show their hunger for me. Their virile, masculine bodies are tense with need, every muscle flexed. Their cocks are impossibly huge and throbbing, and I imagine they're literally dripping with lust beneath those loincloths.

I've never felt so wanted – so small, and vulnerable. The thought of being the object of desire for these three men is both terrifying and intoxicating. Just imagine – three mouths, kissing and licking my body all at once. Three sets of hands, roaming over every inch of my skin. Three huge, throbbing...

I swallow hard. I hope my arousal isn't as clear as theirs. My nipples are hard, desperate buds, pressed against my bra and begging for stimulation. I've never felt so much heat between my thighs before, and my need intensifies whenever I glance back and see the three sets of green eyes riveted on my body – as though I'm the most beautiful woman in the world.

But doubt hits me.

Either this is real, and I've actually been abducted by cavemen aliens, or I'm bonkers. Stark, raving mad. Sweat drips down my face. I must look like a hot mess right now.

If it's option one, I can't blame Stockholm syndrome for my desire. Any sane woman would be weak in the knees at the presence of these three, gorgeous men. They radiate dominance and violence, with jaw-droppingly handsome features, bodies that look like they were carved out of marble, and those huge... hammers between their legs. Stryker, Brigg and Haleon trigger primordial desires in me. Desires that I suspect lurk in the root of every human's spinal cord. Primal desires forged from primitive times, when choosing your mate was a matter of life or death. I ache for these men, and I know it comes from a part of me that never forgot how the strength of your man often determined if your children survived or died.

But...

If these Greek God-like aliens are real, then who is to say I'm the only woman they've abducted and brought to their jungle planet? There's three of them, after all. They couldn't possibly be satisfied with a single woman.

Could I expect to enter their home and be greeted by a harem of women prettier than me? Women younger, and more charming, and who don't have disgusting scars carved all over their thighs? I wince as I step on a rock, but I hide the pain – not wanting to show any weakness in front of these three towering aliens.

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If I'm crazy, then that's the most likely result as well. If my mind truly is torturing me, then what better torture would there be than to put me in a home with a gaggle of beautiful women? The three warriors might be looking at me hungrily now, but surely that's just the novelty of a new catch. When I'm unable to produce offspring, I'm certain I'll be quickly relegated to cooking and cleaning for their more fertile options.

I have to get back to Earth! I have to get back to sanity!

But what if... if, somehow, I enter their home, or cavern, or tent – or whatever the hell it is these primitive aliens live in – and there are no other women?

Then maybe this is all real.

And, if it is real, I can't give into my lust. I need to find a way back to my real life, and I can't let these aliens know what they do to me – how they make me feel.

My feet are aching and I'm covered in sweat by the time we reach the base of the mountain. The moist soil was rough on my feet while I was trying to keep up with the long-legged pace set by Stryker, Brigg and Haleon. It was one of the reasons I didn't even consider running away from my abductors while I had the chance.

The other reason? Where would I even go?

But if the moist grass was difficult on my bare feet, the rock of the mountain promised to be hellish. I have my pride, but there's no reason to have bruised and battered feet because of it.

I look over at Brigg. He's the leanest of the three, his body looking like it was hewn out of diamond. He's also, so far, the only one of these aliens who hasn't either thrown me over his shoulder or grabbed my arm and held it tight.

I just have to do my best to ignore the hard length of his cock, pressing against the fabric of his loincloth with obvious desire for me. There's no real choice here – I'm not going to survive long enough to make my way back to Earth without these three aliens, one way or another.

Back to Earth – and my real life! What a horror.

I pantomime to Brigg, pointing to my shoulders and crouching. It takes him a second to understand, but he realizes what I'm asking – and he squats so I can have a piggy-back ride. I grab onto his shoulders and pull myself up, expecting to wrap my legs around his waist and have my arms around his neck.

Brigg has other ideas.

He easily shrugs me up onto his shoulders, my legs drooped over his chest like I'm one of those extraverted girls at a music festival. He stands as though I'm weightless. I clench my thighs for dear life, until he wraps his arms around my legs and holds me tight.

Unfortunately, my skirt hikes up – and suddenly the only thing between my embarrassingly-wet pussy and the back of his thick neck is my underwear. He takes a step forward, and I stifle a groan as the movement stimulates me in a way that's supposed to be very private.

My cheeks turn a brighter shade of red as I realize that touching the huge, sexy alien is getting me so turned on he might even feel my heat and wetness on the back of his neck.

I tap his shoulder.

“Put me back down!” I demand – but I already know it’s futile. Brigg ignores me, and he starts walking up the mountain with me sitting effortlessly on his shoulders.

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6

Brigg

I’m driven wild by the scent of Aubrey’s arousal. It takes every effort in my body not to reposition her – spin her around, with her legs the other way over my shoulders, so my mouth is positioned directly against her sweet, wet cunt.

Only the knowledge that twenty-foot-long mountain lions are lying in wait for us around the boulders and crevices of this mountain, ready for a quick meal, stops me from indulging my desires.

That’s the thing about our home world – you need to be constantly vigilant. While creatures like the mountain lions won’t generally attack a triad of Aurelians, you never know when one might be driven to madness in starvation; and give it a try.

The moment we are in the safety of the cave, though, I’ll lap at Aubrey’s cunt until she screams out, her entire body quivering with lust and need. Every muscle in my body flexes with need and I run my hands up and down her legs, marveling at the smoothness of her body.

Envy flows through the bond from the other members of my triad. Haeon and Stryker each wish they were the one who was chosen to carry our precious cargo up the mountainside to our home.

I smile at their jealousy as the three of us walk up the mountainside. Haleon pauses to grab a handle of fresh-grass en-route, chomping it down. Stryker follows suit, and since I have my arms full, he also passes me a handful - which I take gratefully. Chewing on the fresh, clean plant always makes my mouth tingle and feel new again. I like to use fresh-grass on my body when I wash in our cavern's stream.

Aubrey is light as a feather on my shoulders as I lift her up the mountain, my eyes scanning at every nook and cranny for a glimpse of one of the beasts that invariably lurk near our home. Despite my all-encompassing need for Aubrey, I still have to be vigilant. Getting surprised by a big cat might end my life – and, more importantly, hers.

The thought makes my mind reel.

Fighting and earning our mate is our greatest honor. All I want is to roll with her in the fur beds of our cavern – to taste her and find absolution in the curves of her body. I will seed her every day, and that moment of pleasure will join us forever, strengthening her. I have heard that it's rare for a human to naturally live a hundred years. My seed will change her body, though. It will make her live for thousands of years; giving her time to bear us a multitude of children, all strong sons who will one day lead our tribe.

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“I’m going to eat you up, Aubrey,” I say, and though she can’t understand my words, her legs tense up at the mere tone of my voice. She aches for what I’m offering, but she’s ashamed at how badly she wants me.

How badly she wantsus.

Nearing our home, I pick up the pace – rushing forward, mountain cats be damned. The sun is slowly setting, and I know what that means. Thebeastwill come out then; the winged demon that has terrorized my tribe for as long as we’ve existed. I propel myself up the mountainside, rather risking an attack by mountain lions than the risk ofthatthing attacking us; especially when I have such precious cargo squirming on my shoulders.

But I’m not afraid. Not of the lions, or even the beast. The only fear I have in my mind is that our mate will refuse us.

It is a rare thing, but the tribe has no respect for those who are rejected by their fated mates. Forcing the coupling is the greatest sin in our society – for children born of a forced coupling are twisted and changed; the Scorp blood too strong in their veins. They become wild and uncontrolled – violent not just to protect the tribe, but violent to members of the tribe itself. Thankfully, it is incredibly rare for a forced coupling to produce an heir – and an Aurelian could force himself upon a woman a thousand times and never sire a twisted, brutal son.

I will not think of such things. Imusthave her. I can taste her arousal already.

She willnotrefuse us, I am certain of it.

Aubrey

As we near the summit, the air thins and grows cool. We stop in front of a huge boulder and Brigg sets me down lightly.

The biceps of the three men bulge as they all work together to pull the boulder aside. It must weigh a ton – but they strain, and their veins pop as they roll it sideways. I step forward to help them, but realize how foolish I would feel trying to add my tiny strength to the struggles of these three, seven-feet-tall warriors.

They soon push the boulder aside a couple of feet, allowing us to walk through and into the cavern beyond.

I pause, biting my lip. I know what's going to happen in those caves. I don't need to speak their language to know what their bodies want. They aren't shy about their hard, throbbing cocks.

If I go into that cave, there'll be no stopping them. As delicious as the warrior men are – and regardless of whether they're a fantasy, a delusion, or even unbelievably real – I know I can feel pain.

And those three huge, throbbing spears of flesh they have tenting out their loincloths? When they get into the throes of passion, I doubt they'll be gentle. I might not be able to walk for days if I let them take me. Hell, I might not even survive such a passionate mating!

Still, the sun is setting – and I don't relish the idea of being outside at night, all alone

in this dangerous alien world.

I tremble, my body aching to follow them. Everything feels sore on this planet – from the heat between my legs to the hard, aching buds of my nipples; which are just begging for these men to pinch and tease them.

As if reading my mind, Stryker looks back, smiling welcomingly – his hair cascading down his shoulders as he beckons me to enter their cave.

I'm still making my decision when a sound like nothing I've ever heard before screams out behind me.

It's not human. It's not even animal.

It's pure hatred.

Stryker jumps out of the cavern and grabs my arm, yanking me inside. There's true fear in his eyes for the slightest moment, and I'm terrified that something in this jungle world could make even such a powerful warrior as him nervous. He pulls me in against his body, and I gasp at how small and vulnerable he makes me feel. I'm so tiny next to Stryker, and the only thing stopping him from pushing me against the wall and having his way with me is his own decency. There would be nothing I could do to stop him.

The three warriors push the boulder back into place – the light of the outside world disappearing.

For a moment, the tunnel is flooded in darkness, and my heart pounds in the fear of the unknown. Then I hear the rasp of metal on rock; the sound of flint and tinder that I remember from visiting the colonial village museum as a child.

A flaming torch suddenly lights the tunnel. I motion frantically for them to leave me room to get out if I need to. There's no chance for me to be able to push the boulder myself – and I don't relish the thought of being completely unable to leave.

The three towering men talk in their language, and finally they push the boulder aside just wide enough that I could squeeze through.

Haleon holds the torch high, and the shadows dancing on his face make his masculine jawline and strong features almost beautiful.

They are gorgeous. All three of them. Their marble skin, green veins, and tribal tattoos only make them look more exotic – but at their core they are pure bad-boys; the kind of men who, back on Earth, would play football, star in movies, or just exist and be showered in praise and female attention wherever they went.

And all three of them are staring at me like I'm the most beautiful creature they've ever seen.

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Their cocks are hard and throbbing, eager for my body. I swallow hard, not knowing what I'm going to do.

Haleon starts down the tunnel, leading the way with the light of his flickering torch. I follow him, and the other two aliens trail along behind me. I can feel their eyes on my backside as I walk, and it both disturbs and arouses me. I try not to add just a little extra wiggle to each step.

Aliens. That's how I described them – and I've landed on the fact that they must be aliens; if they're even real at all.

But if they are, and they really did capture and abduct me, no other explanation makes sense.

I mean, I still think the most rational explanation for all this is a mental breakdown – but this hallucination I'm experiencing is so real, so visceral, that I'm starting to question everything.

The four of us walk down the tunnel, and I hear the sound of running water ahead. The passageway ends, and my eyes light up at the cavern in front of me.

The mountain home is not the drab, dim cave I was expecting. In one corner are three piles of furs and blankets, obviously used for sleeping. In the middle of the cave is a stone-hewn dining table with huge rock lumps that the three aliens must use as chairs. Across from the sleeping area is large pool of water which ends in a thin, fast-flowing stream that exits the cavern.

I blush when I see the soft, dry leaves next to it. It's obviously a primitive version of a restroom!

I walk to the water's edge, wanting to fully understand my surroundings, and dip my finger into the flowing water. It's pleasantly warm, and though I hesitate to think about such...practical details, I know I'd feel cleaner using the washroom here than on Earth – if I could just convince the three aliens to turn their heads – or, better yet, leave the whole cavern when I have to go.

Squatting over a fast-moving stream. Great. Well, in Japan they use bidets – so this isn't that different, right?

I run my hands against the cavern walls, marveling at how smooth they are. The cozy little cave stressed me out on the way up, and I feared it would be full of other, more beautiful women... But, instead, there's nothing here to suggest anyone else lives in this cavern except the three huge men.

The three aliens look at me with raw lust, but they don't make a move...yet.

I welcome them giving me time to familiarize myself with my new surroundings. On the cavern walls are sconces with unlit torches slotted into them. Haleon touches his lit fire against each of them in turn, one by one, until the whole cave is bathed in a warm, welcoming light.

This lets me see the whole place even better – and as I look around, I marvel at the craftsmanship of the stone table. If it was a foot or two lower down, it would be just perfect for my height.

“Torm,” says Stryker warmly, smiling and showing his white teeth as he opens his arms, spreading his hands to gesture at the entire domicile.

I hope 'torm' means home, or welcome.

I try to smile back, but I've never been so nervous. Stryker steps closer to me, his brilliant green eyes filled with lust and his cock surging. He can't wait another second. He towers over me, his massive bulk making me feel so small and vulnerable. I take a nervous step back.

Haleon and Brigg lose their smiles, their eyes hungry as they approach me like wild beasts. The three of them step forward in a ring. Fear grips my heart, almost as powerful as my need for them. The terrifying warriors may have protected me so far, but if they are real... It means they brought me here for one reason, and one reason only.

Tobreed me.

"Oh, God..." I whisper, fear and lust igniting my desires in a way I've never experienced before. This feels so different from my quick couplings of the past. This feels...raw.

Stryker speaks in his language, the words sounding less guttural and more sensual as his voice lowers to a low, deep rumble. He takes another step towards me. I can't understand the words he's speaking, but I know he's telling me what he's about to do with me. Tome. I step back, and my back hits the smooth wall.

I'm trapped between a rock and three very hard places.

Stryker's hand slowly reaches towards my face. He strokes my cheek with the back of two fingers, staring into my eyes with those two, burning green orbs of his.

Then he leans forward and kisses me like no one ever has before.

I'm shocked. I expected a huge, powerful, handsome man like him to be a practiced kisser. The kiss is amateur, though, with no real technique but such incredible passion.

His tongue slips inside my mouth, exploring me, and his mouth tastes fresh like faint mint. He stops the kiss, pulling back, and I melt at the loss of his lips pressed against mine.

"Oh," I say softly, my legs trembling.

Haleon reaches forward, and I think he's going to grope me, or pinch my hard, desperate nipples. Instead, he presses his palm against my left breast, feeling my heartbeat through my firm flesh. His almost-grey eyes, tinged with green, drink me up – staring at me like nothing else exists. He slowly takes my hand and presses it against the slab-like muscle of his chest which covers his own heart.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

His heart is beating as fast as mine. It pounds, like he's run a marathon, and I can feel how eager he is for me. It's endearing, in a strange way. The mohawked warrior defeated a massive eagle earlier – and has probably faced more terrifying beasts than I will ever know. If he wanted to, Haleon could rip my clothes off right now, and fuck me hard against the wall with that huge rod of his – ignoring my pain as he uses me for his own pleasure. I gulp hard at the image, imagining how sinfully good it would feel for the three men to lose control.

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But instead, Haleon lowers his hand and kisses me, his huge hands wrapping around my body as he tastes my lips. His mouth has the same sweet, clean taste as Stryker's, and I remember the grass they chewed on. Is that the reason for the fresh flavor? Their version of toothpaste, or gum?

Such thoughts instantly vanish as Haleon pulls me against his body, and I can feel his heartbeat making his cock throb with every surging pump of blood.

When he breaks off the kiss, Briggs follows – pressing his own lips so passionately against mine that my legs buckle. I reach for something solid, to cling to both mentally and physically, and grab his dangling gold chain for leverage. My own lust is starting to overpower my nervousness, but when Briggs pulls me close to him, his hands firm on my bottom, I feel his huge dick grinding into my chest and panic overwhelms me.

It's too big! That thing is going to fucking hurt!

I push back hard, but all my strength is nothing to the massive alien. He probably doesn't even feel it. He continues kissing me deeply, making my whole body shudder and tremble as his hands touch my sides. I let him explore me with his huge hands, realizing that if I try to fight them off, these three lustful aliens might get angry at me.

A tearing, ripping sound fills the cavern. It's the noise of my blouse being torn to shreds in Briggs's huge hands – his passion overwhelming him. Suddenly, the only thing between my nipples and his huge hands is my bra. He paws at it, not understanding how the lacy garment works, or what its purpose is. He's about to rip it apart when I accept the inevitable and unclasp it myself.

My bra falls to the ground, and my body is bare and on display to the three warriors. They speak in low, guttural tones, their hunger raw as they stare at my breasts like they've never seen a pair of them before.

I'm usually very self-conscious about my body, especially the scars on my legs – but it's impossible to feel anything but beautiful when three, massive men are looking at you like you're being served for dinner. Stryker licks his lips, and I shudder as I imagine that long, thick tongue tracing a wet path along somewhere very different to his own lips.

Stryker doesn't waste a second. He strides forward and scoops me up easily, his huge hands cupping my bottom. I instinctively wrap my legs around him, as he kisses me deeply. I kiss Stryker right back, losing myself in the moment. My hard, aching nipples press nakedly against his enormous chest, and Stryker growls as he walks with me to the sleeping area and sets me gently down on the bed of furs.

The huge alien lays on top of me, pinning me to the ground with his legs. His deep, green eyes are wide with need. Up close, the marble hue of his face is so out of this world – so different from any other man I've ever been with.

His cock strains against the material of his loincloth shorts, and despite my fear I'm aching to see what Stryker looks like naked – what his cock looks like.

Haleon lays next to me on my right, and Brigg to my left, their bodies so fucking huge. I moan out in desperate need as their mouths find my nipples in unison. I've never experienced such teasing, torturously-intense sensations. Their huge mouths cover my areolas, their too-big tongues lapping at my sensitive buds. I moan out in the cavern, my slutty gasps echoing back and forth between the smooth, looming walls.

These aliens might be new to kissing, but they instinctively know how to make me feel utterly lost in pleasure – helpless and squirming beneath the lapping of their

tongues.

“Stop,” I gasp, although even to my own ears, the word sounds more like a plea for them to continue – my voice lusty and harsh with need. I know they don’t understand the meaning; but they can recognize the tone.

Stryker pulls his loincloth down, and a frisson shoots through my entire body as his enormous cock rears up hungrily.

It’s big.

Too fucking big!

The massive rod is pure marble, with bright green veins contrasting against his ivory skin. I chase my flickering tongue down those veins. His cock drips pearly-white pre-cum, way more than humanly possible – and I realize with a shock that with so much of the lubricating substance glistening on his shaft, Stryker might really have a chance to press that impossibly huge cock inside of me without completely ruining me.

But what if it isn’t enough? Joshua had five inches at most, and that thing? It’s more than twice Joshua’s length and girth! If these three men hurt me, there’s no help coming – and men in the throes of fucking don’t stop!

Haleon and Brigg suck insistently at my nipples, and I swear I’m getting close to cumming just from the onslaught of sensation and the sheer, shameful lust of having three men eager to ravish me.

Three pairs of hands roam all over my body, tracing down my stomach towards my sopping wet pussy. I’m so fucking turned on that I can’t even think straight...

...but I know enough to know I can't let this happen.

No matter how much I desire this, if I succumb to the three warriors, I know I'll lose the last shreds of my sanity. I'll never try to get back to Earth and my old life.

I gasp out, grabbing Hadeon's mohawk and pulling hard so he knows it's not a game. He stops lapping at my nipple, his eyes meeting mine, wide and uncomprehending as he stares at me. Brigg stares up, those green eyes flecked with gold, and I see the deep shame in his gaze.

Stryker pauses, his cock twitching and flexing, eager to be driven into me. He growls and says something dark and urgent in his language. Then he stands suddenly, pulling his loincloth up.

The three men can't look at me. I bite my lip, half-wishing they'd ignored my pleas to stop and just ravished me hard. That's what my body wants. It's what it aches for.

But my mind? That needs more time – time to think. My body is trembling and nervous, unable to comprehend the events that are happening to me so fast, and so out of my control.

Oh, God. What if this is real? What if I really am in a cave with three huge, powerful aliens – who make me feel like no man has ever made me feel before?

Would that really... Would that really be so bad?

If the three of them are aliens, and not just figments of my imagination, then I should be angry at them. I have to be furious – incensed that they'd have the audacity to abduct me and steal me from my life without my permission.

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So... Why is it so fucking hard to be mad at them?

When I look at Stryker, Brigg and Haleon, all I feel is lust.

I look up, and I see there's a dark sadness to the three of them as they look at each other; confused at my rejection of their advances.

"It's okay... I don't hate you guys. I just... I just don't know what's happening," I say to them, trying to keep my tone as kind and gentle as I can. I'm scared to death that this is real, and yet even more terrified that it's all fake – a psychotic hallucination. If I'm mad, I lose everything. My career, my purpose in life, all gone.

Please - let this be real!

Fuck. I'm still so intensely horny I can't stand it. I ache to see their massive cocks again, but I know if I make any move that reveals my wet, hungry need for them that, this time, the three aliens might lose themselves completely in their passion – and I'll be split apart.

I have no fucking clue how girls in porn manage to handle those massive cocks – and these three are even bigger than those! They're bigger than any I've ever seen, on any x-rated DVD or website.

If I'm truly on a jungle planet far from home, then there are no medical professionals or hospitals to treat me if Stryker, Brigg and Haleon ruin me with those massive rods.

No matter how badly I want them, I can't let this happen.

Or can I?

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8

Stryker

My worst fear just came true.

Our mate refused us. We stand looking at each other, each of us feeling the same horror deep down inside our hearts.

It took every ounce of my self-discipline not to just take Aubrey, despite her protests. I know it makes me an evil man, but finally being in the presence of a wet, aroused female is almost too much to handle. I breathe in, and the air is still laden with her scent – the desperate need she feels, and yet refuses to accept.

The Scorp venom in my veins tells me to teach her, now. Take her hard, and force her to admit her own needs to herself. How exquisite it would feel to have her tight cunt wrapped around my cock – to slide past her resistance and take her as my own. I clench my fists, holding back the animal in me...

...just barely.

The shame of being denied by my mate was the only thing that jolted me out of the mating frenzy I was on the brink of descending into.

I slam my palm against the wall, and the sudden fear in Aubrey's eyes makes me regret doing so immediately. I'd scared her.

Aubrey grabs at the wrath-bear fur we use as one of our blankets, pulling it up and covering the nakedness of her perfect breasts. My cock is throbbing painfully, but I will not go and waste my seed in the corner of the cavern. I will not be sated until I've shot my stream of hot seed into my mate's perfect cunt.

"Damn it all! What did we do wrong?" I speak to my blood-brothers out loud, knowing that I've failed my species. My tribe can only live on through the breeding of our fated mates – the women shown to us through our powerful Orb-God.

"Can't you see it?" Says Brigg, shaking his head, as if he's trying to clear it. I furrow my brows, egging him on to continue. "She is strong and proud," he continues, "but she has afear to her. It's a sickly, twisted thing that stops her from having what she wants. Can't you see it?" He repeats that question, as if it's the most obvious thing in the world.

I thought there could be some problem with me – that my actions offended my mate. I look at Aubrey again, and this time I see the anxiety in her movements. She trembles, pulling the blanket closer to herself, and I'm filled with self-hatred.

There is something preventing her from understanding her destiny. I was born into the Scorp-Blood tribe, told the legends of my forefathers – who battled huge beasts to earn their fated mates. I watched as our tribal leader grew his harem until it numbered four, beautiful women – and he guarded them jealously.

I have no need for such a harem. I want – no, I need Aubrey. I step closer to her, sitting down next to her and forcing my mind to clear. My cock is still throbbing, but I will not lose myself in the mating frenzy – not until she reaches for it. I wish badly I spoke her language. If I could, I could explain to Aubrey that she has nothing to fear. I would die before I let anything happen to her.

I grab another blanket, this one from the pelt of a leap-wolf, and hand it to her. She

takes it from me with the weakest smile – one that hurts my heart. She wraps her near-naked body in it. Our cave is cool and pleasant, a welcome respite from the heat of the outside world. I breathe in deeply, and her scent is the most perfect torment.

“I can’t stand it. I will sleep over here,” says Haleon, feeling the same tortured lust as me. He grabs a blanket and walks to the other side of the cavern, as far away from Aubrey as possible.

Brigg nods, doing the same, extinguishing the torches as he passes them.

Though it is a true torture to be so near to my mate without being able to claim her, I still relish her proximity. I look up, and see Brigg settling down on the smooth, polished stone floor of our cave. It took us a month of precise cutting with our Orb-weapons to get the walls of this cave so smooth and perfect.

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I throw a couple of furs and toss them to my triad, who nod their thanks and settle into sleeping positions; curled up like mighty lions.

I, however, will not leave Audrey's side. I will face my need – even though every instinct in my body tells me to take her hard. Though it is a pure torment to be so near to my fertile, beautiful mate – who is so obviously dripping with need – I will face the agony of denial just for the reward of being close to her.

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9

Aubrey

Oh, Fuck.

Haleon and Brigg are on the other side of the cave, as if my refusal to let them fuck me was so painful they can't even bear to be near me.

It doesn't feel like they're upset with me that I refused them. Instead, it feels like they're upset with themselves; like they blame themselves for the difficult choice I made.

But while I have a nag of guilt, their absence gives me some relief.

Stryker, though? Stryker gives me no such respite. He lays down behind me, on the other side of the blankets, and spoons me. Stryker wraps his huge arms around me

and pulls me close. His massive, throbbing dick is as hard as a fucking rock, standing straight up against his body as it presses against my buttocks. I try not to wriggle or shift, which would only excite him further – but being so near to this huge, virile man is stoking the fires of my agonizing need.

I want desperately to press my ass against him – to signal to him that I want him... But I have to struggle to control my mind.

Think, Aubrey! Think!

I bite my lip, focusing – trying to find another angle to this situation. A third possibility sprouts in my mind:

Maybe I'm not crazy. Maybe I went into that alley and got mugged, or slipped and fell on a patch of ice. Maybe... Maybe I'm just in a coma right now, with tubes in me, surrounded by doctors.

If that's true... How do I wake up?

I reason through it. I know my history of panic attacks, and I have the scars on my upper thighs that are a constant reminder that I'm not...normal.

As much as I like this third theory – since it takes responsibility for my hallucination away from me – I reluctantly admit that it's much more probable that the betrayal by my fiancé caused these visual hallucinations, as part of a complete breakdown of my mental faculties. I'm merely conjuring up the gorgeous alien whose arms are wrapped tightly around me right now.

As warm, and heavy, and comforting as those arms are – I have to accept the possibility, or probability, that this bizarre situation is all in my head.

My eyes roll back in frustration as Stryker's huge dick presses against my ass – throbbing ever harder. Stryker pulls me even tighter against his broad chest, enveloping me like a big, muscular blanket. Across the cavern, Haleon and Brigg are snoring softly now; easily able to sleep on a single fur.

Stryker's cock, pressing relentlessly against my ass, certainly feels real. I can only imagine what it will feel like stretching me to the absolute limit when he finally takes me hard.

What do people in the movies do to get out of a coma? They go... They go to the light, right? Shit, or is that dying? Fuck! Didn't I watch an episode of House once where there was a coma patient?

I snort. I'm grasping at straws, desperate for anything to distract me from the steel rod that's pressing against my ass. Stryker is slowly falling asleep, but his cock is still wide awake.

The portal. Did it close behind me?

I wrack my brain. In the excitement and terror of being abducted by these three sexy aliens, I didn't check to see if the rippling portal they'd stepped through had closed up after we'd arrived here. I have no memory of it closing, though – so it's possible that it's still there.

If this is real life, the portal is the only way back. And, if this is a coma – or my mind is torturing me – the portal must be symbolic. I need to get to it if I want to get back to Earth. To reality.

I look over at Haleon and Brigg – the two warrior's huge, bulky bodies barely visible in the darkness of the cavern. The only light comes from a tiny, luminescent crop of algae on the wall – one I know the warriors must have let grow there on purpose, to

serve as a nightlight.

I swallow hard. One thing's for certain:

The warriors took me through the portal to bring me here. They won't let me go back to New York.

New York. My memory of the lively city suddenly feels so dull and grey, now that I've experienced... Wherever the hell I am now.

I shift, pulling out my phone. Of course, there's no service – but what's truly shocking is that there aren't a dozen new emails to respond to. I turn my phone off to save the battery charge, and slide it back into my pocket.

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No emails. Imagine that! That hasn't happened to me since before college.

Without internet or email, there's no way I can tackle the onerous caseload I have waiting for me back home in New York. For a luxurious moment, I let myself relax, letting myself drift off in Stryker's possessive arms.

I imagine everything melting away: The cold, New York winters. The fourteen-hour work days. The massive caseloads and endless emails and phone calls. I imagine it all melting away, embracing this new planet and living out the rest of my life in this dangerous paradise.

No! That's your mind tricking you! That's whatever insanity has gripped you pulling you deeper into your delusion! Focus, Aubrey, focus!

The slight snore from behind me indicates that Stryker has finally fallen into a deep sleep.

I'm almost glad he snores. Seven-foot-tall, muscled like my darkest fantasies, and with that... thing between his legs? He needs a fault or two, to have some sort of flaw to his ridiculous perfection.

Oh, wait: The whole abduction thing. That mars his perfection somewhat! I gently wriggle, and I stifle a groan as my movement stimulates Stryker's dick, exciting it and making it throb against my bottom. Stryker doesn't wake, but it certainly doesn't make things easier when I wassofucking close to letting three men ravage me harder than anything I've experienced or evendreamedof before.

Lying here, that surging cock is a constant reminder of the virile, beastly man curling around me like a snoring jungle cat.

It's so tempting to turn around – to grab his dick and wake him. To kiss Stryker deeply, and tell him in words he doesn't understand, but a tone he can't fail to, that I want him, now.

I keep picturing the three tattooed, marble-skinned aliens unleashing themselves on me – making me moan and whimper in submission, and the images are clouding my reason.

Fucking focus!

I wriggle again, trying to get out from underneath Stryker's enormous arm. It feels like a fucking tree trunk – his arm, not his dick, although that's a pretty damn close comparison as well.

I twist and writhe, then suddenly stop cold as Stryker mumbles something in his sleep. With a deft movement, though, I finally get free of his arms.

For warriors, these men certainly sleep deeply. I know why – they've made their cavern impenetrable to the massive beasts that threaten them in the wild. They are the apex predators on this world; the only ones who can relax in a constantly dangerous environment.

It's so weirdly mundane, but I have the very human need to pee. I feel like I'm about to burst. There was no way to relieve myself with the three of them staring at me, and I wasn't about to try out their primitive bathroom with them nearby.

My straining bladder is just another reason to get out of this cave.

I slow my breathing, my heart pounding and my eyes adjusting to the darkness of the cave. I look everywhere for a weapon – but I'm out of luck. Out of luck, that is, unless I want to see how light my fingers are – and try to lift the axe, sword, or mace from the belts of one of these slumbering aliens.

I wouldn't even know how to activate such a weapon, though – and that black orb materialscaresme.

So, I decide to go it alone – unarmed, and knowingly unprepared.

Oh, my God. I can't believe I'm really doing this. Some creatures hunt at night... I've seen the National Geographic specials.

I wince, squeezing my eyelids shut as I remember a particularly brutal documentary my college roommate had on the TV while I was studying a thick tome of 16th century English law for my History of Legal Systems class. It was one of those nature shows, in which a whole pack of lionesses tried to take down an elephant. I can't remember who ended up on top, but it sure as hell wasn't a good experience for the elephant.

I'm not exactly the size of an elephant – and if an eagle on this planet has the wingspan the length of a school bus, I don't even want to think about what one of their mountain lions must look like.

This isn't real. This isn't real. This isn't real.

I repeat that mantra in my mind, steeling myself as I creep out of the main cavern and into the long tunnel leading towards the open air.

There's no algae to light the way in the tunnel, so I move slowly and carefully instead; my hands stretching out in front of me. I'm truly blind in the pitch blackness.

I reach out with my left hand, feeling for the reassuring smoothness of the wall. It's steady beneath my palm.

I travel up the tunnel until the darkness lightens. The slit between the boulder and the cavern walls is illuminated by light outside, and I press my body up to the crevice and look out.

The stars. Oh, God – the stars!

The entire night sky is filled with them, shining brighter than jewels. I've been in New York so long I'd thought the night sky was normal there; never thinking of how the streetlights and neon signs might drown out the stars twinkling in the night sky.

Here I can see everything – like an umbrella of stars, stretching overhead.

It's stunning – but another indication that I'm definitely on an alien world. I swallow hard when I look up and see that there isn't just a single moon here. Two huge, full orbs hang in the sky instead; each as bright as the Earth's lonely moon. This cements the alienness of this planet in my mind.

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I'm seeing the sky like it used to be seen back on Earth – back before there were skyscrapers and factories. I'm looking at the sky from a time when the heavens were filled with sparkling constellations that celebrated Gods and great beasts, the recognition of their forms limited only by humanity's imagination.

The twin moons shine a hollow, eerie light across this alien landscape. I breathe in deeply, tasting the verdant greenery. During the day, the planet might be hot and oppressive, laden with moisture – but at night it's cool and fresh, with a light breeze tantalizing my bare breasts.

I'd originally feared that the night sky might render the same sticky, humid dampness that sticks to your clothes; but instead my nipples harden in the cool wind. My bra had been partially under Stryker's body, and there was no way I would risk pulling it free and having my escape interrupted. Yet, it feels so strange to be in nature without a shirt, and I shudder as I imagine going back through the portal and finding myself topless, in the streets of New York, in the midst of a chill, near-winter night.

Except that won't happen. Because none of this is real – and the portal is just some weird, symbolic... destination in your mind.

Or... or I'm in a coma. There's no way this is real, no matter how real it feels.

I have a choice. I can go back to the cave – back to those three, powerful aliens that have made me feel alive in a way I never have before.

But I know I should think of them as captors. Abductors.

Instead, I'm already feeling like I want to know the thoughts and feelings behind the three alien's intense green eyes; and the violence in their spirit that they seem to be constantly pressing back.

It's that – or I can try to go back to my old life. I clench my fist until my nails bite at my palm. My body and mind beg for me to stay, to explore this world, and to believe it's real...

I squeeze through the crack the aliens were kind enough to leave me and stand near the summit of the mountain. My feet are steady on the bare, rocky ground. I can already feel a blister starting, but I've never felt so free. I'm away from the office, away from the stress of life, away and far away from everything.

It's been less than a day, and yet I feel freer here than if I'd just spent a week on vacation.

And screw you, Steve from accounting, if you try to deny this vacation expense request!

The thought is so strange it makes me giggle. I've got no real resentment towards Steve from accounting, except that he did question my receipts for dinner when I traveled for a law conference with Joshua, who decided that my business expense account meant unlimited margaritas.

I shake my head, and I really do feel free. Joshua's betrayal hit me hard back in New York, but now it feels like I was dragging a ship behind me through ice and waves; and suddenly the towlines snapped. I thought it was so important to bring that ship forward, but in reality, there was nothing inside it but rotten cargo.

A smile blossoms on my face as I understand what's happening. I truly did go mad, and I had a breakdown – but it was all to come to the realization that everything that

had happened to me was a good thing. I'd found out about Joshua before I walked down the aisle with him – the bandaid that was our relationship can finally be ripped off.

All the time I was with Joshua, even though my friends said he was a loser, I felt like I needed him. I needed his love – or his claim to love me, which had been revealed to be a big, fat lie.

A big part of it was my breakdowns, and the scars on my legs. I never thought anyone would accept those parts of me, and yet Joshua had; or had pretended to.

I hate the idea of any man seeing my thighs and asking the inevitable questions. With Joshua, it was already done. I'd told him about cutting myself as a teenager. The awkwardness of that moment was finished, and it was safe.

I think through this new realization. I might be in a psych ward right now, but that doesn't mean my law firm has been notified...yet.

Logically, if I wake up now and get back to sanity, I'll only have missed a day of work. I can come up with some way to convince the other partners that I had a family emergency – that I had to walk out of that partner's meeting for a vital reason. I know I can do it – after all, having a way with words is part and parcel of my job.

Now all I have to do is get back to the portal – and my sanity. At least those three aliens, real or not, will never see my scars.

I relieve myself, emptying my bladder like I've just emptied my insecurities, and after so long of holding it in, the scalding flow feels better than sex.

Well, better than sex with Joshua. I still haven't experienced what it's like to be the sole object of desire for three huge, massively-hung beasts...

...and I never will.

That thought gives me a strange feeling of loss, and I secretly long to go back into the safety of the cave. But I know I can't let myself falter, or I'll be pulled deeper into this delusion.

I get my bearings, and start to creep down the mountainside, sticking to the shadows. Despite knowing this must all be fake – a figment of my fevered imagination – it feels so real that I don't want to endure the pain of an imaginary animal attacking me. That would be a very unpleasant way to be shocked back into reality.

My bare foot slips on an uneven rock, and I stumble forward, grazing my knee against the ground. I curse under my breath at the sudden pain – the pain that feels just as real as when I skinned my knees as a kid on the playground.

I force myself back to my feet. Despite the pain, I feel light. Gravity has been turned down on this planet, at least by ten percent or more, and it's a literal weight off my shoulders.

One thing I'm blessed with, despite my many flaws, is a keen sense of direction. Even though I spent most of the journey being lugged around by those burly aliens, I still know exactly where I need to go. I step carefully, using the moonlight to avoid the rocks and pebbles that will cut my bare feet. Finally, I spot the patch of tall grass the three men ate from. My stomach growls, and I throw caution to the wind – grabbing a handful of the long stems and chewing them.

Instantly, my mouth is filled with refreshing coolness – as if I'm chomping down on a cool, mint-flavored gum. Only, this feels so much more natural.

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It takes me an hour to get down the mountain, stealthily moving from boulder to boulder, hiding in nooks and crannies. My feet are aching, blistered and painful, but I manage to make it to the plains intact.

Down there, the cool, slightly-damp grass is a welcome relief for my poor feet. Yet despite the ease of traveling on the soft-packed grass, I long to be back on the mountainside; where at least I had some protection and cover. Here on the plains, there is nowhere to hide; and I feel like there's plenty to hidefrom.

A growl freezes me in my tracks. Suddenly, I don't feel free. I'm paralyzed for a moment in terror, then I slowly lower myself to the ground, hiding in the long grass, hoping that whatever made that sound hasn't noticed me.

I stare out through the grass towards the growling noise. In the light of the two moons, I see a massive, wolf-like beast stalking through the grass – ten-feet-tall and with a mouth full of teeth the size of kitchen knives.

The wolf stops suddenly, sniffing the air, and then slowly begins walking towards me. The creature is the length of a football stadium away from me – but the distance is closing fast because of the length of its huge strides.

Oh, fuck! Oh, fuck! Wake up, Aubrey! Wake up!

I shudder, cursing myself for leaving the safety of the cave. Suddenly, this feels way too fucking real.

Oh, God – if this is real, I'm going to die. I'm going to die!

The wolf pauses twenty-feet away, sitting back on its haunches and testing the air with huge nostrils. It sniffs deeply, then snarls, the wolf's lips drawing back to give me a closer view of those long, deadly fangs. It steps forward like a wraith. If I hadn't just relieved myself outside the caves, I'd be pissing myself right now. I've never felt a fear so raw. It takes away my own thoughts completely – a fear so complete that it takes away everything that makes me, me.

Instead, I'm an animal of prey, my heart pounding as I press myself as hard as I humanly can against the ground. I want to be swallowed up by the earth. I need to disappear.

Closer, the wolf steps. I feel the vibrations of its bulk through the ground. The giant wolf-creature moves forward slowly, ducking down and approaching as if it doesn't want me to see it coming. The creature growls – a sound that curdles my stomach and fills my veins with terrified adrenaline.

Then another sound comes from behind me – a faint rustling that grips my heart like a fist. Before I can turn to see if another wolf is sneaking up on me from behind, the great wolf in front leaps towards me.

I force my hand into my mouth to stop myself from screaming, as the massive creature leaps over me. I stare up and watch the beast's belly as it flies overhead. I whip my head around and watch as an enormous deer bolts away, racing for its life with the wolf in hot pursuit.

Thank you, not-so-little deer. Thank you!

It was luck that saved my life. I tremble, wondering why my own mind tortures me so. I think back to high school, when I used to bring the razor blade to my legs until the pain was so bad I forgot all my anxiety...

I've got a long history of hurting myself physically. Now, I can add mentally torturing myself to the list. Of course my own mind would want to torment me.

I lay there, quivering, the fear still pulsing through my veins.

"Get up Aubrey! Get up!" I whisper to myself, trying to unthaw my paralyzed muscles. I grit my teeth and push myself to my feet. I don't have any time to spare. I got lucky... once. I won't trust my luck to hold any longer.

I start to jog, knowing I'm about an hour away from the portal. Each step sends pain through my bruised, blistered feet; but I have to get to safety.

It takes me perhaps an hour to get to the spot where I came through the portal. I have no way of telling time exactly, but the movement of the moons suggest that.

All I do know is that I'm at the right spot – exactly where we stepped into this verdant, alien world...

...but there's no sign of the portal.

I squint my eyes. Hovering in the air instead is a teardrop-sized black dot. I wave to it, trying to get its attention.

"Please! Please open," I plead, looking over my shoulder for the next creature that wants to turn me into a late-night snack.

The black dot widens and my hope surges.

Then it blinks out.

Pain and loss hits me. If my mind is tormenting me, the pain is not over yet. My

breath catches as not just the black dot disappears, but the moonlight itself waivers, then disappears.

Where before I could see almost as well as daylight, suddenly I can barely see my own trembling hands in front of me. I look up, and the moons are gone.

The sound of pure hatred fills the air.

It's the sound that I heard earlier – while waiting to enter the cavern. It's the noise that had made even the seemingly-invincible Stryker stiffen with genuine fear.

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Only now, the noise is much, much closer. I stare up at the moons, and I realize that something is obscuring them. Some huge creature is blocking their light.

It screams again – the sound of primal fear, a roar that rends the air, tearing apart the silence and desecrating it with the fervor of violence.

The darkness overhead suddenly splits open into flames. The sky burns as a stream of molten lava shoots through the air, and I witness for the first time the creature that even those three proud, alien warriors fear.

It's a dragon.

“No! No...” I say to myself, barely believing the sight. The beasts' wings spread so far they blot out the horizon. Its eyes burn with dark hatred, as it beats those immense wings and screams out a bloody challenge to the universe. I feel puny and minuscule – even more so than in the presence of Stryker, Brigg and Haleon.

With them, I feel as small and vulnerable as a child.

But in comparison to this... this dragon? I feel like an ant; insignificant, and as easy and inconsequential to crush as any insect.

Far to my right, the huge wolf has killed the deer. The dragon races towards the snarling predator, flying straight past the moons which can again shine their eerie light across the violent scene.

With the moon no longer blotted out, I can see the scarlet blood bathed in silver light.

The wolf had been victorious in its hunt – but now leaps away in terror, using its huge legs to flee as quickly as it can; before the mighty dragon approaches.

The dragon lands, its huge claws pounding into the ground and sending chunks of rock and earth flying. It opens its massive maw and gulps down the carcass of the freshly-killed deer, bones and all, in a single bite.

Then it turns and stares at me with cruel eyes, filled with an other-worldly intelligence.

“Aubrey!”

I snap my head behind me, and see Haleon and Brigg sprinting towards me at full speed, their weapons drawn. Haleon’s axe is activated and brutal – but this is no mere dinosaur-sized eagle that he’s facing.

The dragon is a full-fledged emperor beast; a tyrant of the skies that makes even the seven-feet-tall warriors look tiny.

Brigg brandishes his shimmering, black mace – but the spiked head of his massive weapon isn’t not even the size of one of the huge dragon’s steely black eyes.

The dragon turns its head, its eyes leaving me and turning towards the new threat.

Stryker tails his two companions – his legs pounding into the ground as he rushes forward towards me. His veins are pulsating, his eyes glowing bright green and filled with madness as he grabs me and throws me over his shoulder. He sprints with me, rushing away from the danger, leaving his friends behind.

The dragon beats its wings, taking to the air, and it fires a long stream of magma towards the two remaining aliens. Flames sear towards them, and I scream out in

terror. Brigg and Haleon dive to the side – singed, but alive as they escape the dragon’s blast with super-human agility.

By then, I’m too far away to see the rest of the battle. Stryker runs with me, carrying me back up the mountain slope and into the cave at an incredible speed. At the top of the mountain, with me still slung over this shoulder, he pushes the boulder aside – his muscles flexing and his veins popping as he groans and grunts in exertion.

Then, frustrated, he throws me angrily inside. I stumble, nearly falling, and when I turn back and look into his eyes, I see no humanity any more. Stryker is now an enraged beast – a demon that wants to kill and destroy everything in front of him. He grunts and groans, pushing the boulder back into place.

It shuts, and I’m finally blocked off from the outside world – almost. This time, he leaves a tiny opening, just narrow enough to slip through, and I realize with horror that this means Stryker isn’t sure if he’s going to make it back alive. He’s sealed the boulder so I can shelter in the protection of the cave, but he’s left just enough room for me to escape; knowing I’d never be able to move that mammoth boulder without the strength of these towering aliens.

Then, giving me a final angry snarl, Stryker takes off in a sprint back towards his battle brothers.

I stand there, alone in the cave, and guilt hits me like a fist.

The three warriors might have abducted me, but they’ve always tried to keep me safe.

Now, they’re all going to die – because of me.

The warriors might be fierce and able, but there’s no way they can face that horrific dragon on their own. That means I’ve killed them – not by my hand, but by my

actions. Though I know they may just be a figment of my imagination, I've already started feeling something for these three incredible men. I hate the idea of this deranged fantasy continuing, but not including them.

"Please! Please survive," I plead to no one, aching for the three warriors to return safely.

I sit down heavily in the darkness. I'm in the tunnel, leading towards the three alien's cozy cavern – but I won't give myself the comfort of their cave, with its warm, comforting furs. I don't deserve them. Seconds pass, then minutes, then hours...

I think. I don't know, I can't tell time without a watch, or my phone. My only way to measure its passing is my heartbeat; pounding fast and then slowing as I wait longer and longer.

Suddenly, a crinkling sound from outside makes me jump to my feet. It could be a wolf, or something small enough to fit through the crack...

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...but I hope beyond hope that it's my abductors.

Then the boulder shifts, pushed aside, and I squeeze against the wall as Haleon runs inside carrying Brigg with him.

The sight makes my heart break. I look desperately for Stryker, but he's nowhere to be found. I follow Haleon into the cavern, where he sets Brigg gently on the ground.

Brigg is burnt, badly.

His eyes roll back in pain, and the proud, powerful warrior groans in agony. His pure white skin is marred, blistered, and burnt on his left arm and across his chest. In the darkness of the cave, I can barely make out his wounds – but I know they must be bad.

Stryker is gone, Brigg is wounded, and it's all my fault.

I wish there was something I could do. Haleon uses his flint and tinder to light a torch, and the sudden fire makes Brigg whimper and try to crawl away. My jaw drops as I see the extent of his brutal burns. My heart pounds, and stress fills me. It's impossible to believe he's still alive with the extent of his wounds. He might cling to life for a few moments more, but surely those burns are a death sentence. I hear footsteps coming down the entranceway, and relief fills me as Stryker runs into the cavern.

But my relief is short-lived. He's dripping blood from a long gash on his chest. Stryker casts me a dark glance and brushes past me, holding a mushroom the size of a

football in his hands.

Haleon and Stryker crush the mushroom with a mortar and pestle on the stone table, chanting under their breath. As they work, Brigg writhes in agony on the floor. I run to Brigg's side, and hold out my hand, curling my fingers around his enormous, right hand. Brigg clenches, staring into my eyes wildly, and pain shoots through my palm as the wounded warrior holds onto me for dear life.

I embrace the pain. I deserve it, and I just want to help him.

"You're going to be fine, Brigg. Haleon and Stryker are going to help you," I murmur softly, trying not to look at the brutal burns covering so much of his once-perfect skin. His hand is wet in mine, and sweat drips down his body.

Stryker and Haleon crouch next to Brigg. They've turned the mushroom into a white paste. The two men chant, applying it to Brigg's arm and chest. At first Brigg winces and moans in pain at their hands on his fresh wounds – but once they've coated half of the paste over every burn, Brigg's face relaxes and he stops clenching his jaw.

Whatever is in that salve is healing him, or at least relieving his pain.

Haleon and Stryker lean Brigg back against the furs, and only then does Stryker dip his finger into the paste and presses his finger over the gaping gash on his own chest.

The two of them haven't even looked at me. I hope it's because they're concentrating on their battle brother – but I know the truth. They hate me.

I almost got them all killed, and the pain Brigg is feeling is my fault. They trusted me enough to leave the crack in the boulder so I wouldn't feel trapped...

...and I betrayed that trust.

They won't make that mistake again. Stryker says something guttural in his language, then stares at me with angry, green eyes. His eyes glow venomously as they judge me. I can't understand his words, but I get his meaning. Guilt roils up inside of me, and I hate myself more than he or Hadeon ever could.

You know exactly what he means, Aubrey. You're a fucking idiot. You nearly got all of us killed!

Stryker and Hadeon stand, leaving me with Brigg. I hear the sound of the boulder closing in place. I suddenly feel so naked, with nothing covering my chest, and I take a small fur to wrap around my upper body.

In the chaos, I'd barely remembered to feel ashamed of my own nudity – but now the judgmental eyes of those two warriors make me feel it more than ever.

I'm trapped in a cave with three very pissed-off warriors. Stryker comes back, and my blood runs cold.

He's got a switch in his hand. A long, thin branch. I know exactly what is going to happen next.

The massive beast is going to punish me.

Stryker towers over me, reaches out, and grabs the fur I have covering me.

He throws it aside easily, and then motions for me to bend against the wall.

I know how vulnerable I'll feel with my ass arched for his discipline. I hesitate, fearing the pain that's going to come no matter what I do, or say... But I know the pain Stryker inflicts on me will be nothing compared to the agony that Brigg's burns and wounds must be bringing him.

I deserve so much worse than just a switch.

Stryker motions again. I shake my head, trembling.

“Blaza gan,” snarls Stryker when I don’t move. Then he grabs me, picks me up, and walks me next to the table – where he throws me effortlessly over his lap.

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The towering alien is sitting down on one of the stone-hewn lumps that serve as chairs. My legs and arms dangle over either side of his powerful legs. Stryker presses down firmly on my back, holding me in place.

Then, his huge hand slips down to my skirt, pulling it up and exposing my thong.

I gasp as Haleon's huge hands rip my thong apart – leaving my pussy and ass naked and completely exposed.

Then I feel Stryker's cock surge beneath me. He's brutally angry at me, but the sight of my naked pussy and ass is too much for him to control.

I groan in fear and lust as I realize that being naked and exposed to these two powerful aliens – even though they're about to brutally punish me – is turning me on more than I can stand.

My nipples harden into sensitive buds, and I bite my lip, knowing the two men can sense, and see, and maybe even smell my naked arousal. Heat grows between my thighs and my pussy tingles with need for them.

Oh, fuck! This is so humiliating... And it's exactly what I deserve.

I know I deserve to be punished. I just never dreamt it would happen, and not like this. My cheeks redden with embarrassment and angst, and then I hear the sound of the switch rushing through the air.

Stryker brings it down hard on my ass.

Sudden, stinging pain fills me and I howl out loud. Stryker snarls something in his language and switches me again. Though I know I deserve it, I kick and fight to escape. He's way too strong, though. With a single hand, he can pin me down, over his lap, and keep me there as easily as I would hold a doll. I press my thighs down harder against Stryker. I might be utterly exposed, rended by the scalding pain of that switch, yet despite it all I'm more desperate to hide my secret scars than anything else.

I pant in agony, expecting another blow of the switch – part of me wanting the pain and degradation that I deserve. My cheeks are bright red, knowing Stryker and Haleon can see my pussy glistening with utter need for them...

...but then Stryker throws the switch far away, and rubs my aching bottom. I shudder, still feeling guilt that I put his triad in mortal danger. For a moment his touch soothes me – and I'm ashamed to be comforted when I've caused so much pain. But be careful what you wish for – because a moment later, Stryker brings his hand up from my bottom and then slaps it back down across the fleshy part of my ass.

The crack of flesh on flesh fills the echoing cave, and my gasp of pain and disbelief soon follows.

The punishment is over. This isn't about teaching me a lesson anymore. Stryker just wanted to feel my bottom. He spanks me again, and his cock surges as he brings his hand down on me like I'm an unruly child. He's enjoying disciplining me. I feel my guilt melting away as he spanks me again and again, the pain and embarrassment overwhelming my mind as I wriggle and try to escape his grasp – yet secretly aching for him to bring his hand down hard again.

Crack!

Once more, that massive palm slaps against my ass, pain blossoming. Then Stryker's

enormous finger – bigger even than Joshua’s humble little cock – grazes my sopping wetness, sending frissons of shocking pleasure sparking through me.

Stryker teases my pussy, grazing his fingers against the folds of my sex, his thumb just barely coming into contact with my clit and making me moan in absolute need. His cock surges beneath me, and he mutters something in his alien language, his voice a low, animal growl. I feel Haleon behind me, and I crane my neck to look at him.

He’s towering over me – staring at my naked pussy like he’s never seen one before; licking his lips eagerly.

Stryker tests me again, rubbing his thumb against my clit and I moan out in sheer pleasure. For aliens that have never seen a woman before, they’ve sure learned quickly how to touch one effectively.

My bottom emanates warmth and pain, but it’s nothing compared to the electric pleasure of Stryker’s fingers. Stryker takes his finger, wet with my juices, and grazes it against my asshole. I jump, gasping, and he presses me down even tighter against his leg, exploring my most private place with his thick finger.

All I can do is shudder and wriggle, my cheeks turning a brighter red as I realize that his finger, pressed inexorably against my asshole, is turning me on even more than I was already.

I’ve never let anyone do anything like that to me in my life – but the delicious tickling, teasing sensation is making me moan and gasp in tantalizing pleasure. Stryker’s cock surges under my bare stomach, and it throbs beneath me as he plays with my body.

Stryker runs his other hand up and down my back. The punishment is over, and I look up, craning my head to see what emotion is now burning in his eyes.

Those deep, forest-green orbs have no hatred or anger in them anymore. It's as though the moment the punishment is over, all is forgiven.

I try to stand, but Stryker presses me down harder against his leg.

The punishment might be over, but he wants me, badly.

I don't struggle nearly hard enough to get away. Feeling him press me down against his lap makes me feel so tiny, so protected, so utterly his.

I'm breathing too fast now, letting go of the last vestiges of self-control as Stryker rubs my body, sending tremors of need throughout every nerve ending I have.

Then I feel Hadeon's hands on my ass, too – spreading my cheeks. I gasp as his wet, massive tongue touches my sopping cunt. His short mohawk grazes my cheeks as he dives between my thighs with wild abandon; possessing no technique, but a natural passion and innate skill.

He licks me as though he's been starving for weeks and the taste of my arousal is the only thing that can satisfy him.

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“Holyfuck,” I moan out, electric pleasure shooting through me as Haleon’s too-big tongue laps eagerly at my wetness. Stryker takes his hand from my back, no longer pressing me down. He doesn’t need to. I’m not trying to escape any longer.

I simply moan and whimper, unable to handle the sensation of being eaten out from behind, all while Stryker’s massive cock is pressing upward against my stomach. Stryker’s dick is driving me mad. I can remember clearly every vein, every throbbing inch of the huge thing. I can visualize it even while I can’t see it – my head flooding with the image of that thing pressed against me. I ache to see it for real once again.

I need it. I wriggle, moving myself away from Haleon’s insistent tongue. I push myself off Stryker’s lap, biting my lip – suddenly shy as I stand in front of the two highly-aroused men.

Before they can see anything of my thighs, which are barely covered by my skirt, I drop to all fours. I’m eager to hide the self-inflicted scars that crisscross my thighs – but in dropping to my knees, I’ve inadvertently offered myself up to these two men in an utterly submissive position.

I was already so small compared to them. Now, on my knees, I have to look right up at the two looming men. Haleon stands, his mouth wet from my juices, and every muscle in his body is taut with desire. His huge dick is straining against the fabric of his loincloth. I motion to Stryker’s loincloth, wishing there was a less embarrassing way of asking him to take it off.

Stryker looks at me with pure lust, mixed with a tinge of amusement. He motions to his loincloth as well.

I get the message:

If I want to see his enormous, beautiful cock again, I'll have to get it out myself.

I crawl towards Stryker, knowing Haleon is staring at my wiggling ass as I do so. I kneel in front of Stryker and reach forward with trembling hands, to tug at the top of his tight loincloth. I can see every inch of his beautiful cock pressing against the fabric, and I can remember every vein that I can't immediately see for myself.

Stryker helps me, tugging down his loincloth, and I gasp as his huge, powerful dick jumps out, pressing towards me as though it has a mind of its own, and aches for me independent of Stryker's obvious desire.

His huge cock is rock-fucking-hard, jumping with every heartbeat and dripping copious amounts of pre-cum. A long, pearly string stretches from the tip of his dick, trailing down to the ground, and the sinful thought of lapping it up with my eager tongue fills my mind.

I can't help it.

Something inside me snaps.

I lean forward, unable to resist, and I kiss the huge head of Stryker's swollen cock.

He tastes good. His salty, slightly bitter pre-cum somehow tastes right, and I reach out with my tongue, lapping at the long string of cum that drools from his massive member.

I open my lips as wide as they go, straining to get the huge head of Stryker's cock past my lips. He groans in need as I take him into my mouth, and the sounds of his pleasure fill me with a strange sense of pride. I've never thought of myself as overly-

submissive, but being in the presence of these enormous, powerful men is changing everything I ever thought I wanted.

Stryker's pre-cum is slick and highly lubricated, allowing his cock to slide deeper and deeper into my mouth. Haleon stands behind me, and gently puts his hand on my lower back as I kneel there. Instinctively, I arch up my ass for him – my body responding to his touch and making me present my sopping, eager pussy to him.

This time, it's not Haleon's tongue that finds my cunt. His huge cock throbs as he presses against my slit. I gasp around Stryker's cock, my mouth opening wider in shock and desperate need.

Stryker takes advantage – gripping my hair at the base and forcing me to take more of his dick deep down into my mouth. I choke, but then adjust to the sensation of his powerful dick stretching open my throat; so slick with cum that I couldn't stop it even if I'd wanted to...

And I don't.

Haleon's cock presses relentlessly against my slit, and I moan out around Stryker's dick as Haleon uses his fingers to spread my pussy lips wide. My eyes roll back as he presses past my resistance, forcing his too-big dick slickly inside me.

Haleon's cock is so wet with his alien, highly-lubricated pre-cum – glistening wetness that I figure was designed to let them seed and breed tiny human women like me. His slick wetness enables Haleon to press his dick further and further inside of me, deeper and deeper, stretching me out as I try desperately to handle his huge shaft of throbbing flesh.

Oh, my God! It has to be fully inside me now! There's no more space for it to go!

I think that thought again and again with each lavish inch that presses inside of me, slowly but surely filling me as though Haleon has an iron-rod between his legs. I've never felt such slutty, overwhelming pleasure before – losing all control as I fully succumb to these two virile men.

Stryker snarls, gripping my hair hard until my eyes well with tears. He forces me take his dick deeper and deeper into my throat; but I eagerly struggle to handle the invasion of his straining shaft, trying desperately to breathe through my nose as I swallow more and more of it.

Long strands of spittle and pre-cum drip from my mouth, but I can do nothing about that. If I lift up a hand to wipe the drooling wetness from my chin, I might not even be able to support my own weight.

Stryker pulls my head back off his cock, and I gasp desperately for air. Through watering eyes, I look up at the towering alien and see the beastly, lustful expression in his face. The veins of Stryker's powerful chest are popping, filled with venomous blood, and his eyes are a luminous, bright green that stare right into me as he claims my mouth deeper and deeper.

Stryker's expression is one of pure, utter dominance and ownership.

Haleon starts to thrust in and out of me slowly, from behind. Comparatively speaking, he's gentle – letting me grow accustomed to his huge girth and length, and I shudder as I realize he hasn't even fully embedded himself inside me yet.

I look down in shame at the way I'm being used – but as my head sinks forward, Stryker reaches out to pull my hair up; forcing me to look him in the eyes. He cradles my face with one enormous hand, while gently stroking my chin with the other.

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“Aubrey,” Stryker murmurs, his voice deep and rumbling. I want to melt with the sound of my name on his lips. It sounds so fucking perfect – like I’ve been waiting to hear his low rumble since the day I was born.

“Stryker,” I moan out, and before he can force my mouth deeper onto his straining cock, I open wide and eagerly swallow his shaft instead. I struggle to deep-throat him, the slick lubrication pressing his dick farther and farther down my throat, and Stryker’s eyes widen as if he’s...impressed?

As I struggle to tackle Stryker’s swollen shaft, Haleon grabs my ass cheeks – squeezing the burning globes of my buttocks hard enough to leave handprints on my skin. He spreads my cheeks for his own pleasure - forcing his dick so deeply inside me I think I’m going to black out. He stretches me to the limit, fucking me balls deep with each huge, powerful thrust.

Every time Haleon sinks inside of me, it makes my whole body shudder. Each thrust forces my mouth further and further onto Stryker’s cock – until somehow his huge balls are pressed right up against my chin. I struggle to pleasure the leader of the triad – spit and cum drooling down my chin as I ache for those two huge, heavy balls to release their load in my mouth.

“Gara nolo Aubrey,” growls Stryker, and although I have no idea what the words mean, I doubt I would have understood them even if he’d been speaking English. My mind is so warped and overwhelmed with these sinful sensations – the sheer pleasure of being used building inside me into an unstoppable torrent of lust. Pleasure is building and building between my thighs; like a river filled with ice melt pressing against a dam.

Cracks appear in the metaphorical barrier, as overwhelming sensations mount and grow in response to Haleon ravaging me with his massive dick; fucking me like he owns me.

Stryker groans, and his cock suddenly spurts in my mouth; flooding my tongue with his salty, somehow delicious seed. He shoots stream after stream down my throat, and I eagerly swallow – until the towering alien finally pulls back and his still-spurting cock springs from my mouth. With a deep, guttural groan, Stryker covers my face with the final spurts of his cum; even as Haleon continues to pound me into a puddle of submission.

I gasp and moan as the endless stream of cum lands on my face and lips, and I open my mouth, screaming in pleasure as my pussy convulses in the throes of the most powerful orgasm I've ever felt.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck!” I yell, cursing like a sailor as my vision goes black and I see stars from the intense pleasure. My pussy milks Haleon's cock, and when it finally stiffens it seems even harder than it did when it sunk inside me; if that's even possible! Haleon is fucking hard as he grabs my hips and impales me deeply; balls deep in my greedy little cunt.

“Aubrey,” Haleon growls, and his cock suddenly spurts inside me; rivers of cum filling me up. Haleon keeps his cock deep inside me, spurting load after load as he groans and growls like a wild beast.

My hands give out from the pleasure. I start to fall, but Stryker grabs me by hooking his huge hands under my armpits – holding me aloft as Haleon milks every last drop of cum out of his cock deep inside me.

I'm completely fucking covered in Stryker's cum, with it dripping down my face, even as Haleon fills me to the brim from behind.

Finally drained, Haleon reluctantly pulls his dick from me; and I blush a deeper shade of red as I feel his cum running in scalding rivulets down my inner thighs.

Stryker pulls me up, his hands hooked under my armpits, lifting me easily to my feet...

...it should be sexy – but instead, my heart goes cold.

I reach down, trying to hide my thighs with my hands. My body is still trembling from orgasm, and my mind still fogged with pleasure, but suddenly I'm filled with shame. I can't let him see these disgusting scars.

But Stryker sets me down and pushes my hands away from my thighs, batting them aside as if they're made from paper. My most shameful secret is exposed. The ugly, disgusting scars are plainly visible.

I try to cover them, but Stryker holds my hands at the wrists, preventing me from hiding my shame. Tears well up in my eyes, and I just want to disappear into myself...

...but then Haleon steps up behind me, and begins gently stroking my hair, still slick with sweat. It's as if he can sense my fear, and he wants to sooth me. His huge fingers running through my hair are strangely calming. Stryker, meanwhile, lets go of my hands, and I instantly drop them to my thighs, covering my scars as best as I can.

Stryker points at his own wound, fresh and covered by the mushroom paste. Then he points to another scar on his belly. I didn't even notice it until now, as it was covered in intricate tribal tattoos.

He reaches out, gently taking my left hand and pressing it up against his scar. I feel the length of the cut, tracing his chiseled abs. Then, he pulls my hand up, touching it

against another scar on his shoulder.

Haleon stops running his hand through my hair, and instead moves to my right. He sits down, cross-legged, and takes my right hand in his, uncovering my scars completely. My cheeks burn – but he's not looking at my old, long-healed injuries. Instead, he strokes the fingers of my hand against the brutal white line of ancient scar tissue across his own chest.

Then the two aliens reach out as one and place their other hands on my thighs. Their huge palms are burning hot, and hide the scars better than my human hands ever could...

...and yet, somehow, I know they aren't trying to hide my shame – but accept it.

I've never felt so close to anyone before. I sit there, reeling with emotion, as the three of us gently hold our hands on each other's ancient wounds, as if they're stories written in our skin.

My shame and fear starts to recede – for perhaps the first time in my whole life.

"Scars... To them, they are a mark of honor," I whisper to myself, my voice shaky and scared.

If my mind is playing tricks on me, and I'm truly insane, I'm glad at least that the madness brought me to a place in which I don't have to feel ashamed of the marks on my legs any more. It's going to take a long time to ever feel secure in my body image; but for once I can actually see a light at the end of the tunnel.

Stryker gets up off the chair, kneeling next to me. He places a gentle kiss on my thigh, somehow not caring that his battle-brother's seed is still dripping from my pussy just inches away. Then he kisses me deeply on the lips, obviously uncaring that

his cum is still covering my face.

Haleon moves behind me, rubbing my shoulders and massaging me deeply. The stress starts to disappear from my body. Then he stands and lifts me up easily, as if I weigh nothing, and suddenly I find myself in the air, being swung around effortlessly, like a toy. He runs with me, laughing in a deep booming voice that shocks and surprises me. Haleon leaps, and my heart catches for a second...

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...and then we land with a huge splash in the pool of water in the center of the cavern; which I instantly discover is surprisingly deep.

I don't understand it. I've always hated the idea of a man seeing my scars. It took me a year to even let Joshua have sex with me with the lights on, and I did it only for his pleasure, feeling disgusting the entire time.

But now, as I gasp for air and break the surface of the water, I feel... liberated.

Reborn.

I tread water, feeling the current beneath the surface, that gently pulls me towards the thinner part of the stream and the hole where it exits the cave.

Stryker jumps into the water too, cannonballing with a deluge of water that splashes everywhere. It's as though he's forgotten his wounds. As he churns through the water with powerful strokes, Haleon climbs out to check on their wounded battle-brother.

I watch him walk, shamelessly naked, across the cavern – enjoying the sight of his muscled bottom, glistening and wet, maybe a little too much.

Still watching, I'm enthralled as Haleon takes a wet cloth and wipes away the paste painted across Brigg's chest and arm. Miraculously, the terrible burns have faded – already looking as though they've been healing for a week or more. Haleon starts to apply another layer of mushroom paste, while Brigg sleeps peacefully – clearly no longer agonized by his horrible injuries.

Stryker splashes me playfully, water suddenly cascading down my hair. I turn in the water with a startled laugh. Stryker might be a massive, brutal alien warrior – but, apparently, he has a playful side to him, too.

I'm just glad he isn't still angry at me. I splash the enormous warrior back, but my efforts result in little more than a tiny wave; pathetic compared to his tsunami. As he laughs, I dive under the water – washing off the sex and sweat from my naked body.

My bottom is sore, and I can still feel those two, huge dicks inside of me – where they'd fucked my mouth and pussy simultaneously.

And, yet, I'm somehow more relaxed than I've ever been before in my life. The adrenaline of nearly being killed by an eagle, then stalked by a wolf, and finally facing an actual dragon was so intense...

...but now that those terrors have subsided, I suddenly feel so safe in this cave; with these three powerful, sexy warriors. All the horrors of the outside world are suddenly so far away. I know that Brigg is going to be okay, and the lightness in Stryker's green eyes tells me that everything between us is forgiven.

"Aurelian," he says, pointing to himself. "Aurelian," he says, pointing to Haleon, next. "Aurelian," he repeats, finally pointing to the recovering Brigg. Then he says it one last time; extending his hands to indicate all of them.

Aurelian? Oh, I get it.

"Human," I reply, pointing to myself.

The aliens have a name. Aurelians. I wonder what other talents their species has? Other than... the obvious?

I shudder, imagining the next time I might do something to deserve a punishment. I never thought of myself as someone who'd be into whips and chains; but I'll admit that the feeling of being utterly submissive and powerless feels so strangely natural when it happens with a massive, powerful man like Stryker.

I smile, thinking of ways I could earn a nice, light spanking... Or, maybe I could justask...

What the fuck? No! No, no!

I'm giving in to the pleasures of this reality – this fabrication of my tortured mind.

I cannot allow myself to accept this as real. I know the truth: I broke down from stress, so of course my mind created a hallucinatory paradise in which I have no bills, no emails, no meetings, and no cheating fiancé.

And, of course, my mind would conjure beautiful, mind-numbingly handsome, seven-foot-tall warrior aliens to share this fantasy with me; who all look at me with such desire and devotion that I'll never feel the slightest tinge of worry they'd abandon me for a younger, prettier woman.

Right?

Stryker stares at me with longing with his deep, green eyes. Then he wraps his arms around my neck, pulling me in and kissing me so deeply that I forget everything.

His cock stirs, hardening, but if he puts that thing in me right now – while I'm still sore and stretched – I doubt even his alien pre-cum could make the experience pleasurable for me.

Despite my soreness, though, his lips pressing against mine are reigniting my lust. I

gasp as Stryker slides his hands down to cup my bottom and pull me against his huge dick. Despite my concerns, I can't stop myself from spreading my legs for him. He's already rock-hard; even just minutes after releasing his powerful seed down my throat – and he's relentless as he presses the huge head of his dick against my slit.

Yet despite his power, Stryker is so gentle. That's what defines him. He's so powerful, yet so in control. It's a deeply sexy combination.

Stryker grips my bottom firmly as he pulls me harder against him. He presses his cock inside me. Maybe it's because I've already been fucked once, or maybe it's his pre-cum, but my soreness instantly evaporates as he presses himself into me.

Suddenly, I feel so perfectly full. I gasp out in ecstasy as Stryker claims me, thrusting inside me, firmly and powerfully, as he makes me his.

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He pulls me so close to his muscled chest, every hard ridge of his chiseled abs pressed hard against me. My moans echo across the cavern as he makes me cum twice in a row, our bodies so intertwined that it's impossible to know where my body ends and his begins.

Stryker eventually growls when he fills me with his seed, his hands pulling me tight against him. As he finally lets go, I watch as his seed is snatched up by the light current of the pool, and washed away in a silver stream.

Stryker pulls himself out of the pool and I follow him. He throws me a fur, soft and gentle, and I towel myself off with it. I wish so badly I could communicate with these warriors! I'm going to have to start learning their language tomorrow. I'd teach them English – but that wouldn't make much sense since there are three of them and just one of me.

After I'm dry, Stryker hands me another thin hide, one I recognize as belonging to a deer much like the one I saw the wolf kill the previous night. I wrap the skin around myself, tying it as a makeshift dress that doesn't do much to cover my body.

Not that it matters, the shameless way these three treat being naked.

Stryker strides to the other side of the pool of water, where it flows in freshly from some mountain stream. He fills a wooden bowl and carries it to where Brigg lies, and then gently drips the cool water into Brigg's mouth. His battle-brother's lips move as he gulps it down.

Finally, Stryker lays down in the bed of furs, motioning me to join him, and Haleon

who lies beside him. I cross the cavern and lay down between the two men – and I've never felt so safe or secure before. I'm sandwiched between these two muscled hunks, ensconced protectively.

If this is real, I'm not mad anymore at them capturing me. I don't care that they pulled me away from the dismal winter of my ruined life in New York. I can be happy here.

I let myself get lost in the ludicrous thoughts, knowing that it can't be real. Then, the familiar anxiety grips my heart at the thought of what will happen if this does all turn out to be real.

These Aurelians want a child.

The three of them are male, and they have no qualms about sharing me between the three of them – which means this planet must not have many women. If, logically, these three gorgeous aliens are real, then my greatest value to them is my ability to produce offspring.

I hate my scars, but they aren't my greatest flaw. They aren't my truest, greatest fear and the most powerful source of my self-hatred. There's something even worse than being thrown away like trash by the so-called love of your life.

I'll never be able to bear these men a child.

Don't think about that. Just... Just try to relax. If you went mad, and you are manic, you need to find a way to lose your stress.

I let myself drift off between these two, huge men – not sure whether to cry or smile; feeling so safe, secure and protected, yet knowing deep down in my heart that this can't be possible.

Tomorrow... Tomorrow, I have to make the decision.

Do I try to escape this tropical paradise, so filled with danger?

Or do I find peace here, with these three Aurelians?

Tonight... Tonight I'll let myself imagine a future here. Tomorrow... Tomorrow I'll make the decision.

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Stryker

I wake up smiling.

I'm one of the lucky few who has experienced the greatest sensation known to an Aurelian: To wake up next to your fated mate. To smell her scent, and to feel her body against yours.

To be complete.

The only thing greater could be if Aubrey's breasts were already full with milk, and her belly was already swollen with my child. My smile widens, knowing she will bear me many strong, powerful children who'll continue the proud traditions of my tribe.

Aubrey's skin is so dark compared to mine. So sun-kissed; and so different from my paleness. The light of the algae gives her a strange sheen as she sleeps, and I ache to

light a torch and view Aubrey's beautiful body in its full glory. I could sit for hours just watching her. No, days. I'd pass out from hunger, watching her – forgetting to even eat, or drink.

I extract myself from her arms carefully, not wanting to wake her. Aubrey had a fearsome night last night.

We barely survived the attack. The dragon nearly killed Brigg, but it had no real interest in killing us. The demon beast views us as nothing more than insects to be swatted. When it attacks my tribe, it does so for the sport of catching and killing us. It simply burned Brigg, and then flew off to hunt meatier targets than a wiry, muscled Aurelian. We are unpalatable to the beast, and it's not just our leanness. Unlike us, the dragon has not had Scorp-venom inked in their bodies from a young age. If it took a bite of us, it would be filled with the poison and weakened. That doesn't stop the dragon from enjoying hunting us down like prey. If the beast had wanted to kill us, we'd all be dead.

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Someday, dragon king, you will be mine. Someday, I will end you.

We made it back alive, though – as my triad always does. That fight is in the past now.

Haleon stands silent as a leap-wolf waiting to spring and checks on Brigg. Good. The mushroom paste calms the mind, but too much and you'll never awaken. Brigg will recover in a deep sleep. His aura is peaceful in my mind, barely there but strengthening by the hour. Our mountain home will be safe for him.

Brigg's pride and joy, his thick gold chain – the one that he forged to mark the day we first protected our tribe from the Scorp attack and earned our first tattoos, is lying near him. It's warped from the flames, broken into two, but the rare gold is still valuable.

"Brigg will forgive us. We must sell his chain... We must be able to speak with Aubrey," I telepath to Haleon, not wanting to wake Brigg or Aubrey with the sound of my voice.

Haleon looks at the gold chain with regret. Forged a hundred years ago, when Brigg found a rare deposit of gold after an earthquake near our tribal home, we mined it for days. Women and children came to watch as we laid claim to the vein of gold. Though we were barely more than children, the tribe allowed us to mine it by the right of first find.

Then, when the men of tribe were out hunting, the Scorp came.

They'd never ventured so close to our home before, and we had no way of expecting them. Haleon, Brigg and I killed them as a triad - protecting the women and children of our tribe, and bringing the venom glands of our conquered enemies back to the tribal elders. That act earned us our first ink. We became marked that day – true men of the Scorp-Blood tribe.

Brigg forged that chain to honor the battle; and he's never been without it since.

Haleon nods. We both know how much the chain means to Brigg, but we have to be able to speak to our mate sooner than she can learn our language. There's only one man who holds a God-Amulet in our tribe, powered by the same Orbs that energize our weapons. Reep is an older man who has long lusted after Brigg's chain. The amulet, powered by the same God-substance that controls our weapons, allows any man or human woman to speak with someone who doesn't understand their language. Reep claims the amulet allows him to speak even to animals – although not a man in the tribe believes him.

We need to speak to Aubrey.

Not tomorrow, or next week. Today.

Our God, the great Orb that we sacrifice offerings to, allows us to claim our mates. But the Orb does not keep them here. Aubrey will be offered chances to go back to her old life – portals opening to let her decide her own fate. We must convince her to stay before she takes the chance to go.

It's tempting to simply tie her up – to make her stay. But that way will never end in love.

For a single day with the amulet, Reep will charge us Brigg's most treasured possession.

I step carefully to the chain, picking up the warped pieces and feeling the hefty metal. I only hope Aubrey will appreciate Brigg's sacrifice. We need the Amulet of Speaking badly. The Orb-God may give us access to our mates, but our God is a capricious one. Each woman will get many chances to go back to their old world; and it is the duty of an Aurelian to claim her so fully she gives up everything in her past life for a new future as a fated mate.

There are a few warrior triads who've lost women this way. Some treated their mates too harshly, or – if you believe the older men of the tribe – sometimes not harshly enough.

Those who fail to keep their mates?

I shudder at the thought. It's a great dishonor. Those who lose their mates often go off into solitude, regrouping and dealing with the loss in isolation from the tribe.

Even with the offering of another great sacrifice, the Orb-God rarely gives second chances. It takes a long time to regain your reputation when you demonstrate that you can't even hold onto the woman you fought for, killed for, and perhaps nearly died for.

If I can only speak to Aubrey, I know she'll understand.

I know that in our coupling she fulfills her purpose, and her destiny to bear our children. To be protected, ravished, and worshipped by us for the rest of her long, long life.

And yet, I must explain it with my words as well as my body. I must be able to tell her what I feel deep in my heart and soul – how, unlike many in my tribe, I'll never take another woman for as long as I live. How I ache for her – so deeply that burns my soul.

“Let us leave before we wake her,” telepaths Haleon. I nod. It’s dangerous outside, and it’s better to move in twos and threes. A mountain lion, starved and desperate, may attack a single Aurelian warrior. It is rare for them to try anything against two of them.

I give a last, longing look at Aubrey – cementing her features in my mind so deeply that they’ll never go away. I’ll remember every inch of her skin in this moment, for all eternity. Every strand of her hair, every subtle movement as she breathes in and out...

Haleon and I leave our cavern, pushing the boulder aside. We could easily use the lever system of a log to make it move quicker, but we both relish the visceral feeling of pushing that huge, heavy rock aside with all our might.

The instant I leave the cavern, I feel loss. I hate to be away from Aubrey now that I’ve finally found her.

The long walk back to the jungle, where my tribe resides, will take most of the day. In the underground caverns there, older Aurelians, human women, and unmarked boys play and learn. Very few warrior triads stay there – most preferring solitude like us. Aurelians must earn their own way. Yet, these caverns are where our current chief resides with his harem. It’s also where Reep holds the Amulet of Speaking, so it’s where we must voyage.

I take a last look back at our own cave.

All I have to do is get this amulet – just for a single day – and she’ll never leave us.

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Aubrey

Wait... Where am I?

I wake up feeling strangely refreshed, but very confused – staring out into the darkness.

My eyes are adjusted to the darkness and the luminous algae makes enough light for me to see the cavern. As soon as I do, it all comes flooding back to me.

The betrayal of my fiancé.

Being captured.

The eagle. The wolf. The dragon!

The spanking. Oh, God. The fucking!

Only Brigg is in the cave. He's in a deep sleep, and the mushroom paste is fully dried and flaking off. Though he has some faint, new scars from the burning, he looks as though it happened months ago.

My belly rumbles, and I hope that wherever the other two Aurelians are, they're getting food.

This must be what it was like to be a cavewoman back in prehistoric times. Perhaps these warriors will teach me how to hunt and fight, or get me a weapon like the ones they have. I don't want to be scared going out into the world.

Then I see it.

In the murkiness of the cave, there is a deeper black. A tiny dot, near the pool.

It suddenly opens wide – a portal ripping a hole through reality. My mouth opens in shock as snowflakes pour through, whispering in with the cold, New York wind of a chill November.

The cavern fills with light as I stare into the same grungy alley I'd been abducted from, covered in sludge from a new snowfall that remain virginal for only moments before it was corrupted into the grimy slush of a New York City sidewalk.

It's oddly metaphorical. I think of all the women who came to the city, snow white and pristine, to find their dreams – and, instead, they found rot and corruption.

I shudder.

This all feels real. I have my way back home, the one I nearly died for last night. I suddenly have an easy way back...

But back to what?

Back to my cheating fiancé? To the career that sucks up every second of my time? To a city in which my shame and my insecurities fill me with anxiety?

Or I can stay here – in this cavern, exploring a relationship with three huge, brutal warriors who look at me with such firm, devoted eyes. Eyes that, I know, will never look at another woman the same way as they do me. Men who, I know, will never leave my side.

Tears come to my eyes as the bright light burns through the portal. I gather my bra, the one I let fall like autumn leaves the night before.

Before.

Before our lovemaking.

With my heart breaking, I pull it onto myself.

There's a grunt and a murmur from behind me. I turn. The light has assailed Brigg's eyes, and he grunts, trying to lift himself. His eyes are fogged with the mushroom paste, and he's so badly wounded he can barely move, but he reaches out for me.

I stand, shuddering, entranced by the portal that could close at any second.

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“These three... These three will never leave my side...” I murmur to myself, looking down at Brigg.

His face is so strong, his body so powerful, and he struggles to try to lift himself up despite the pain of his wounds.

For a moment I imagine life here. Learning their language, and then learning what lies behind the stern exteriors of these three starkly different men.

The warrior, Stryker, who at first seemed so ferocious – but then splashed me playfully in the pool of water.

The mohawked Haleon, who’d fight any foe for me; fearless and devoted.

Then, finally, the wounded Brigg – who I have yet to taste and experience, but so keenly hunger to do so.

“These three will never leave my side... and they’ll die never having a son.”

I say it out loud, and a deep coldness washes over me. One that isn’t caused by the New York winter. I finally understand fully the reality of this situation. I feel it so deep in my heart – that these Greek-Gods of men are utterly devoted to me, even though they barely know me. It’s as though they waited their entire lives for me.

And I will never bear them the sons they want.

They’ll grow old.

They'll die.

And, because of their devotion to me, none of them will pass on their legacy.

"I can't give you what you need," I whisper to Brigg, my heart wrenching. I quickly grab my mud-soaked skirt and purse, pulling the fabric up around my waist, and feeling the familiar weight of my apartment key that I'll never use again. My credit card. My phone. All the things that are so obsolete on this planet. The tattered remains of my shirt are still on the ground, but I grab my coat instead, and pull it over my shoulders, hiding any trace of my bare skin.

Brigg can't understand my words, but he knows what my tone of voice means, and he can see me collecting my belongings. The wounded warrior growls in pain and pulls himself to his feet, his face a rictus of agony. His eyes are so wide that I can see the white circling the green of them. He reaches out, trying to pull me back. I dart away, and before I can second guess myself, I throw myself through the portal.

The cold air hits me like a slap. I turn to get one last look at Brigg, but the portal snaps shut almost instantly the moment I do – disappearing into nothingness as if it never existed.

It's as if my time with the Aurelians never happened.

The cold sludge chills my feet and I rush out of the alley. Even for New York, land of the free and home of the weird, I look crazy – with disheveled hair, and barefoot in the cold of winter. My feet are freezing as I rush to the closest hotel, and I'm not sure if the man at the front desk who looks at me with wide eyes is going to take my Amex, or call security.

Ultimately, though, he hands me a room key; as if this is just any other day in New York, and I'm just any other weird-ass customer.

I take the elevator up. When I close the door of the small room behind me, the surreal nature of the situation hits me. I crawl into the rented bed – and despite receiving exactly what I'd been desperately begging for – a way back home – I instantly feel the greatest pang of loss.

This is far worse than losing Joshua. This is the loss of comprehension – of not knowing if I'm insane, or really here... Really back home in New York.

A New York that no longer feels like my home.

I feel grief. Grief for the Aurelians. I barely knew them, and yet I ache for them – for their touch.

If only I could have given them what they needed. Then, the temptation to leave every dark and dirty mistake of my past would have overwhelmed me. I would have stayed on that jungle planet in a heartbeat; embracing a bold new life with those gorgeous Greek-God warrior-aliens.

But instead, I spared them that disappointment.

I spared myself that shame, and self-hatred.

Instead, I turn on my phone, waiting to see the inevitable missed calls and emails.

I'll be back in my old life in no time.

But how the hell can I live my old life? Now that I know there is so much more?

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Aubrey

Twelve years later

“You’ve made such excellent progress, Aubrey. Despite a traumatic experience that caused a fugue state and audio-visual hallucinations, you’ve managed to recover admirably. Most victims of that level of delusion are unable to succeed professionally like you have.”

“Thank you, Dr. Rosewood,” I reply, my voice flat and dull.

I’ve accepted that it was all a lie. But I dream of them every night.

Even twelve years later, I dream every night that I’m back in that cavern. Every night I feel the touch of their hands, the softness of their lips, the hardness of their bodies pressing against mine. I imagine them in such vivid detail that it’s so much more real than my own dull, grey life.

I still see them in my mind’s eye, fighting and killing on that paradise planet – so filled with danger.

Dr. Rosewood is my therapist. In her late-fifties, she has an impeccable sense of style and an affinity towards purple. Her violet nail polish reflects the warm light of her office.

“We’ve spoken about your trust issues. We’ve made some great progress together. You suffered a trauma when you confronted your fiancé’s infidelity. You’ve grieved. You’ve grown accustomed to the new reality. You’ve spent more time being single now than you were ever in a relationship with Joshua... So, have you considered sharing the beautiful life you’ve built with someone?”

I force a smile. “Not yet. There’s so much work, you know?”

She nods, smiling with real warmth. I know Dr. Rosewood wants only the best for me. “There’s always going to be work. You’re a beautiful soul, Aubrey. Why, you don’t look a day older than our first session.”

She’s right.

I haven’t changed since that fateful day, when I had a nervous breakdown and entered a fugue state. It really is strange. There’s not a single new wrinkle, a grey hair, nothing – despite the fact that I’m now forty-four. I’ve watched Dr. Rosewood age gracefully over the last twelve years, but I haven’t changed at all. When I look in the mirror, I see the person who woke up and was betrayed over a decade earlier.

“Maybe you’re right,” I say blandly. Dr. Rosewood latches onto my response, which is more positive than any I’ve given before.

“Not all men are unfaithful,” she promises me.

Haleon, Brigg and Stryker would never be unfaithful.

I try not to think of them, but it’s impossible.

Remember my plan? It feels so far away now.

Partner at the law firm by thirty-two. Married by thirty-three. Two kids by thirty-six.

I feel a wave of nostalgia for a time in my life where such things made sense. I invested fully into my career, losing myself in my work, and I made senior partner sooner than even I could have hoped for. I was soon running point on accounts worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Then I branched out with John Gold, another talented lawyer, and we started our own firm: Wells, Gold and partners. We poached Marissa, who's now gone from a secretary to a vibrant young lawyer – eagle-eyed, and able to spot any inconsistency in a witness' story.

On paper, I'm making it. I've got a penthouse in Manhattan and summer home in the Hamptons. The beach house is beautiful – with waterfront views to die for and rentals on either side that welcome Hollywood celebrities every summer.

But the beach house should be filled with children laughing, and playing. Instead, it feels empty; as lonely as my penthouse when I take my two weeks of vacation to destress by the ocean.

Professionally, the choices I've had have advantages – especially for the people who work for me. I'm the one who's always on call on Christmas and at Easter. But the price of that is being the one who doesn't have a family to spend those holidays with, even at the venerable age of forty-four. Everyone told me I'd start to feel differently about that as I aged – I'd feel the pull to 'set down roots' – but that never happened for me. I've felt the same for all these years; never once able to forget that day and night on another world...

...even if it never really happened at all.

"You're right," I tell Dr. Rosewood. "Maybe it is time to put myself out there." Yet I

cringe at the thought. I haven't been with a man in twelve years. I could have, sure. I got set up by coworkers and friends all the time. I even went on a couple of blind dates; but I felt nothing towards the men I was set up with; as handsome and successful as they were.

No matter how handsome and successful any human man is, it's impossible to measure up against three towering, Greek God, Aurelian warriors.

It's wasn't just the tattoos, the pale marble skin, or the bright green veins. It was their brutal strength. The viciousness when they lost control. The power they emanated – that could keep you safe from anything. I know I could have felt safe in a war zone with those three by my side.

Delusions! Remember – let the thoughts flow through you, but don't engage them. Then go about your business.

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I might have told my therapist that I'm considering putting myself out there, but it's a lie. In my heart, I know I won't date. The one thing I have is work. I've put myself fully into it. I consider eighty hours a week a light workload. I even have my assistant transcribe notes to audio, so I can listen to them while I'm on the recumbent bike.

The only time I'm free from work is when I'm there. When I sleep, I'm back on that distant, jungle planet – replaying the day and night I spent there, over and over in my mind. The way I surrendered control, the spanking, the fucking, the love I felt from those three men.

Oh, God. Why did I ever come back?

I've long since stopped caring that it was all a delusion. I'd go back in a heartbeat. It felt so real. For years, I've been going to therapy to deal with it – but secretly, at night, I still say out loud:

“Please! Please open a portal.”

I'll beg, to no one in particular. Wishing. Hoping. Sometimes, when I'm walking to and from the office, there'll be a trick of the light, or a reflection that makes me suddenly think I see a portal for an instant...

But it's always just that – a trick of the light, or merely the reflection of something that turns out to be utterly mundane.

“We made some excellent progress today. I'll see you this time, next week,” says Dr. Rosewood, smiling. I leave her office and take my company car to our brand-new,

downtown offices. The firm has exploded recently, expanding massively, and we're now billing among the top ten law firms in New York.

But our massive success has done nothing for me.

All I feel is dull.

I take the elevator up to our office.

"Incredible work on the Tolmouth file last week! You were a force to be reckoned with. They increased their billings by thirty percent!" It's Marissa, greeting me as I walk into the main floor of our office building. She's juggling a stack of papers in one hand and a venti macchiato in the other.

Marissa's the rising star of our firm. She's working her way up the ranks, already showing huge promise. I took her under my wing. It was the only thing about returning to New York that made me feel good. I hoped that somehow my own success – despite being meaningless to me – could mean something for somebody else.

She'll make partner maybe even younger than I did. Marissa blossomed from a secretary to a junior lawyer, fighting aggressively and smartly in court in a way that reminded me of myself when I was her age. Seeing her rise is the only thing that can make me truly smile from my heart anymore.

"Flatterer, you," I quip back, feeling a little lighter. Marissa gives me a nod of respect and ducks away into her office, probably just as buried in paperwork as I am.

Well...Nobody is as buried as I am. I've got a reputation for accepting any work.

You know what they say – if you want something done, you give it to the busiest

person. As long as the work is high-level and will increase billings, I'll take it and use it to distract myself from the pain and emptiness I feel every day.

I take a folder from one of our assistants. I know it's old-school, but I still prefer to have paper copies of important accounts. It cements the importance of the work more than an email could ever do. I'm about to start flipping through the folder when I glance over at a flash of color on the computer screen of our new secretary, Lila.

The brunette is pretty enough that men would discount her as nothing more than eye candy – but I've discovered that she's clever as well. Yet, she has a flaw – the work is too easy for her, which leads to distractions and the appearance of a terrible work ethic.

Lila can do her job just a little too easily, thanks to her quick brain, and it makes her think she can afford distractions. As her eyes dart up to meet mine, I notice that whatever she was looking at suddenly disappears from her screen – and she has an Excel file open instead.

I walk over to her and put my file down next to her. If she wants to do more than be a secretary, she needs some tough love.

“How can I help you, Mrs. Wells?” Lila says, smiling so sweetly and innocently that anybody without my legal background might have thought she'd been diligently working away.

“You can switch your tabs back now, and show me what you were doing instead of working.”

Her innocent expression disappears into guilt. Lila shifts uncomfortably in her seat. “Um, it was nothing, okay?”

I raise my eyebrow. I'm not about to ask twice. Lila sighs, then opens the other tab.

It's some kind of online forum.

"Well then. What's so important you decided to stop paying attention to your job?"

I keep my tone firmer than I actually feel. Truly, as long as she gets her work done, she can go on whatever forums she wants to. But that's not going to be the sentiment of the other lawyers, and if one of them catches her wasting time she could lose her job.

I've already heard a couple of rumblings that Lila isn't suited for the job. Worse, if she continues with this bad habit, she might never develop the attitude about work that could help her reach her full potential.

"I was paying attention, I can..."

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Lila wilts under my gaze, and gets the message to stop making excuses.

“It’s just some dumb website. Reddit. People say random stuff on there. I was reading some post about things people saw, but that no one would believe them.”

I snort, and peer at the page. I look at the comments with mild interest, trying to keep my face stern so Lila doesn’t think she’s going to get off easy.

“I once saw a dog shoplift a sandwich from a gas station. Full on knew what he was doing! The little guy had the smuggest, sneakiest look on his face.”

“I once saw a toddler juggle. The kid was like, three at the most, and he legitimately juggled Lego pieces! No one believes me! Not even the mom, who honestly should just be proud of her kid.”

“I know you guys aren’t going to believe me. I’ve never told this to anyone... but 12 years ago I saw something truly insane. This happened in New York. There was this cute chick, real professional looking, and for some reason she walks into an alleyway. So, of course, I follow to see what the hell she saw in there. And I swear – I swear it – these three shirtless albino giants appeared out of nowhere, snatched her right up, and then just... disappeared. I don’t do drugs, I’m not crazy, and this really fucked me up over the years – because I honestly know I saw it... Think I saw it... But it makes no sense.”

“Uh... Mrs. Wells? Aubrey? Are you okay?”

I come back to reality. I’ve been standing stock-still for over a minute, reading and

re-reading the last post. I point a shaking finger at it, not sure if I'm imagining it.

"Can you read that? Do you see that?"

Lila is uncomfortable – confused. I don't care. She doesn't know if I'm going to chew her out, or I've gone off the deep end. "Umm... It's just some crazy guy who thought he saw an alien abduction, or something."

I nod, and walk away.

"Mrs. Wells? You forgot your folder!" Lila's voice calls from behind me. I keep walking, barely seeing my surroundings until I've finally taken the town car back to my penthouse.

I fire up my laptop and search for the Reddit thread – and then I spend the next half-hour wide-eyed, staring at it like it might be a trick.

Then I break down crying.

It happened. It happened! Oh, God, all of that was real!

Tears stream out of my eyes as I feel a horrific grief overcoming me. All this time I accepted that I was mad – and yet, even then, I felt a deep sense of loss at something I'd told myself was only in my mind.

But it wasn't...

Twelve years ago, somebody else saw me snatched from that alleyway by those three towering, shirtless aliens.

Knowing that it's all real twists the knife deep into my old, unhealed wounds. I could

have spent the last twelve years loving and being loved. I could have spent the last twelve years without the constant anxiety and stress that follows me like a dark cloud.

I pick up my iPhone and call the office. Lola picks up. “Wells, Gold and partners. How can I help you?”

“It’s Aubrey. I’m taking a leave of absence. One week. Marissa will step up on my caseload. She has my cell.”

“Mrs. Well? Are you okay? That’s...”

I hang up before she can finish her sentence. If anyone is up to the task of handling my files, it’s Marissa. She’ll prove herself under the doubled workload. None of that really matters though. Not anymore, does it?

How did they open the portal?

I think, and think, and think. I’ve been trying to figure it out for twelve years. Then it hits me. The portal shimmered with the same light as their weapons, which all had tiny black orbs in the hilts.

Orbs! Orbs are the key!

I open up my online banking and check my funds. I can get three million liquid cash by tomorrow. That’s just a start. I’ve got lines of credit available that are deeper than most businesses.

But I need more information. I pick up my phone, scrolling through the contacts and placing the call. I’ve already conjured the scenario to get our firm’s lead private detective agency to do what I need them to do.

“Aubrey. What do you need?” Jed’s voice is curt, but not unfriendly. The former Marine’s gruffness just means he’s busy.

“Something personal. I’m going for a huge contract with a risk profile a little out of our range. This is a long shot, and I’m pursuing it without the partners’ knowledge. It doesn’t carry risk to our professional relationship with you, but I need to move without red tape. Can you do it for me?”

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“Of course.”

I pace as I talk. “I need you to look at the following. Abductions with three assailants, and alternative energy that use the keywords: orbs, circle, ball – or anything else related to those words.”

It’s a strange request. There’s a pause on the line.

“Who do I bill it to?”

“Me. Personally. At 15% over normal rate for speedy delivery.”

I lick my lips nervously. I need him to get this done yesterday.

“Aubrey, this is an unusual request. Can you give me more information? Without context, this sounds like two wildly different investigations. My only speculation is that you want information about an alternative energy-related kidnapping. Is this a national defense contract?”

I run my tongue on the insides of my teeth. The story I tell has to be precise.

“Specifically, abductions with three albino men with tribal tattoos.”

“Is this some kind of joke?”

I shake my head, though I know he can’t see me through the phone. I could link him to the Reddit thread, but I need to know how seriously he takes my request. If his

initial information doesn't bring it up, I know he's not the man for the job.

"I don't joke, Jed – not when money's involved. I brought you into my firm four years ago. How much have you billed us since then?"

He pauses, calculating. "Six million dollars."

"Six million, three hundred, and sixty-four thousand dollars. That's what you earned in the last four years, because I brought you in. This assessment is of utmost importance. I need you to devote an entire team to it. I need results yesterday, do you understand?"

My voice is raised – high-pitched, and urgent. I calm myself with deep breaths.

"Of course," Jed responds. "I'm on it. Email me any more pertinent details if they become available." The line goes dead.

All the dullness is gone from my eyes. All the fog of the last twelve years, moving through life without purpose, is cleared. My eyes are wide open now, and I feel like someone dropped icy, cold water on me.

The next call is to my bank, opening every line of credit available to me, and liquidating a litany of investments. The financial advisor tries to talk me out of the move, explaining that I'll be killed on early redemption fees, but I don't care. None of that matters. Why would I need money when I have Stryker, Haleon, and Brigg?

They're galaxies away – perhaps not even in the same reality – and yet I swear I can feel their love; undying and so deep in my heart that it never left me after all these years.

And if I miraculously go back and they've moved on? How can I expect those men

not to have spent the last twelve years finding multiple replacements for me? What if I arrive and they've got themselves a harem of young, beautiful, fertile women attending to their every need?

The thought rankles in my mind, but there's nothing I can do. I have to take the risk. I've regretted coming back to New York every day for the last twelve years.

When Joshua got married within six months of meeting his new girl – especially after he couldn't commit to me after nearly a decade together – I didn't even feel anger. I felt nothing. The emptiness of my life has remained constant and never ending...

...but now I know how to end it.

For the first time in twelve years, I feel...something.

I feel...alive.

"Stryker... Haleon... Brigg... I'm coming for you," I whisper, though even a day ago I would have called myself delusional to have uttered such words.

Now I'm resolute.

My phone rings. It's the office.

I let it go to voicemail.

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Aubrey

Fourteen voicemails are unread on my phone. I only notice them because I glance at my iPhone for the time. Every available surface of my penthouse is now covered in news reports and printouts, and it's only going to get worse when Jed sends me his information.

I rush back to the living room to read the second report I've uncovered, about three men grabbing a woman. I scan over the details, shaking my head as I realize it was a cartel related kidnapping. The tattoos were gang-affiliated, and not tribal. With a scowl, I grab the paper, crumple it into a ball, and toss it into the garbage – where it joins countless others.

Then I rush back into the kitchen, where I scan through page after page of conspiracy theory on infinite energy sources. None are useful.

The doorbell rings. For the strangest moment, I imagine Haleon, Brigg, and Stryker on the other side. Yet, they seem the type to kick the door down, not wait patiently on the other side. I press my eye to the peephole and my heart sinks.

It's John Gold, the other founding partner of our firm. I realize I'm disheveled and haven't showered in a couple days. I can't let him see me like this.

I pause, hoping for a foolish moment he'll simply leave.

"Aubrey, I know you're in there. I saw your car in the garage."

I could be out for a walk, couldn't I? No, that wouldn't matter. John's relentless. It's why I chose him to start a firm, right? He'll just sit and wait in his car outside until he gets let inside – all night, if that's what it takes.

"Give me a moment!" I yell, and rush to the bathroom – staring, wide-eyed, at my disheveled hair. I look like absolute garbage.

On the plus side, I'm pale and sickly, my face flush. I could pull off having the flu. I pull a housecoat around myself and walk back to the front door. I'm about to open it when I freeze.

Fuck. If I was sick, I would have told them and taken medical leave. John's as smart as a whip. He'll see right through this.

I choose another angle and open the door.

John stares at the huge mass of papers that litter my apartment. He's about to step in, but I move slightly to block him, and I put my hand up.

"What the hell is this? You're a founding partner. You can't just disappear! We've got the Lawson case on Friday, and we need you in the office!"

"I know. I know. Look, John, do you trust me?"

He pauses. I take offence.

I've been working harder than anyone else for years, and he's getting nervous over a

couple days off? Channel that.

“When I came to you to start this firm you were pushing fifty, and you stopped being hungry at forty. You were content. You would have stayed in your comfort zone, retired at sixty with a nice home and your nice wife, and regretted every next day for the rest of your life that you didn’t go for more.”

John bristles. “What does that have to do with you disappearing and leaving us to pick up the pieces?”

I still don’t let him in, blocking him with my body. His sharp, tailored suit is a direct contrast to my frizzy hair and terrycloth robe, which is pulled tight around yesterday’s clothes.

“Do you remember my obsession when we started the firm?”

He nods slowly.

That time of my life was dark. I was haunted by the memories of the three Aurelians. I could feel the love and adoration coming from them even though I knew, logically, that they had to be a figment of my imagination.

I questioned everything, and instead of turning to self-harm to distract myself from the pain, I turned to work. I put my heart and soul into starting the new firm, and I didn’t sleep for an entire week, hopped up on Adderall and caffeine.

By the end of it, I looked about as good as I do today – and yet we had our first three clients.

“I’m in that state, John. I’ve found something that’s going to take our firm to the next level. I can’t talk about it yet, and for the short term, you’re going to have to pick up

the slack. I can't waste any more time, I have to get back to work – and you have to go.”

John's eyes light up with dollar signs. He mulls over my words, but I've found the right angle. He's grown greedy, always wanting more.

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“Very well. Be back on Monday, and you’d better have something incredible.”

“I will,” I reply, and close the door behind him.

I almost slam my palm against the wall in anger, but I refrain, knowing John could hear. I better have something on Monday, though, because I’m in no state to go back to work right now – and I’ll need the resources of the firm if I ever want a chance to get back to the jungle planet and forget this empty, loveless existence I’d condemned myself to for the past twelve years.

“The energy. It has to be the energy source...” I mutter to myself, already putting John and the firm out of my mind and focusing on what’s most important.

I walk to the kitchen, pouring over the documents I have piled up there.

“The Aurelians had a simple, tribal society. Primitive, but with elements of higher technology, because of those orbs that powered their weapons. If this technology existed in their world, it could exist on Earth,” I think out loud, vocalizing my thoughts as I scan yet another page on energy. The instant I judge one worthless, I crumple it up and throw it into the growing pile near the garbage can.

Then one finally catches my eye.

A comment on a new report, about a meteor that landed in Arkansas in 2003.

“I saw it before the government took it. Had these glowing rocks in it – really beautiful.” It was a comment from an unnamed eyewitness.

“Could be orbs... That makes sense. But don’t be too certain. It could be diamonds, or gold, or anything glittering and worthless.”

Imagine – me considering diamonds and goldworthless.

“Itcouldbe orbs, though,” I repeat, taking the printed news story and bringing it to the living room, where I place it in the stack of promising articles.

My phone rings. I glance at it and see Jed on the call display. I pick up immediately.

“Jed. What do you have for me?”

“Plenty. Check your email.”

I check my inbox and scan through the useless work stuff. Then, my eyes lock on a new email from Jed. I click it and speed read.

Section one is dedicated to kidnappings. None involve albinos. Two involve tattooed men, but they both happened near the southern border, where the rare kidnappings that occur are most-often drug-related. Jed also included the Reddit thread, showing me that he’s taking this seriously.

“You’ve got the kidnappings detailed in the first section. Most are cartel. One was a jealous husband who grabbed his ex-wife with his two friends. I haven’t found any links between the kidnappings, so if there’s a trend, I’m not seeing it. I also included a report on social media. We have one interesting comment on a Reddit thread about three albinos with tattoos taking a woman from New York – but, again, I only included that because of the specificity. There’s no way to contact the guy who posted it. I tried messaging him to no avail.”

“Good. And the energy report?”

I scan through the next section, which is a word document with one hundred and twenty pages of information.

“That’s where things get interesting. You wanted me to look up energy related to orbs, circles, or anything like that. I didn’t find it, but I do have a wealth of information on new government projects. One isveryinteresting. It’s based on nuclear power. Let me know if you have any questions.”

“Thank you, Jed.”

I hang up and stare through the Word document, speed-reading it. The nuclear power project started in 2003, and my heart beats quicker as I piece it together. The project is highly secret, without much information available, and the dates line up with the meteor that crashed in Arkansas.

Think, think! If the meteor had orbs in it, and the government found them... Then they’d have to put up a front, to pretend it was something normal...

I swallow hard. I know this is going to be a tough sell, but I’ll call a partners meeting on Monday and tell them we’re going into the energy sector. It could take decades to work up an extensive-enough portfolio to work with a project related to this government one; but I’ve already wasted twelve years. What is another decade or more, compared to that?

Besides, all I need is to get close enough to this project that I can gain access to their lab and see the project with my own eyes.

Then I’ll know for sure – one way or another.

I walk to the bathroom and splash cold water onto my face, looking at myself in the mirror. I can see the whites of my eyes about my irises, and I know how insane I

look.

But my skin is smooth. Whatever is pulling the Aurelians and I closer together is slowing the aging process. It might take me twenty, thirty, or forty years, but I will have the time. I'll work my way into the legal department of the alternative energy section of the government, and I'll see for myself if it truly is an orb – no, an Orb, a proper noun, as the Aurelians described them – that powers their project.

The hint of a smile forms on my face. My adrenaline flows like never before.

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“Stryker, Haleon, Brigg... I’m coming,” I say out loud.

I walk back in a trance to re-read the article about the meteor. I gasp audibly as I see what I missed.

“The meteor is now displayed in the Tech and Science Museum in Little Rock, Arkansas.”

Oh, my God! Why wait decades, when I have the Internet?

I don’t waste a second.

I grab my laptop and book the next flight to Arkansas. I pack lightly, pulling a few days’ worth of clothes at random and stuffing them willy-nilly into the first suitcase I pull from my closet. I take a cab to the airport within the hour.

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Aubrey

The plane touches down, and if you needed proof of how obsessed I am about this mission, it’s worth nothing that I even forgot to be anxious about flying. I usually have to pop a couple of Ativans before take off. Today, I’m finallydoingsomething –

and subsequently, my pointless anxiety is eclipsed with the audacity of hope.

But at the same time, I know that the moment I stop to think – for even a second – how crazy all this is, I'll falter.

Some random person saw something shiny, and I'm suddenly dropping everything to take a flight to Little Rock. Just imagine, if I hadn't seen that Reddit post, I'd truly think I was insane.

I check into a cheap, but clean Quality Inn in the heart of Little Rock.

The lady at the front desk says something about a swimming pool, but all I can think of is the Tech and Science Museum. I dump my things down next to the bed and take the longest, hottest shower of my life, my mind racing as the steam envelopes me.

This truly is insane.

On paper, I'm forty-four – and I should know better.

But on the inside? I still don't feel a day older than when I went through that portal, as if time froze and my entire life has been on standstill ever since I made the choice to leave. At the time, I'd thought I was making the selfless choice to leave, instead of burdening the three Aurelians with a barren woman...

...but now? Now, I don't care how selfish I am. I crave them, and the knowledge that those three warriors are real, and not just a figment of my imagination, has opened my eyes to the futility of my existence back here on Earth.

Everything I've worked for is dust – meaningless.

There's no time to waste. I get dressed and take a cab to the Tech and Science

Museum. The cab driver is chatty, but I can't make out a word he's saying. All I can think about is seeing the asteroid and uncovering the truth.

And if there's nothing there? Step two will be to move my firm into the alternative energy sector. If in another ten years I still haven't aged, I'll know for certain that I've been utterly changed – and I need to do something about it.

My hand shakes as I purchase an admission ticket to the museum.

“Enjoy your visit!” The pimply young man smiles as he waves me through the turnstile.

“Where is the meteor?” I demand, my eyes narrow.

“Exhibit twelve, just that way. I prefer to end on that exhibit, because otherwise you miss all the...”

He trails off when he sees I've already strode away.

I don't care. All I care about is seeing it.

I rush to the exhibit, and disappointment grabs me as soon as I see the meteor tucked away in a corner, past some pictures and facts about the moon landing.

I walk to it, and the rock is only the size of a large dog. There's a small list of facts about it, printed on a panel.

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This meteor fell in October, 2003. It has a mineral composition high in ferrite.

That's it.

I feel so foolish for coming here.

“Dammit, dammit, dammit!” I mutter under my breath, wanting to smash the glass open with my hand and feel the sting of broken glass against my skin.

“Used to look a lot better back in the day,” comes a cracked voice from behind me.

I turn. An old man with a shock of white hair is sitting on a bench, catching his breath as he motions with a cane to the meteor.

“What do you mean, sir?” I ask, giving him an extra dose of respect.

“Saw that thing come down. Oh, must have been twenty-five years ago now. It was a real beaut back then.”

“What do you mean, a real beaut?”

He coughs, then laughs slowly. “Ha, they all said I was crazy. That I was seeing things. But I swear to you, that meteor had this big, beautiful, blue and black thing in it. Never seen nothing like it before – and never gonna see nothing like it again. The scientists in their hazmat suits took it away.”

An Orb. It was an Orb!

Hope springs in my chest. I stare the old man deep in his eyes. “I believe you. I’ve seen one as well.”

His eyes widen. “You playing tricks on an old man?”

I shake my head. “No. You aren’t crazy. A blackness blacker than black, right? A darkness darker than the absence of light. A beauty – a danger, awrongness.”

The old man’s jaw drops. He clamps it shut, then shakes his head. “A blackness blacker than black... By God, you did see one! All this time... All this time, I thought I might be crazy... But you saw one too! Tell me more, young lady, tell me more!”

I give him a sad smile. “That’s all I know. I saw one, pretty small actually, when I was a kid. I always wondered if I imagined it. Same story as you. A meteor hit the ground, and scientists took it away. Now we both know we’re not crazy, as much good as that does us. You have an excellent day, sir.”

I nod respectfully, and leave.

Was it a lie? Of course. But it was a lie designed to make him stop doubting himself. I know what it feels like to not trust your own eyes. It’s terrifying. Now, he’ll know for the rest of his days that what he saw was real.

I check out of the hotel and take the next flight back to New York.

When I step back into my penthouse bathroom and see my face, I know I’m going to find my way back to the jungle planet. My eyes are wide, my jaw set.

Nothing will get in the way of me being reunited with those three Aurelians.

I spend the weekend preparing my battle plan, and the first thing I do when I get into

the office on Monday is call a meeting.

I walk into the boardroom and the ranks of my legal troops are filled and ready, all dressed in their battle uniforms of pricey suits and Rolexes.

I open my laptop and start the first slide.

“I have incredible news for the future of Wells, Gold and partners. The alternative energy market is filled with one thing: Money. Speculation is at an all-time high, with Silicon Valley pouring billions yearly into the field. China has pushed its way into the global market. There is agold mineof money just waiting to be scooped up. And we’re going to get it.”

My voice is pitched at the perfect tenor to grab attention, to inspire, and to enthrall.

By the end of the presentation, every lawyer and partner listening thought it was their own idea. That’s how you sell stuff – I learned that a long time ago.

They all file out, until only John Gold remains. He extends his hand, and I shake it, looking him clear in the eye.

“You’re right. It’s time we added a bigger stream of income to this firm. Alternative energy has exploded in the last decade, and I’ve been wanting to get into the sector for a long damn time. You’re right, Aubrey. I do get complacent. You continue to push me forward.”

I smile, charming him. “We’re a good team. And we’re going to take it by storm.

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Aubrey

Twenty Years Later.

I run my hand through my wet hair, applying the grey dye carefully.

I'm sixty-four years old. Luckily, in the age of botox and plastic surgery, I can simply pretend I spent money not to look like it.

My one subterfuge is the hint of grey in my hair – a subtle touch that instantly makes me look older.

If I don't add that touch of grey? I still look and feel thirty-two.

I know now for a certainty that I can get back to those three men. I've been stuck back here on Earth for three decades; and I haven't aged a day.

It's fate. Destiny. I came back from their world inexorably altered, and deep down I know that means we'll be together again. Me, and my three Aurelian warriors.

Together, we'll be complete.

John Gold passed away six years ago. Since then, I've been calling the shots completely, and my firm has become the country's powerhouse in alternative energy.

Then, I moved into politics.

President Marigold Landels shakes my hand. "You've shown incredible promise, and I feel confident putting you on as our Secretary of Defense. This is an age of peace, and an age in which the best defense is found from energy sovereignty."

"Thank you, Madame President," I reply, keeping a grave expression on my face as I accept the honor.

I got my security clearance a year ago. If they interviewed my therapist, she didn't tell them jack shit to stop my chances for success. Thank God therapy is more normalized in this day and age.

I take my office in the West Wing of the most important building in the world, and instantly staffers start pouring in with requests.

I ask for information on the energy projects. They send me a huge list of projects, and all it takes is a "control f" for the term "orb" and my search comes up with the project I'd been chasing after all this time.

Given that its taken me twenty years to get this far – twenty years of scheming, subterfuge, determination and grit – I find it ironic that I find what I'm looking for within twenty seconds of taking my seat at that desk in Washington DC.

A top-secret, classified energy program...

...based off materials recovered from a meteor crash in 2003.

The staffers and executives are stunned when my first actions as Secretary of Defense aren't to review our troop levels, visit our bases overseas, or discuss new military technology.

Instead, the same day I take office, I order a plane to take me to that particular energy project for a tour.

It's top-secret. Classified.

But I'm the goddamn Secretary of Defense.

The same day as I take office, I achieve the goal I'd worked at diligently for the past twenty years. I knew that all I needed to do was get in, and I'd find it. I take an executive plane and I see it for myself.

I am going to see the Orb. It sounds so crazy, but it's going to.

The project has been running for nearly forty years now – forgotten by most of the government. The site is stunned when the Secretary of Defense herself makes a surprise visit. The scientists who meet me at the gate are full of smiles, eager to show off decades of work that they'd assumed had been lost and forgotten, as happens to so many government projects. Along with a scientist, a high ranking military general stands silently watching me. My coming here must have triggered some alarm in the military structure of the government.

But they have no idea.

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The scientist in charge of the site is eager to show his prize to someone new – especially somebody as senior and important as the Secretary of Defense.

“It’s incredible,” he tells me, leading me into the bowels of the scientific institute. “What’s more, I think we’ve only tapped a tiny percentage of this material’s true potential. The licensing and patenting of such an energy source will be quite a morass of technicalities. For example, the substance itself seems to defy our attempts to quantify it in a meaningful way. It’s practically classified by the impossibility of trying to classify it.”

Sensing the chance for more funding, or increased recognition, the scientist winks at me in an over-familiar fashion.

“Of course, that will be your prerogative, Madam Secretary.”

He leads me to the Orb, and I struggle not to show the reverence on my face.

There it is - encased in glass. A glowing, shimmering sphere that’s blacker than black; more like the absence of anything, than being anything in particular.

I stare at it for a second – not caring the impression it gives this scientist, or my staff.

I don’t care. I’ve spent twenty years play-acting a roll to get here –right here.

I stare at the Orb, and it’s like greeting an old friend.

The blue-black ball hovers, as if it is instilled with power.

“Does it... Does it float on its own?” I ask.

“Peculiar, is it not? This substance seems to possess an innate energy. Because it’s such a unique substance, from what I understand you’ll be drafting the non-disclosure forms about this project in such a way that completely prevents any mention of the substance. Please, watch, a small demonstration.” The scientist flips a switch.

The Orb suddenly pulses with anger, as electricity is pulled from it and into a long wire. I watch the readings on the dial going up, higher and higher.

“This could power an entire block of homes!” The scientist breaths. “Imagine, if we’re able to recreate this substance.”

I look into the Orb.

It’s angry. Violated.

The scientists have been sucking from it for four decades; like vampires.

But it possesses more power than they could ever claim. It is eternal. Its anger is mitigated by the knowledge that it will continue long after these human parasites have turned from walking apes to bleached bones, and then into dust itself.

Don’t ask me how I know this – I just felt it.

It was like the Orb was speaking to me, through the glass. Like it recognized me – knowing I’d seen others like it. Understood its power.

I respected it, and it returned the compliment in kind.

As I stood there, surrounded by oblivious scientists and staffers, I felt what the Orb

was saying to me. It knew what I wanted. It could give it to me...

...but it demanded a sacrifice.

A sacrifice... What kind of sacrifice?

Like, a blood sacrifice?

I stare deep into the orb and the blackness changes. Blue streaks of lightning flare out, and the scientist jumps back while I stand transfixed. I step forward, and I see through time and space.

It's them!

My jaw drops as the Orb shows me the jungle planet. I glance left and right, but if the general or the scientist can see what I am seeing, they make no indication of it. I watch as the Orb shows me Stryker, Brigg and Haleon dragging the head of a huge scorpion beast into the dark cave. Somehow I can tell it's showing me the past, but it doesn't feel like I'm watching a movie. It feels like I'm really there. I watch as the aliens drag the head to a huge Orb in their cavern the size of a warhorse and the Orb gobbles up the sacrifice eagerly. Then time in the vision flickers forward and a rift in reality is opened in the middle of the plains for the Aurelians to capture me.

The three Aurelian sacrificed the head of some beast to the Orb to get me.

I know I will never be able to bring one of those into this scientific institute – even as Secretary of Defense, I couldn't expect to be allowed to – fuck, I don't know; sacrifice a goat, or something, to the Orb.

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But is that even what it wanted? There isn't a beast on the planet Earth that could rival the massive head of whatever disgusting creature the three warriors defeated to earn me!

The vision snaps out, and I'm brought back into the room. I get my bearings.

"What happens if you open the box?" I turn to the head scientist.

The scientist licks his lips nervously. "We... We lost a few people to it. The energy... It isn't very well-controlled. Only three of us have the scan cards that can open the glass encasement."

"Four. I will require one."

The military general who accompanied me to this site scoffs. "There's no need for that, Madam Secretary."

I give him a long, appraising look. "I decide what there is a need for."

But even as the general huffs and puffs, I'm already thinking of something else. Something more important.

What the Orb wants.

A sacrifice. What can I sacrifice?

I need that keycard!

I have two problems. I need to somehow get a sacrifice in here – whatever that might be - and I need to get that keycard. For a split-second, I imagine grabbing the nearest guard's gun, and just killing the staffers and scientists gathered around me – sacrificing them to the Orb.

But while I'd do almost anything to get back to the Aurelians, I wouldn't do that.

The Orb seems to mock me, twirling in its glass prison.

You want a sacrifice?

I feel myself in communication with it – staring into the swirling, blacker-than-blackness, as if its tethered to my soul.

You want a sacrifice? I repeat.

“I sacrifice all of this.”

The scientist looks at me, confused. “I'm sorry, Madam Secretary. What did you just say?”

I ignore him, staring deeper into the Orb.

“I sacrifice my life here,” I tell it, out loud. “Everything I've worked for during the last thirty years. Everything I've bled for. It's all gone now. They'll take away my position.”

“Is she... Is she talking to the thing?”

It's the general, and I know he's as confused as everybody else.

I know he's probably staring at me – everybody else is - but I can now see nothing in front of me except the Orb.

“I sacrifice everything,” I told it. “I give it freely, not knowing if you will accept my sacrifice, and not knowing if you will deem it worthy to let me return to where I want to go. I just give it to you: My entire life's work.”

As I say those final words, and snatch out as fast as I can and grab the key card from around the scientist's neck. I rip it from the lanyard. Before he can act, I'm pressing it against the panel that controls the glass encasement.

The scientist's eyes widen in horror as the door swings open.

“Run!”

The scientist, the general and the rest of the gathered crowd floods from the chamber; terrified at the sight of the unleashed Orb.

I don't blame them. Tendrils are emerging from the Orb, crackling with electricity that arcs in all directions.

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One crackling bolt of energyskewersth the arm of guard in the corner – holding him aloft as his body twitches, and flails, and then seems to burn from the inside out.

Burnt, smoldering and dead, the guard's smoking body falls to the floor.

More tendrils shoot out in all directions.

It's like that scene at the end of Raiders of the Lost Ark, when the Nazis open the Ark of the Covenant. Tendrils of crackling, devastating, intelligent energy ripple outwards, targeting and exploding the cameras that have studied this Orb for years.

The Orb pulsates, and the heavy glass panels covering it pull away, falling aside as if they're made of paper.

The tendrils crackle all around me, and I know any one of them could pierce me with that same otherworldly energy; rending me to dust and atoms.

But I stand firm, as if the death and destruction crackling all around me is harmless.

I stand firm, and I address the Orb – my voice bold and fearless.

"I've lost it all," I bellow. "All for just a chance. Please, please accept my sacrifice."

And I have sacrificed everything. I just violated a top-secret government project, stole a keycard from the top researcher, and let an innocent guard die as a result.

I'll be arrested for this; if the government's black-suited operatives don't just make

me disappear. It doesn't matter if I'm the Secretary of Defense – not now.

But I don't care.

“Please,” I beg again, and for a second the Orb seems to judge me.

And then grants me what I demand.

It's almost as if it's laughing, as the Orb opens the portal I've been dreaming of for thirty years; one with the verdant scent of an alien jungle wafting through it.

So familiar, despite the thirty years since I last filled my nostrils with that air.

I gulp, hardly believing this is happening. Taking a deep breath, I snatch the gun from the guard's smoldering body, as well as a spare ammo clip, and step through the rippling portal.

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Aubrey

The portal closes instantly behind me, snapping shut like a guillotine. The Orb clearly didn't want me changing my mind – not again.

I don't care, though. I break down, falling to my knees as I stare out at the dangerous paradise around me.

I'm back, and now it's all real. The same teeming jungle. The same lighter gravity. The same warm, lush scent to the air.

The only thing that's different is me – and I'm not referring to the fact that I'm wearing sensible boots beneath my pantsuit this time, unlike the heels I'd been snatched in thirty years ago.

I clamber to my feet and take a deep, deep breath.

I'm feel like a conquering explorer – one who fearlessly lands on virgin ground, and burns his ships behind him. There is now no way back to my old life. And if there was? All that would await me is a court martial and endless science experiments when I continued not to grow old – no matter how many decades they kept me locked in some government prison.

No turning back. Nogoingback. Not again.

Andgood.

At least this time, I know that when a fire breathing monster flies down and roasts me to a crisp, I'm not going to wake up panting in a mental hospital.

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If an oversized wolf decides to hunt me, I'm going to be eaten on this jungle planet for real.

I've had twenty years to prepare, and twelve more before that to dream.

I grip the steel of the pistol I stole. I trained extensively in small firearms while I was making my way towards the post of Secretary of Defense. If a beast tries to make me lunch?

I'll put hot lead through its throat instead.

I've got nine shots in the gun and one clip to reload. It's not much, but as long as it can get me to the mountain home of the Aurelians, it will be enough. I haven't been here in thirty years and yet everything is the same. I touch the ground, feeling the familiar softness of the densely-packed, yet moist dirt through the grass.

There are a million predators out here, and I probably won't make it to the Aurelians mountain home.

But I'm here. Oh, God, I'm here!

I start walking in my boots, holding the grip of the pistol tight as I make my way towards the mountain in the distance.

One thing is different. Vast swathes of the ground are burnt. Naked and devoid of plants and vegetation, and I shudder as I realize that dragon must still be alive and terrorizing the planet. I might be able to survive an attack by one of the great golden

eagles or one of the wolves – but if that dragon sets his sights on me, I'll be a goner.

A warm breeze touches me, and I breathe in deeply – tasting the freshness of the air. It feels like there's more oxygen and less gravity on this beautiful, dangerous world. Every breath fills my lungs completely. Every step is bouncing.

I'll have to find a way to tell them the gray in my hair is not real!

Facing such danger, I laugh as that's the first thought crosses my mind. I know Stryker, Hadeon and Brigg will not have changed at all. I just hope desperately that they haven't completely forgotten about me.

Something in my primal mind – my deepest, most basic senses – warns me that danger is near. I dive down, pressing myself against the grass. I peer out between the long stems, looking for a glimpse of whatever caused my senses to tingle.

My jaw drops as I see a magnificent tiger striding past me.

It stands as tall as a one-story building, its haunches moving powerfully as it creeps through the grass. The beautiful predator is the length of a few city blocks away from me, and walking in the other direction. The breeze passes through the grass, rippling and creating a beautiful rustling sound as I watch the majestic beast. Thankfully the wind is blowing towards me, so my scent isn't brought towards the huge tiger's nostrils. Instead, I watch with fascination as the beautiful tiger walks away.

This is all real.

The thought makes me giggle, then smile. It's all real. I just witnessed something no one else on Earth will ever get to see. I just saw a beast that could feature in a movie – but only if it was computer-generated!

No one else alive gets to see these things! No one – and yet I do.

I keep walking at a trot, the mountain growing ever larger and larger in my vision. I'm breathing heavy by the time I get to the base of it.

I look up at the towering mountain, my heart pounding as I realize how close I finally am. Then my eyes go wide as I see the brutal scars marring the side of the towering rocks.

The dragon must have been hunting these grounds too, and that means he might come for me. Burns have levelled trees and scorched the rock of the mountainside in long swathes; more obvious and devastating than I'd seen thirty years ago.

I start climbing, and halfway up the mountain I hear a snarl that makes my blood run cold.

I freeze up, turning to find an enormous mountain lion – and I mean enormous, the size of a moose from back on Earth - just fifty feet away.

Long, lithe, and dangerous, it covers the ground in massive leaps and bounds; traveling at a speed that's truly daunting.

I don't have time to think.

I raise the pistol and fire. I fire until the gun starts clicking and I've burned through an entire clip.

The mountain lion staggers to halt, confused and in pain. It whimpers, and then staggers to the ground.

My heart pounds as I stare, wide-eyed, at the mountain lion. It's huge and bleeding –

yet still so majestic and elegant. The dying beast breathes with wide, uncomprehending eyes, blood pooling from its jaws.

I'm suddenly wracked with guilt at what I've just done. This beautiful, elegant creature was merely doing what nature designed it to do – and I just ended it.

I can't bear to see the beast in such pain. I've already shot off the loud, powerful gun nine times, and I know that I've already called attention to whatever other animals are lurking on the mountainside.

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As I watch the beautiful, dying beast, I see that an old burn runs from flank to shoulder across the lion's long body. It's a deep, old scar. Clearly, the beast survived an attack from the brutal dragon...

...yet, it didn't survive me.

I know I shouldn't spare another bullet on this beautiful, majestic, tortured creature – but I can't stand to let it die in agony. I reload my last clip, and nervously advance as close as I dare to the dying beast.

I look into its tortured, frantic eyes and raise the gun.

One more shot echoes out across the mountain – right through the lion's eye, ending the animal's suffering instantly.

Eight shots left.

I continue up the mountain, shuddering as I see more burn marks scalded deep into the rocks.

Apparently, the dragon has been rampaging close to the Aurelian's home. They escaped death against that beast once – and I hope against hope that they haven't confronted it since.

I'm nearing the summit, and so impatient that I sprint.

It seems to make sense. I'm so close now, and I can't afford another mountain lion

attack. I was lucky that the last ambush came from far away, instead of getting snuck up on in close quarters.

I guess when you're a small, slow-moving target, predators don't think of you as much of a threat. The last time I was on this mountain, I wasn't. I even had bare feet.

This time, though, I'm prepared with boots and a gun – and my feet pound against the rocks as I scale the mountain, higher and higher, until I finally get to the cave.

I gasp as I see the same boulder covering the entrance, even after all these years. My eyes widen as I see a tiny opening in the side.

The three Aurelians have left just enough space for me to squeeze through. After all these years, they've still left the door open for me, metaphorically speaking.

Hope surges through me. I can barely believe this is happening – after twelve years of thinking I was insane for my memories of the day and night I'd spent here, and twenty more of fighting desperately to make it back. All the political manipulation, the wheeling and dealing, the things I did and promised to get into a position of power just so I could follow up on the slimmest chance of finding and using an Orb...

An entire life I'd built, in pursuit of this moment. A life I simply threw away to get here again; and one I know, deep in my heart, that I'd trade again in an instant.

I squeeze in through the crack in the rock, my heart pounding. Most of the beasts of this planet are oversized and could never fit through this narrow crack. Maybe a baby, I guess...

I shudder for a moment, imagining the cubs of the mountain lion I'd killed earlier. They'd be the size of a cougar on this world; but still as comparatively helpless as kittens.

I push the guilty thoughts out of my mind. There's no turning back, remember?

"Stryker? Haleon? Brigg?" I stagger into the cavern, and my voice echoes emptily down the long tunnel.

There's no response, so I hurry into the darkness, trailing my hands against the smooth rock to guide me.

The cave opens up in front of me – but it's empty.

No furs remain. No torches hang on the walls. Only the stone table and chairs are there to show that, once upon a time, three brave alien warriors lived here.

Before I can sob from the loss, I see that there's a strange glow emanating from the table itself.

What the hell is that?

I step suspiciously forward, towards it. My finger is on the trigger of my stolen pistol, not sure what to expect on this alien planet – but knowing I must be ready for anything.

The table has a ring of luminescent algae growing on it, obviously cultivated to illuminate the carving.

It's a map. There is a detailed representation of the entire mountain, and the portal that once brought me here.

Far north on the map, there's a drawing of a huge volcano, with a dragon perched on the top. It's carved with such incredible detail I can see every sword-sized tooth in its gaping black maw – even the intense, burning hatred in the dragon's intricately-

carved eyes.

I shudder and look down at the arrow pointing from the mountain home of the three Aurelians, back towards the jungle where I'd first been brought here with them; thirty years earlier.

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The jungle map shows the entrance to a cave, as well as a second, smaller cave close to the first one. A larger arrow points to the smaller cave system.

They have a new home.

Perhaps their new home is far enough away from the dragon to offer them some safety. I take a huge breath in. I thought if I could only get up to the mountain, I'd be reunited with the three, gorgeous warriors and finally be in safety.

Instead, I've got another long battle to face.

There's something else glowing under the table, so I crouch. I find a small bag under there, which I pick up and put on the table, opening it. There's dried meat and the hilt of a weapon in there...

I gasp. An Orb-weapon – with a tiny shard of shimmering, blacker-than-black Orb in it.

My hand freezes as I witness an Orb. I just watched one tear apart a guard and wreak havoc on a room. This Orb sits patiently in the hilt of the weapon, as though it has only one purpose. I stare suspiciously for a moment, then grab the hilt and hold it up.

How do I get this thing to work?

I squeeze the hilt, feeling foolish. Then I remember that the Orbs are somehow intelligent, even the shards of the small ones.

Turn on, please.

The Orb-weapon suddenly snarls to life, emitting with a low, dangerous hum.

The shimmering black-blue blade is a foot long, the perfect size for me. It ripples and glows with that eerie blue light, and I almost feel like it's been waiting for me; that it longs for me to take it in my hand and feed it...

Feed it in blood.

I shiver, and feel the power of this Orb-weapon resonating through me.

The Aurelians left me just enough so that I could have a chance to survive back on this alien world.

Now I've got a choice. I can wait here, and hope that they come back before my rations run out...

...or I can rush to them, and finally be reunited; whatever the danger I might face in doing so.

I swallow hard, realizing I've already made my choice.

I turn and set off immediately – leaving behind the safety of this cave; the one I've fantasized and dreamed of coming back to for so many years.

No turning back – that's the promise I made to myself, when I struck that bargain with the Orb back on Earth.

“Haleon. Brigg. Stryker. I'm going to get back to you. I'm so sorry I ever left.”

I'm talking to no one in particular – just wishing that the cavern I'd returned to had still been filled with the warmth of torches, and the voices of the three gorgeous men who once protected it.

I push my bag of supplies through the crack they'd left me in the boulder entrance, and then sling it over my shoulder. My left hand holds my pistol steady, while my right holds the Orb-blade they'd fashioned for me.

If something comes for me – and I fear it might – I'll be ready for it.

I walk fast, clambering down the mountainside as quickly as I safely can, knowing that the less time I spend out here in the open, the better my odds of surviving.

The oversized, glowing sun is already lowering. Soon, it'll disappear beneath the horizon and those two, twin moons will climb into the shimmering, star-filled sky.

I shudder, as I remember that the dragon hunts in darkness.

I make it down the mountainside, my legs burning with exertion. There was no ambush by mountain lions this time. Perhaps they'd seen what I did to the first one who tried to test me; and realized I wasn't such an easy dinner.

Then I hear it.

That sound... The sound that's as vivid to me as the rest of the memories of this place.

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It's a snarl of pure hatred and rage. I quickly jump behind a boulder, making myself as small as possible as I peer out towards the source of the sound.

From the north, I see it. The dragon is swooping this way, beating its huge wings, rushing forward towards the jungle. Now I understand why I was able to get down the mountainside without attack. Any beasts hunting me are hiding away, sensing the oncoming attack of the winged devil.

I stare out from behind the rock, squinting to try and make out the green hue of the faraway jungle. If I can only get there alive, I'll be reunited with the men I've spent decades longing for.

A war horn sounds, and birds – tiny and colorful from this distance – erupt from the forest, swooping up and away from the foliage.

They do so just in time. The dragon has reached the edge of the jungle and sweeps over the towering, lush trees – shooting off a long trail of scalding magma into the verdant greenery.

It's like those old documentaries of the Vietnam War, when American planes would pour hundreds of gallons of scalding napalm across the jungle to clear out the brushes where the Viet Cong lurked.

I shiver, watching as the swooping black dragon dives down into the flaming foliage, before grabbing something and soaring back into the sky overhead.

My heart pounds as the dragon swooshes over me, and I see in its claws an Aurelian,

still kicking and struggling.

I squint, filled with momentary horror, but I quickly realize that the unfortunate soul is not one of my three loves. I'd have felt it if it were.

But my relief instantly turns to horror, as the dragon pulls upwards, gaining incredible height, and then drops the Aurelian.

The flailing figure falls screaming through the air, before splattering against the rocks below, killed instantly. The dragon did not even want to eat the Aurelian. It just wanted to kill.

All I want to do is hide. All I want to do is just curl into a ball and whimper.

No.

No. I will not be afraid.

The thought is resolute. I stand up, drawing myself to my full height and gripping my weapons with white knuckles. I didn't come this far to get spooked; even by a massive, fire-breathing, Aurelian-slaughtering dragon....

I set my face with determination and set off.

There is danger everywhere, and I know I won't be safe until I'm finally back with the three men who once seemed like they'd die to protect me.

Will I even be safe with them? I just watched one of their species get turned into a fucking splatter by that dragon.

Oh, God – what have I gotten myself into?

I shake my head. I don't push the thoughts of fear down. I simply let them flow through me, until all that remains is me. I chose this path. I will walk it.

It's funny. Because of that single night I spent here, three decades ago, I've been irrevocably altered – seemingly unable to age.

But while I might not look like I've changed, I'm so far from the person I was when I first arrived on this alien world.

I remember them from thirty years ago as I stride forward. Back then, I had this stupid plan. This idea that I could create a life that I never even wanted, all because being a lawyer somehow made me feel like I had some semblance of control. When I was in the courtroom, I was the one who made things happen.

Deep in my heart though, I was still that scared little girl who'd once cut her thighs.

I weep for that girl. I feel pity for her. But she's not me anymore. I've eagerly chosen terror and danger over comfort and stability; and I'd do it again in a heartbeat.

I chose love. I just wish it hadn't taken thirty years to see it to fruition.

I trot towards the jungle, keeping a steady pace, glad that the grass only reaches to my knees. No huge lion or wolf could hide in these plains.

But once I reach the jungle? That will be a different story. I'll have to be constantly looking over my shoulder for beasts that might stalk, ambush and attack.

I make it that far – to the jungle – without any additional horrors befalling me. I think back to the map for a moment. I've always been blessed with a strong sense of direction, and I know exactly where to go to get to the smaller cave system. I push through the brush in the right direction, until I get to a clearing nearby.

Then I freeze. My mouth drops open as I see a disgusting sight in front of me.

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Three huge...creatures are dragging a dying panther through the jungle. They drop their bloody burden as they see me.

So far, every creature except the dragon has had a human counterpart – the mountain lions were over-sized versions of the ones back on Earth. The same with the tiger, and that enormous eagle.

But these things?

They look like a horrific mix of reptile and man – grotesque beasts with cunning, red eyes and huge, pincer claws – like some kind of over-sized lobster. I remember back to the Orb that granted me passage to this jungle planet. It showed my triad sacrificing something to the Orb God of the jungle. The head of the thing they sacrificed looks like a massive version of these creature's faces.

Darting over their heads are long tails, tipped with barbs and dripping a glowing, green venom that looks exactly the same color as the tribal tattoos adorning the magnificent bodies of my beloved Aurelian warriors.

The creatures suddenly run towards me, crossing the space between us with superhuman speed. I barely have time to raise and aim my weapon before I see movement to my left. With horror, I see two more of these hideous, hybrid creatures rushing towards me.

I try desperately to swing my gun to the left to take them out – but I already know it's too late...

“Aubrey!”

My name emerges as a roar. I turn and see three shirtless Aurelians burst from the jungle, weapons drawn.

My Aurelians!

Stryker cleaves the head off the first scorpion beast, and the bloody skull spins in an arc through the air. Before he’s even paused, Stryker is spinning in his own deadly circle – slicing a deadly wound through the second monster; sending it gurgling back with blood gushing from its chest.

Haleon throws his axe, just like I’d seen him do against the eagle, thirty years earlier, and it lands true – finishing off the wounded beast.

The first of the two creatures are down – and that’s when Brigg jumps forward, out of the jungle foliage. He dodges the stinger of one of the remaining monsters, and dances around the pinching claws of the second as he smashes his mace through the creature’s bony carapace. A second blow finishes off the first creature, before it’s even had time to recover its balance.

Brigg landed on the ground and pauses – studying his flailing, foaming foes. When he’s finally certain the three things are dead, he turns and ends the suffering of the writhing, whining panther with a blow from his Orb-Mace.

Only when they’re sure their enemies are dead do the three of them turn to me.

I stand there, Orb-Blade clutched in one hand, the pistol in the other, and my eyes widen as I see that it’s really them.

Stryker, Haleon and Brigg.

For real. Theyreallyexist.

I've known they had. I've known for the last twenty years, and that's why I've spent them pursuing the impossible goal of finding that earthbound Orb.

But... But somehow, it still never felt real. Not until now. Not until I see them again with my own eyes.

The three men turn and look at me with similarly wide, open eyes – seemingly unable to believe that I'mreallyhere.

Tears come to my eyes. I can't believe it. All this time, and we're finally back together.

Stryker has an amulet around his neck, a long, woven string with an Orb at the end. He staggers up to me, taking it off his neck to place it around mine.

“Aubrey, by the Orb-God, it'sreallyyou!”

I gasp as I realize I understand him. Stryker runs his hand through his dark, curly, shoulder-length locks, and then reaches out to graze my forearm with his fingertips.

His touch sends electricity through me. I've been waiting over thirty years for that touch.

“You speak English now?”

Stryker shakes his head. “No. You speak Aurelian. The amulet lets you understand us.”

“I thought of you every day, Aubrey,” says Hadeon, stepping closer, but keeping a

wary eye on the jungle.

Brigg shakes his head. He's clearly overjoyed to see me too – but cautious about how exposed we are. "It's not safe here," he warns. "Quick, come with us."

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Brigg holds his Orb-Mace aloft as he leads the way through the brush. The three men form a protective circle around me, and suddenly this dangerous planet doesn't seem so scary anymore. I'm surrounded by three broad backs, and I remember the first time they surrounded me like this – when the eagle attacked so many years ago.

We walk for only a few minutes when I tense up, seeing more of the Scorps ahead of us.

“Watch out!” I yell, and Stryker smiles. Then I see more clearly. The Scorps are already dead, strung up as warning to others of their kind.

“Scorps will not come within a hundred feet of our home,” Haleon boasts.

I feel even safer as I pass by the grisly trophies, and we walk only one more minute before we get to a stream with a rocky cliff next to it. The three Aurelians move slowly, carefully stepping over trip wires. I look at them skeptically. Haleon reaches down and brushes his hand against one of them. Instantly, the sound of gentle bells rings out.

A warning system, if beasts come.

Stryker helps me up the rocky cliff-face and into a small cave, protected by a boulder just like the one from their mountain lair; which they heft aside for me to enter.

Their new home is smaller than their former cave, and filled to the brim with comfortable furs and a store of food to one side. In the corner is a warhorn, and I wonder if they were the ones to sound the alarm that the dragon was coming. Near it

are pots, carved from stone. I recognize small mushrooms growing in some of them – the same as the ones that were used in the paste that saved Brigg’s life. I also notice the sweet, refreshing grass growing in other pots.

The three of them have a wooden table set up, crafted expertly. I nearly cry with joy when I see that there are four seats at the table. Have they really been waiting patiently for me all this time?

Then I shudder.

What if that seat is for another woman?

“There are four seats...” I say softly, knowing I can’t blame them if they took another mate while I was gone for over three decades.

“For you, my sweet. I crafted it myself,” Brigg boasts, his voice low and filled with happiness now that I’m safe and sound – back in their little home. I drink in his muscled body, each tattoo so elegantly inked on his flesh. His veins are that beautiful, vibrant green which has haunted my dreams every night for thirty years.

I’ve been walking for so long that my feet ache and my belly rumbles embarrassingly. Brigg pulls out the chair, motioning for me to sit. Before I can, he wraps me up in a huge bear hug.

“I feared I’d never see you again,” he whispers, and I know how broken his heart must have been, every day for the past thirty years. Haleon and Stryker join the hug, and suddenly I’m wrapped up and crushed between the three huge, muscular men – held close by their immense bodies.

“What... What were those things?” I ask, the moment they break off the hug. I don’t need to clarify the ‘things’ I was referring to. Clearly I mean the monstrous, pincer-

handed creatures dragging that crippled panther through the forest.

“Scorps. It’s their venom which gives us strength. It’s their venom coursing through our veins that give us our virility. Our species are intertwined – Scorps and Aurelians. Without them, we cannot procreate.”

My eyes widen when I hear that – but Stryker changes the subject before I can learn more.

“Tell me, love. When did your hair change color?”

I smile. “It’s not real. I colored it so I’d look older. You... You have no idea what I went through to get back here.”

“Why did you ever leave?” Haleon demands, his voice suddenly hardening.

I breathe in deeply. They accepted my scars so easily. But this? This is something else entirely.

These three gorgeous, warrior aliens waited for me because they wanted a future with me. They thought I could give them what they needed so desperately...

Children.

But I can’t. I’m a broken woman. I look down, suddenly deeply ashamed of who I am, and what is wrong with me.

“You’re in pain,” says Brigg, and he stands behind me, wrapping me up in his huge arms to pull me close.

“I... I can’t bear your sons,” I gasp, and then suddenly sob.

If Brigg wasn't holding me, I'd fall to my knees right now. I sacrificed everything to get here. I risked death to have life. But now I've told them my secret, that makes me worthless to them.

"What do you mean?" Stryker asks.

I shake my head. "I got tests with doctors," I say, and realize that even with the amulet translating my words, they still don't understand. "A... A medicine man, I guess you could say. He told me I can't bear children. I am... I'm barren, like a field that won't grow plants. I am like the ground, burnt by that dragon."

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“No. I will not believe this,” growls Haleon, and I see the anger in his eyes. It’s not directed at me. He’s angry with fate itself.

I smile so weakly, tears welling in my eyes. One slowly drips down my cheek. “Believe it, my love, for it is the truth. You can hear it in my voice.”

Stryker reaches forward, gently brushing my tears away. “We were cast out of our tribe, Aubrey, because we sacrificed many creatures – but we ached only for you. Our tribe said we had a duty to take another woman and grow our numbers...”

“...but if our mate wasn’t you, we’d rather have died alone,” Haleon murmurs.

I gasp, feeling the intensity of their love for me. What did I do, to deserve the devotion of these three gorgeous, towering men?

Well, after three decades of exile on Earth, what didn’t I do?

Brigg kisses my ear gently. “The tyrant dragon has grown vengeful. Since you’ve been gone, many of our tribe have died to its flames, and there aren’t enough sons born to replenish our number. Our tribe are dying, Aubrey. And yet we forsook our duty, and so we have been pushed out of the tribe. Now we live on the outskirts, warning of attacks and killing the Scorps that have been pushed south because of the dragon’s rage. And yet, we take this duty willingly. Every night I dreamed that you’d one day find a way to return to us.”

Haleon’s face is rage. He clenches his fist. “The Orb-God would not bring you here unless you could bear us sons. You are barren to your own kind, but not to us.” His

voice is firm, and he steps in front of me and kisses me softly, pushing away all thoughts of how unfair the world is.

I've been waiting thirty years for the sensation of his lips against mine. Under his touch I melt. The three Aurelians form a protective ring around me. Their hulking bodies block the light and form a barrier between me and the outside world. The seconds, minutes, hours, decades of stress, anxiety wash from me as Brigg gently traces his lips from my ear down to my neck. I feel like I am waking up from my nightmare of thirty years living on Earth and that it's all being pushed back and far away.

The low growl from Stryker behind me sends shivers down my body. Hands roam over me, and I help the three aliens pull my clothes from my body before they rip them apart in the mating frenzy. The moment I am naked and vulnerable between the three men Brigg pulls me hard from his battle brothers.

"I have yet to claim her," he snarls, his eyes wild with need. The alien warrior has ached for this day for decades. His lips draw back slightly, showing his teeth, and my heart pounds as I realize he would fight his own warrior triad for the right to have me. He pulls me against his body tight and I let go, forfeiting control. It took me decades of planning, deceit, and political manipulation to get here. It took iron control over my mind and discipline over my thoughts.

I let all that disappear as Brigg's huge hands grab the flesh of my bottom and pull me up against the head of his huge cock. He holds me up in the air easily and I wrap my legs around his hard body. I stare wide into his golden flecked green orbs and gasp as he slides his cock into me. I haven't been fucked in so long it feels like I'm losing my virginity again. The head of his cock is so fuckingslickwith Aurelian pre-cum that my tightness is no match for his throbbing, pulsating rod thatslowlysplits me in two.

"Oh Brigg," I moan out in shock as I remember the feeling of being taken by an

Aurelian. His muscled body presses against mine, all hard lines and impossibly defined abs as he pulls me closer.

“You’re mine, Aubrey,” he growls in response, his words slurred with desire. The only thing between us is the amulet as inch after inch of his alien cock impales me. I’m so helpless in his arms.

“You’re ours,” comes a dark voice in my ear as Stryker stands behind me. I bite my lip in nervous anticipation as his huge tongue licks at the nape of my neck. I’m trembling like this is my first time, shuddering and losing control over my own body as Brigg pulls me down onto his cock. A tiny moan of pleasure and surprise leave my mouth as I feel him impale me fully until every inch of his cock is inside me. My mind goes blank. My mouth is open and I can’t seem to shut it as I relish in the lavish sensation of being completely filled. Brigg’s cock pulses inside me, and every twitch of the huge thing sends waves of pleasure and anticipation through me.

Brigg lays down on a thick fur while he is still inside me. It’s so easy for the Aurelian to move me around like I’m a toy. I might be on top of him, but his firm hands on my hips tell me who is in charge. I try to ride him, but he grips my hips and pulls me up and down on his body, and I relinquish all control as I stare down at the powerful alien warrior. His eyes have lost all humanity. He is a beast, using my body for his pleasure as he pulls me up and down on his massive cock. Shuddering pleasure washes through my body and I bite my lip, unable to stop slutty moans from echoing through the cavern.

I want to say something, anything, but no words can form in my mind. The three Aurelians have control over my very thoughts. With them I lose the rational part of my mind and become something else. Brigg growls in pleasure as he uses me, and his sound of ecstasy fills me with a dark pride. I want to please these men. I want to give them everything they have dreamed of for decades.

Briggs grips my hips hard and pulls me down completely on his cock, filling me again. The sensation of having his cock fully inside me is nearly too much to handle. My mouth opens in a soundless gasp, and Haleon stands over me, his huge cock bobbing with anticipation.

Haleon's grey-green eyes shimmer as he stares down at me. He looks at me possessively, as if he owns my body and mind and he'll never let me go. I shift on Briggs' cock as Haleon gently strokes my hair then gives me what I need. He leans forward and I take his cock gratefully in my mouth, feeling more complete. Haleon's dick is dripping pre-cum and the taste sends me in a frenzy. I squeeze my pussy tight on Briggs' cock, and he can't resist. He bucks wildly, making my entire body bounce as he takes me hard.

A moment later I get what I've been craving. Stryker positions himself behind me and wraps his arms around my tits, massaging my nipples. He pinches and pulls them, sending pain and pleasure through my body as his highly lubricated cock-head presses against my asshole. I would moan out in pleasure and tell Stryker to take it slow but my mouth is filled with Haleon's cock. I look up and see his eyes turning hard. Sweat drips down his gorgeous body as he snarls like a wildcat and grabs a fistful of my hair, pulling my mouth forward on his huge dick. I feel so out of control as Stryker's massive dick presses past all resistance and fills me.

Then I am complete. Everything is perfect as the three men enter me, fucking me in unison. Their minds seem as though they are one being in three bodies, their cocks thrusting into my holes rhythmically. I am so helpless and miniscule.

"I'm going to fill you with my seed and truly make you mine," growls Briggs, and his words send true pleasure through me. Drool drips from my mouth as Stryker uses my mouth as his toy, fucking it as though it's my wet pussy. The deeper he thrusts into my mouth the more pleasure I get, and I use my hands to massage his massive, hanging balls as he takes me. Shuddering pleasure grows and grows in my body, and

I'm on the verge of an orgasm that is going to take my mind.

I stop thinking of what is. I stop thinking that I am deficient, that I am a failure as a woman. Brigg's words are filled with certainty. He believes deep in his heart that he is going to make me bear his children. Stryker toys at my nipples, gently playing with them as he rocks his cock deeper and deeper into my ass, his lips against my ear. I feel so fucking tiny between the three men.

"Cum for me, my little toy," he whispers in my ear, and his words trigger a reaction in my body. My pussy convulses and contracts at his command and shocking pleasures washes over my mind. I lose all semblance of rationality as the three men lose themselves in animal pleasure. Their cocks spurt into me as one, thick ropes of alien cum in my mouth, pussy and ass as their animal growls fill the cavern and I am truly claimed by the Aurelians. Their cocks seem to grow and throb even more as they seed themselves inside me and a feeling of utterrightnessfills my mind as Brigg empties his balls deep in my eager cunt.

When we're done my body is not my own. It shudders and trembles in the aftermath of my orgasm, and I feel so vulnerable and tiny.

I squeeze down between them, losing myself in their muscles and their musk. The three men run their hands over my trembling body as tears stream from my eyes.

"Are you hurt, my love?" Brigg asks tenderly.

"I'm j-just," I gasp out, my voice breaking as emotion floods over me, "I'm just sohappy." I bawl my eyes out in the joy of finally being reunited with these three men – the triad I haven't gone a day – an hour – without thinking of for thirty years.

I'd have felt so foolish crying in front of any other man, but in front of these three, I feel like I can be as open and vulnerable as I truly feel.

Stryker kisses my ear gently. “You broke our hearts, Aubrey. Perhaps that’s earned you quite the punishment.” He gently brings his hand down to my bottom and squeezes tight. Imeltwhen I remember the way he put me over his knee all those years ago, and roughly spanked me. My nipples harden into sensitive buds as I imagine him spanking me like that once again.

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I bite my lip, my cheeks reddening, and then I realize that here, I should have no shame. They love me – they truly do. Stryker, Haleon and Brigg all waited thirty years for me; and there's nothing I can say or do that will ruin that.

“You don't need an excuse to punish me,” I whisper, barely able to get the words out. Stryker's cock surges as I admit my desires, and he massages my body, his huge hands working my sore thighs. A little giggle leaves my mouth as I realize how badly Stryker wants to spank me. I can tell from his voice that he's been aching for it every night for the last thirty years.

Haleon kisses me tenderly, squeezing our bodies together – his cock rock-hard.

Brigg lays near my feet, gently taking my right foot and massaging it.

Haleon gazes into my eyes. His eyes are still that familiar light grey that I saw in my dreams every night for thirty years – a slate-colored hue touched with green that I could vividly recall in my mind simply by closing my eyes.

He smiles wickedly. “I've thought often of putting you over my lap and turning your bottom red,” his words a dark promise. My pussy tingles in response to Haleon's statement, and I bite my lip, unable to meet his eyes any longer.

Haleon gently forces my chin up with one huge finger. “No, Aubrey, don't be ashamed. We will give you everything you ache for, and more. We will give you the sons you never thought you could have.”

I breathe in, my body shuddering, and the three aliens push closer together, so I'm

sandwiched and secure. “I truly hope so, Haleon, I truly hope so.”

I close my eyes, feeling a deep tiredness, and then suddenly snap them open again.

Haleon laughs. “We will not disappear if you sleep, my sweet – and you will never leave us again.” His voice hardens slightly at the end of his promise to me.

“I’ll never leave you again,” I reassure him, and then I finally let my eyes close, the exhaustion pouring over me as I drift into the comfortable darkness of sleep.

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Stryker

I wake and my hackles rise. We lost everything to wait for Aubrey. We went into Scorp nests and killed countless Queens, bringing their heads back to the Orb-God again and again. We fought mountain lions, great boas in the rivers, huge eagles and every beast upon the land.

The Orb-God granted us visions, but nothing more. When Ripper, our tribal chief, realized that we were not sacrificing beasts for new mates, but to try and reclaim the one who’d left us, Ripper called her cursed.

The years since Aubrey left have been violent and brutal. The tyrant dragon has scoured our lands, growing more violent and frenzied, mad with bloodlust. Northern Scorp nests have been pushed south, towards our ancestral caves. For a time, women and children were being picked off as they gathered food; before Ripper finally set a

curfew and banned unaccompanied visits out of the caves.

My triad?

We were banished by that bastard. Forced out of the caves – allowed only to serve our tribe by keeping watch and sounding the alarm when the tyrant dragon attacks. Even with our alarms sounding, many of our tribe still die.

I hold Aubrey close. She's murmuring in her sleep, happy and content. I'll never let her out of my sight again. Just as I'd hoped beyond hope, Aubrey came back to us – and I'd sooner keep her tied up before I'll ever give her the chance to leave again.

My hand forms a fist.

I will seed my mate. She will grow fat with my child. This barrenness is not final.

I want to stand and start the day, but I can't let Aubrey go, not even for a second. I hold her closer, relishing in the softness of her skin. Her hair is a deep, dark brown, flecked with the false grey color that she said will wash out, and reveal her to me. She wriggles in her sleep, and my cock surges to attention, strong, hard and virile, pressing against her womanly figure.

I shiver. Aubrey drives me mad with lust.

She wants to be punished. She enjoys the feeling of submission. How lucky I am, to have the perfect mate.

I force myself to get up, not taking my eyes off her as I grab a handful of fresh-grass and chew. It fills my mouth with a refreshing taste. Our home is usually safe. We kill any predator that comes nearby, and all but the most brave or desperate avoid the area around us completely. Even Scorps now prefer to hunt for their prey farther away,

after we killed so many of them and displayed their carcasses as a warning.

Still, occasionally a panther or snake will slip through, and I now wish we had a safer home for our mate.

The southern valley, where the other tribe lives. Only the dragon roams that far south. That is a safe place, a place suitable for a mate. But that tribe has hated ours since the beginning times.

I snort. The tribe south of here is softer than ours. They plant food while we hunt. I thumb my shoulder before I realize I'm even doing it, tracing the wound I received with an arrow fired by a member of our rival tribe.

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The Aurelians further south fight with cowardly weapons – ones that can hit from afar. When I was freshly-blooded, I went to see the fabled valley myself. It was luscious and verdant, filled with orchards. That is the sort of place to keep a mate until you sire children with her. Only then you should come back to the jungle, to make your sons grow into hardened warriors, and not soft-blooded Aurelians.

My cock stands straight out in front of me in the presence of my mate. I can't help it. I desire her so completely it pushes all other thoughts from my brain. I clench my fist, forcing back a growl. Aubrey deserves rest.

Then the Scorp-Blood in my veins tells me differently. I need her – more than life itself. I growl, scooping Aubrey up, still sleeping in my arms.

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Aubrey

I'm pulled out of my dreams and gasp as Stryker's clean, fresh mouth presses against mine, kissing me deeply.

I know I need a shower, and to relieve my bladder, but he's insistent – his hands groping at my body. There's nothing I can do to stop him as the mating frenzy takes over.

“Give me a second,” I gasp, and I try to press him off me, needing to freshen up. I fell asleep in the arms of the alien men and I’m still filled with their seed. Stryker can’t wait, though – and he pulls me tight to his body, ignoring my protests.

Haleon and Brigg are waking, but all I can see is Stryker’s eyes right now – so dark, yet such a brilliant green at the same time. His obsidian curls frame the hard lines of his jaw, and Stryker looks absolutely beastly in the most delicious ways possible.

I gasp as I see his veins pulsating with his venomous blood – his eyes burning an ever-deeper green as he places his hand on my chin and forces me to meet his eyes. Stryker kisses me harder and harder, his tongue hungry for my mouth as his fingers pinch and pull my left nipple. Pain and pleasure surge together as this incredible, powerful man presses me back, pushing me against the smooth wall of the cave. He lifts me up, forcing me onto his huge cock and entering me in one deep, powerful thrust.

My eyes roll back as Stryker impales me with his cock, burying it deep inside me – stretching me to the absolute limit as I gasp in a delicious cocktail of pleasure and pain.

Stryker growls like a beast as he hears my gasps – losing his humanity in a mating frenzy; fucking me harder and harder, disregarding my pleasure utterly as he claims me as his own.

“You are mine, my little toy. Your body is mine!” Stryker’s snarl roars in my ear, and I give in fully to his dominance as he fucks me like he owns me.

Haleon and Brigg are waiting and watching; their muscles tense and their cocks rock-hard. I know the instant that Stryker seeds me, the other two Aurelians will fuck me too – perhaps even harder and more desperately than the leader of their triad.

I reach out desperately, digging my nails into Stryker's broad back as he ravishes me. The amulet presses between us as he grabs my buttocks, squeezing so hard I know I'll be wearing his handprints on my skin for days to come. He pulls me harder and harder against him, forcing me to meet each thrust, and his slick cock sends dark, endless pleasure throughout my body. I shudder as my need builds, and builds, and builds – into an endless crescendo of ecstasy; until I can barely see, my eyes fixated on Stryker's huge, muscled chest as he takes me ashis.

“Oh, God, I'myoursStryker. I'myours,” I moan out loud as my orgasm finally washes over me, overwhelming me with pleasure, my body shaking and shuddering as Stryker claims me again and again. I rake my nails down his back, knowing I'm drawing blood andlikingit. His animal growl makes me feel so small and vulnerable as he takes me, but I feel some small pride that he'll be wearing my claw marks in his skin.

“I'm going to punish you for that, my little toy,” Stryker snarls in my ear, and then he unleashes torrents of hot cum inside me, filling me to the brim as his rock-hard cock spurts and throbs.

Finally, he's spent – but I know if Stryker lets me down, I'll fall. My muscles don't obey my mind anymore. Stryker instead leaves his huge, still-hard cock deep inside me, kissing me with such ownership that it melts my mind. Then, finally, he slowly lets me off of his dick – but continues to hold me upright.

Brigg picks me up from Stryker's arms, and before I can even feelemptyhe presses his own huge, hard dick inside me.

I wrap my legs around his muscled waist, as Brigg holds me up easily, fucking me hard and fast. I stare into Brigg's eyes, enthralled by the golden flakes that seem to shimmer and shift as he stares back into my soul; relishing the moment of finally being inside me.

I gasp and moan as I feel Haleon step up behind me, and then the swollen head of his slick cockhead pressing against my asshole. I know there's no way he's going to fit his massive cock inside me – notthere!

Yet Haleon doesn't care. His cock, slick with alien pre-cum, presses past the resistance of my asshole – sliding past the tight, sensitive ring and then sinking deep inside me. I'm suddenly completely and utterlyfilledby these two, huge men – filled so deeply that I can't even think any more.

Brigg and Haleon thrust into me in unison, as if their minds are linked, and I can't even comprehend howgoodit feels to surrender so utterly to them.

Haleon wraps his huge hands around my body, cupping and playing with my nipples. Then he drops his searching hands downward, and the two men simplypressme together, sandwiching me so tightly I can't move an inch as they fuck me hard.

It's deliciously sinful to be taken like this, and before the Aurelians I'd never once considered it – but even if I had, this is far from your average sexual encounter. This isn't some lackluster tinder date, followed by mediocre sex. This is being ravaged by twin aliens – huge, powerful creatures that take me like theyownme. Their growls fill my ears as a second orgasm overcomes me – and the clenching of my pussy and asshole send them over the edge as well. In unison, Brigg and Haleon seed me, filling my holes with their hot, sticky cum.

Finally, satisfied, they set me down, holding me up as my legs fail to support me.

Oh, God. I really need to pee.

“Is it... Is it safe to go out there?” I ask nervously.

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“Come with us,” says Brigg, leading the way outside. Their seed runs in rivulets down my thighs as I walk, leaving a trail of drips along the ground.

We clamber down the side of the cliff and I go into the water of the nearby stream first, releasing my bladder in a luxurious surge. These guys don’t wait, or ask me what I want. When they ache for me, they take me.

I shudder as I realize I knew all this coming here, and it’s exactly what I wanted.

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Aubrey

Three weeks later.

Is it possible to settle into a routine with three powerful aliens? Who do whatever the hell they want to you, whenever they want it?

Apparently, you can adjust to anything. I’ve never been happier. I smile to myself, sing to myself, and look forward to my men returning each day. They seem to eat a diet almost entirely composed of rare, bloody meat, and I’ve insisted that they start bringing back fruits and vegetables, which I then convince them to eat.

I haven't really left the cavern, though. It's too dangerous out there, especially with the raging frenzy the dragon has been in for the decades since I first left this world. Sometimes I ache for the freedom of being able to go wherever I chose without worrying about being grabbed by a panther the size of a bus and turned into a snack.

We all have to make sacrifices.

I hear the familiar sound of the boulder moving, and my heart flutters.

Honey, we're home!

I imagine Stryker calling out like he's in a 50's sitcom, the golden retriever jumping up to greet him. Of course, on this planet, the golden retriever would be the size of a horse.

"We bring fresh meat," says Stryker. He brings in a cleaned and gutted brace of pheasant-like birds; my absolute favorite. They have a dark, rich taste to them when seared over an open fire.

"And veggies?"

"Fresh veggies too," laughs Brigg, but there's an edge to his voice. The three men never return relaxed. It takes them a few hours before they're calm again. The jungle is full of dangers, and I know they've been having troubles with their own tribe, although they don't give me too many details.

Perhaps it's a blessing I'll never have children. This is no place to raise them.

The thought gives me the familiar tendrils of self-loathing that I try to push back. The Aurelians still seem to believe they can bear heirs with me, and I wish I could more than anything. It breaks my heart to think that they waited so long for me and won't

get what they truly crave. Stryker sets the meat down in the corner, and Haleon adds fresh wood to the fire. It spits and hisses as the damp wood joins the small inferno that already burns there.

I take great pride in the fire. Before, the men cooked their meat outside, or simply carved it with their Orb-Blades and ate it almost raw.

I suggested the idea of an indoor fire – and then used Stryker’s Orb-Blade to carve a hole through the rocks overhead; just small enough that no evil creatures could get in, but wide enough to take the smoke of the inside fire out.

“One at a time! Or you’ll make too much smoke,” I admonish Haleon, as he slows himself in adding another wet stick to the flame. He smiles back at me, a rueful grin as he runs a hand through his hair. He’s still got tense lines under his eyes though.

Brigg gives me a light kiss on the cheek. “You have not had your moon blood yet?”

I bite my lip, shocked at the question. I didn’t think this all male species concerned themselves with such things.

I shake my head. “Not for over thirty years. It is what made me go to the doctors and get the tests done that...” I don’t finish the sentence, but they all know what I mean. We speak mostly in their language, but I’ve started to teach them a few words of English. The amulet is the perfect tool for learning Aurelian. I’m able to hear some of the words in their language, and yet instantly translate them in my head. This lets me start to get used to their words, and it also lets me speak in their language fluently; by converting English to Aurelian. My subconscious has been picking up their language to the point where soon I’ll be able to shed the amulet completely. Apparently, it’s very valuable, and Brigg not only had to trade his chain for it – but the three Aurelians had to brave the northlands to mine more gold to trade for continued use of it.

In the current times with the fear of the dragon always lurking, I won't let them go north again. I'll have to learn quickly or we'll be back to communicating with grunts and smiles.

The three Aurelians look suddenly somber. "The moon blood stops only when a woman is pregnant," says Stryker, and I realize he's now understanding that there might be something seriously wrong with me. I look down uncomfortably. Despite being over sixty, I still have the body of a thirty-year-old. The three of them somehow make me feel so small and young again. It's not just that they've lived hundreds of years. It's not even the sheer size of these towering warriors. It's how vulnerable I feel that I'll never be able to give the three of them what they want and need more than anything.

Haleon swallows hard. Then he nods. "There is only one way forward. We must consult the Orb-God."

Brigg slams his palm against the wall. "Consult the Orb-God? We've been banished, dammit. They'll never let us see it!"

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Stryker muses. “All men of the Scorp-Blooded tribe have the holy right to commune. Ripperwillsee reason.”

Brigg shakes his head. “No. He won’t. The tribe has shrunk, and he guards the Orb-God jealously these days.”

I know why they were banished.

Because of me.

I got it out of Brigg. Apparently, they’d been bringing sacrifices to the Orb-God, yet never gained a replacement mate in return. Their leader, Ripper, realized that these three men were not praying for a new mate, but praying for me to return. I realize instantly what we have to do.

“I’ll go with you.”

Stryker grabs my arm, looking me deep in the eyes with those vibrant, green orbs of his. They flash with anger and possessiveness. “I will not let Ripper within a hundred feet of you. He is dangerous, and he has hatred for us. He calls you the Cursed Mate.”

Stryker’s hand clenches too tightly on my arm, sending a shockwave of pain through my arm. His veins pulse as the venom courses through him. I breathe in gently, not wanting to show him that he’s hurting me – because I know the moment he loses his beastly rage he’ll feel deep shame that he caused me discomfort.

I might defer in the bedroom, but I need to stand firm here. “No. This is the only way.

Your chief needs to see that you aren't forsaking your tribe. That you want children. Bring me with you, or he'll never let you in."

"She's right," Haleon says slowly, mulling over my words.

"I'll think on it," considers Stryker, his grip on my arm loosening. I'm so used to being the one in charge at the law firm and the boardroom that it's tough adjusting to the new dynamics. Stryker is their leader, and I'm not going to try to bully him into seeing my point of view. He looks down at the marks on my arm, and instantly a deep sorrow fills his face. He gently kisses my bruises. "A thousand apologies, my love."

I smile, and I know that his roughness should terrify me, but it doesn't. I know Stryker only acted like that because of a threat to me. It's only when I'm in danger that he flies into his rage, and that he'd never do anything to hurt me.

But imagining what he would do to anything or anybody that threatened me is the true horror. I've ached for thirty years to feel Stryker's inflamed passion again; and I'd take no subdued version of his might. I ache for his power – his drive. Stryker's violent nature scares me, but it also draws me closer to him.

"And if Clan Leader Ripper turns on us?" Brigg gives me a nervous look. He fears that I might be taken from them.

Haleon shakes his head. "He would not risk losing more Aurelians – even us."

"I'll bring my gun," I say with certainty.

"Explain to me, again, how this weapon works?" Haleon reaching for the metal weapon I brought with me from Earth. I grab it away from him before he can take it. I don't want him accidentally shooting it, especially not in this cramped cave. Even with the safety catch on, it's too dangerous.

Always assume the safety is off, even when you know it's not. That's one of the rules of firearms.

"Have you seen bows and arrows?" I ask, trying to find a way to explain the weapon.

Stryker rubs a small scar on his shoulder. "Yes. A coward's weapon."

I raise my eyebrow. "Not all of us have strong arms, you know. I'm just as deadly as you are with this thing. This gun shoots with the force of a hundred arrows – but it can only shoot eight more times."

Brigg snorts. "And then it's just a useless hunk of metal?"

I nod. "Yes. But until then, I could kill an Aurelian from a stone's throw away."

The three of them look at me with new understanding. I look like a small, weak woman to most Aurelians – but those who underestimate me will see my teeth. I didn't get to the position of Secretary of Defense back on Earth easily. I had to manipulate and negotiate, growing my influence slowly. I've faced down five-star generals and men of power and influence who'd make even this so-called "Ripper" shake in his boots.

"Tomorrow, we go," says Stryker, without a hint of doubt in his voice.

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Aubrey

We trek to the underground home of the Scorp-Blood tribe. A guard challenges us at the entrance.

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“Halt! The three of you are banished. And who is this woman? Procured by some ungodly means? None of you have brought a sacrifice to the Orb-God to earn your fated mate. Where did you find her?”

The guard draws his Orb-Weapon, holding the hilt but not activating it. I see Brigg’s eyes dart up and I raise my gaze. There are Aurelians surrounding us in the trees, with horns slung around their necks. So close to their tribal home, they have a stronger warning system against the dragon – or whatever other dangerous creatures lurk in the jungle.

And there are few more dangerous creatures than Stryker, Brigg and Haleon.

“This is our one true mate, Aubrey,” says Stryker calmly, though I notice his hand inches towards the hilt of his own Orb-Weapon. He may put on a calm front, but I know Stryker could explode into violence at any second.

An Aurelian drops from the trees. He’s less than seven-feet-tall, with fewer markings than my triad.

He must be a younger member of the tribe – one who has not yet earned the full tribal tattoos of the Scorp-Blood tribe.

“Impossible!” The young newcomer snarls. “When a mate leaves, she will never return. The three of you are forsaken!”

That sets my three Aurelians off. I watch in horror as Stryker, Haleon and Brigg each reach for their weapons.

“Stop!” I yell, surprising everyone. I step forward. Brigg instinctively moves to protect me. “It’s true,” I growl. “I found a way back here through an Orb-Portal. I came back – I am these warrior’s fated mate, and I did not forsake them.”

The guards listen dubiously.

“These men are not forsaken – and, as such, they have the right to consult with their god.”

The guard inspects me, his eyes roaming up and down my body. I hope he doesn’t look for too long, or the uneasy truce will be broken by the jealous Aurelians.

“It was wrong of Ripper to restrict the rite of consulting with our god – even to you three.” The guard who first stopped us seems to be leaning in our favor. “All members of our tribe have that sacred right, and if this woman truly is your fated mate, then the Orb-God must have brought her back for a good reason.”

“They lie! Sent by some void-devil to trick us,” snaps the younger Aurelian. The guard instantly boxes his ears. The younger Aurelian bristles, but steps down. I chew my lip, realizing how close the young man came to being killed. The Aurelian species is one that values honor almost as high as life itself.

The guard grabs a thick vine and pulls, opening a path to the cavern beyond. He goes first, with Stryker following right behind him. Brigg gently motions me forward, and I follow Stryker into the smooth-walled tunnel and downwards into the caverns themselves. As we enter the young Aurelian glares daggers at us.

The three of us enter the main cavern and I instantly feel that something is wrong.

In one corner, three Aurelian warriors lie covered in mushroom paste and bandages, groaning softly in pain. Children sit duly in front of a thin stream, and pale-faced

women huddle near a fire. They look up fitfully as we enter.

There is a large, stone chair in the center of the cavern – which holds a large Aurelian warrior with scars crisscrossing his entire body. He's eating a large piece of meat messily, juices dripping down his bearded face. A woman sits near him, and behind him stands a second Aurelian, just as large as the first. I wonder if the third member of his triad died in some fierce battle, or if he's simply out of sight.

In any event, I know instantly that this enormous, venerable Aurelian is Ripper, the Clan Leader and Chieftain, and my heart beats faster when I see the Orb-Bracelets around his wrists.

He got the name Ripper because, in battle, those Orb-Bracelets extend into pincers modelled after the first Scorp he killed.

Ripper stands, discarding the bone he was chewing on with force. It clatters against the ground and the woman next to him flinches.

“Why did you let these forsaken Aurelians in?” He yells at the guard, his voice booming.

The guard stands tall. “They seek consult with the Orb-God, who has brought them back their fated mate!”

“Impossible!” Ripper roars, striding towards us. I tremble as the massive Aurelian stands only a few feet away from us. The second Aurelian, the one standing behind Ripper, steps up to support his battle-brother.

“No, not impossible,” Haleon explains calmly – calmer than he has any justification to be. “She found her own way back to us. You banished us for fighting for her, but you could not stop fate from bringing our fated mate back to us.”

Haleon's voice remains relaxed, but I detect a knife's edge of stress under it.

"My word is law in this cave. I banished you once with words, do not make me do it again... with force. Defy me, and I'll see you in... the Circle," threatens Ripper.

I swallow hard as I see that in front of Ripper is a broad circle of polished stone. He steps to the edge, and gasps fill the cavern. I know that if he steps into it, he won't leave until someone is bloody in front of him.

"Very well. Then we do battle," snarls Stryker. Before I can stop him, he walks to the edge of the polished circle and draws his weapon. The Orb-Blade hums to life and he holds the sword in front of him. Every member of the Scorp-Blood tribe stands and walks forward as if in a trance. I feel a deep fear, knowing that if Stryker's toe crosses the line, nothing but blood will end this.

Ripper's weapons activate. The huge Orb-Claws appear, warping reality as light seems to flee them. I watched my triad defeat Scorp warriors in battle, but Ripper is a different foe. I can see how badly he wants to fight and kill Stryker.

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The light disappears from the cavern. I can see the outlines of torches, but they are simply a tiny light that cannot travel in the sudden deep silence that falls over us all as if we are being crushed by the night sky. Some nights back on Earth I'd look up at the stars and fear that our atmosphere would be pierced by the nothingness of space.

Screams fill the cavern and the light comes back on, but no one is moving. We are not frozen, but not a single one of us can move a muscle. Gasps fill the cave as a black pulse comes from down a long corridor. Long tendrils of Orb-Lightning reach out, and then as soon as it all started, it stops.

“The Orb-God calls to us. Even a chief cannot stand between an Aurelian and a deity,” says Brigg, appealing to rationality. I force myself not to tremble. I need to put on a strong front.

Ripper considers. He holds his huge pincer claws up, and there is open bloodlust in his eyes as he stares down Stryker. Suddenly, the two men deactivate their weapons as one. “Very well. I will give you the consult, but I too will be there.”

Stryker bristles. Horror fills me as I see his veins pulsating – every one, crisscrossing his body like the roots of a plant, and I know that the Scorp-Venom is affecting him; charging his anger and emotion. We were on the verge of bloody violence, and it's hard for him to back down.

“It is the right of a triad to seek consult alone!”

Ripper bares his teeth. “Aye, and it's also the right of the Chief to kill a man who insults him. Take my conditions – leave, or fight.”

I grab Stryker's arm. "Please, we came this far. We need to speak with the Orb. What matter is it if he's there to witness?"

In fact, given how Ripper's misunderstanding of the situation had led to this, maybe it would be beneficial if he was there, too.

Stryker nods, not saying anything, and we follow Ripper into the chamber that houses their Orb-God.

It's the first time I've seen it, and I gasp as I witness a shimmering, rippling blacker-than-black ball that's so much larger than the one that brought me back to this world.

The Orb back on earth was nothing compared to this stallion-sized, pulsating sphere of energy. I look into it and lose myself in the swirling, incomprehensible darkness. It's like I'm staring into nothing, yet everything. I see the entire chaos of the universe – the vastness of space, the brutality of life, and the coldness of an empty, endless void.

Tendrils of darkness emanate from the ominous Orb, and I wonder deep in my heart if these things are good or evil, or if they are something else – far beyond human comprehension.

Stryker, Haeon and Brigg step forward to address their Orb-God. Nothing happens that I can see, and they look at each other, confused and disappointed.

"So, the Orb-God did not call you. Tell me then, what do you seek?"

"A son," says Brigg.

Ripper looks at me again. "This female will not bear you a son? She is truly the Cursed Mate. The moment she came to our lands, the tyrant dragon rampaged.

Perhaps it is a sign that I must end her!”

I gasp. The room hums with violence as my triad circles me, keeping their bodies between me and Ripper.

That great, hovering Orb-Sphere activates again.

We all feel it, and turn to watch.

Then I see it.

The great, shimmering Orb pulses and I witness the clouds of black oblivion swirling and parting; moving open. I step forward without even telling my feet to move, until I’m right in front of the Orb.

I remember the death and destruction the much-smaller Orb wrought, back in that lab on Earth...

...but I’m not afraid.

It’s speaking to me.

“I see... I see something,” I whisper, and the four growling Aurelians reluctantly back down.

I stare into the Orb, and I watch swirling blackness form shapes and images. I see generation after generation of the Scorp-Blood tribe, and other proud, primitive warriors like them, finding their mates and bringing them back through the benevolence of their Orb-God.

Then I see a meteor hitting the ground, and hatching – for it is no mere chunk of

space debris. It's an egg.

A dragon grows from that cracked, otherworldly egg - a dragon that lusts for company; another of its kind. A mate – and yet it finds none.

A dragon that now lashes out in anger upon the Scorp-Blood tribe; alone and frightened and hate-fueled and vengeful.

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I peer through the shimmering Orb clouds and see the creature itself – like something from the fairytale books I'd read as a child.

It's as if I'm seeing it – watching the dragonright nowthrough the eye of the Orb.

In my vision, the dragon turns to face me, its red eyes staring at me. I can seeit...

...and it can seeme.

A scream leaves my body, as the dragon's tooth-lined maw stretches open and a torrent of flaming magma roars out.

Then I see the dragon's head –justits head. It bleeds, it's huge eyes unseeing.

Visions of children follow – of strong, proud Aurelian offspring. More and more of them appear – generation after generation ofmyprogeny, heroic and brave. I watch as one of my great, great grandchildren fights with his triad in a futuristic world ravaged by Scorp attacks, pulling a strong-willed mate and three small children back to the safety of the jungle planet. I watch as my sons fight for the right to their fated mates, bringing sacrifices back to the Orb-God. I watch a million years in an instant, and my mind fills to the brim with the vast yarns of destiny, all spinning from my own fertility.

Countless strong, young sons sweep out in front of me – my sons, and the sons of my sons, and a dynasty that follows.

I watch them all, and somehow it's like they look up and seemein return. I feel a

wellspring of pride inside me...

...then they disappear into nothingness.

The Orb abruptly ends its vision.

“The dragon!” I gasp, staggering back from the swirling Orb, until Stryker grabs me.
“It’s the dragon! That’s the key!”

“What did you see?” Stryker growls, his question a command.

“I saw the tyrant dragon. It needs a mate, and it kills because it’s full of rage that it cannot find one.”

“She lies!” Ripper snarls. “She wants to draw attention away from her role in all of this. She is the reason the dragon angers. She disgraced you, your Cursed Mate, and the dragon is punishing all of us for her betrayal.”

I shake my head. I don’t want to say what I saw next – for that will force my triad and I to face almost certain death...

...but we have no choice.

I speak as though in a trance:

“The Orb wants its head. It demands the head of the dragon as sacrifice.”

The cave becomes hushed. Then Ripper snorts: “The tyrant dragon has killed twenty-three Aurelian warriors. If you three fight it, the number will be twenty-six... Plus one foolish, human woman.”

Brigg clenches his hand into a fist. “The tribe has dwindled under your rule, Ripper. Aurelians hide like rats, instead of facing their enemies!”

Ripper smiles, but the emotion does reach his cold, hard eyes.

“Then come for the crown yourself, boy. If you think you can do better – challenge me in combat.”

Haleon grabs Brigg by the shoulder. “We have a more worthy foe to fight.”

Brigg turns to him, and they exchange a glance. A connection.

Their look extends to Stryker, and then to me.

The four of us nod, wordlessly agreeing to embrace our destiny.

Ignoring Ripper, we walk back to the cavern together in silence. All I can think about are the images the Orb showed me. So much violence and death, and yet, so much life. So many stories, all stemming from my womb.

We leave the cavern of the Scorp-Blood tribe, and journey home. When we eventually get back to our own cozy cavern, I realize that while life on this world means being surrounded by danger on all sides, it’s nothing compared to the danger we all wordlessly know the Orb-God has instructed us – no, ordered us - to seek out.

I try to speak reason to my three loves.

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“You can’t seriously be considering trying to fight that thing!” I implore the three Aurelians to see reason.

They are my bliss. These three beautiful, powerful, caring men – who I know would die for me in a heartbeat.

This is my bliss – being with them for the rest of my life.

I long ago gave up the fantasy of having children, and I found far greater happiness than I could ever have imagined as a result.

But now, it will all be threatened once again by the curse of my infertility.

Joshua took a younger woman because I was unable to have children.

Now these three will go on a suicide mission for the same reason – to offer an impossible sacrifice to their damned Orb-God; at the risk of everything I’ve spent thirty years trying to restore.

Haleon runs his hand through his mohawk. Then he touches me, his hand against my belly, and looks deep into my eyes. “You will bear me a son, my pet.”

I step back, anger flaring. “I’ll bear you nothing if you try to fight that creature!”

Brigg has a hint of fear in his eyes.

“We must. It’s our only chance.”

His voice is resigned, yet determined.

We eat a terse dinner. Then we fall asleep, barely a word spoken between us. My dreams are filled with fire and agony, and I wake up with a start, gasping for air.

In the corner of the cave is a black dot.

A floating, black dot. The same type I've seen before – the call of the Orb, or whatever intelligence it is behind those eerie, floating balls of raw energy.

It shimmers into a portal, rippling and humming, but the three Aurelians don't wake from their slumber.

I do, though. I've never been so awake in all my life. The rift in reality opens, offering me a way out of the situation. I took it once before and it was my greatest regret.

I see clearly through the shimmering portal into an office building.

Earth.

Home.

If I go through it, the three Aurelians will have no reason to fight the dragon. It is only for their progeny and legacy that they'd take such a stupid, foolhardy risk.

I pull myself gently away from Brigg's arms and stand in front of the portal. I lick my lips, knowing that if I go through it, the Aurelians will be safe. They will have no reason to battle the dragon without me. They will survive instead of going on a suicide mission.

Tears come to my eyes.

I know what I should do...

...but I can't.

I'm the selfish one now. Though I know I should step through and away from the certain doom that I'm condemning these three, proud warriors to, I can't take that step.

I did it once before, and it nearly destroyed me.

I fall to my knees, knowing that by staying here I'm effectively killing the three men I love.

As if reading my mind, the portal abruptly disappears. I'm left on my knees in the darkness, and suddenly all I feel is hatred at myself for not making the noble choice – to leave this brutal paradise and let my three loves live.

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Aubrey

The three men leave to hunt, and I feel hollow inside.

What if they decide to fight the dragon today?

I fondle the cold steel of my gun. With it, I could most likely survive going out in the jungle and following them... if I could get a shot off before some panther turns me into lunch. I nervously touch my thighs and console myself with reason remembering the map I'd seared into my memory.

If the Aurelians were going to fight the dragon, they'd have taken more resources and rations. The volcano that was marked on the map was at least a few days hike away, even at their quick, long-legged pace.

Plus, I have to trust them. I have to trust that they would not make such a life-altering decision without consulting with me. Because if they don't? Then I don't know what I'm fighting for.

Yet every second that passes in their absence is agony. For the first twelve years I was back on Earth, I constantly questioned my sanity – my very understanding of the world.

Then I worked for two decades with a single-minded focus – committing every second of every day towards getting back to my three, powerful warriors.

Sleeping was a begrudged necessity. Eating was a biological weakness.

I didn't spend thirty years fighting for Stryker, Haleon and Brigg just to lose them to a great beast.

I'll kill that dragon myself.

The thought flares up in my mind. It excites me. My heart pounds as I imagine sneaking up on the dragon and putting my pistol to its eye; pulling the trigger eight times and putting it to sleep forever. I don't care if you're a mythical being, cold steel slugs through your eye will put you down.

But how could I possibly sneak up on it? I have no idea how good its hearing, or sense of smell is. How much of the day does it spend in slumber?

I hear the rough sound of the boulder being moved aside. The three warriors have returned, with a brace of birds plucked and ready to cook. They all have the same stern, indomitable look. I know a decision has been reached.

"We go tomorrow," says Stryker, his deep green eyes locking on to mine. He does not ask. He simply tells me what is going to happen.

"Good. I'm ready," I respond, my pistol in my belt.

"This is not the time for jokes," Haleon says sternly.

I stand, drawing myself to my full height. Haleon still towers over me, but I don't let that stop me from saying what I have to.

“The portal opened for me again last night.”

The three warriors stiffen, their eyes wide. I’ve seen them face down giant eagles, lions and even Scorp – and yet my words are the first thing to ever make them appear truly frightened.

“I stayed,” I reassure them, and the tense shoulders of my three loves soften slightly. “I stayed because you need my help. Do you even have a plan for killing the dragon?”

Brigg nods. “Yes. We do. We will ambush it while it sleeps.”

I smile, knowing that I have them. “I thought of this plan, as well. I thought of leaving while you were gone and putting my pistol to its face. One small woman could hide better than three large warriors.”

Stryker reaches forward for my gun, but I jump back, putting my hand up in warning. “I’m no pet, Stryker. If you knew the things I did to get back here, you wouldn’t think of my so lightly...”

“My love... We donotthink of you lightly.”

Maybe not, but I knew my three loves each had a warrior’s arrogance. They just still didn’t appreciate that I was every bit the warrior they were – only I used my wits and intelligence instead of brute strength and an Orb-Blade.

“I have a better plan than yours,” I told them.

“Then speak it,” says Haleon, his voice cold. He hates the idea of me being anywhere near the terror of the dragon. The irony is, I feel the same about them.

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“When I was first on this planet,” I explain, “I left this cave at night. I watched a wolf kill a deer. The dragon swooped in and stole the kill.”

Brigg nods. “The dragon is greedy.”

“Exactly – and it must not have the same immunity to Scorp venom that you three have, built up by years of small doses. I saw it grab a Scorp-Blood warrior. Instead of eating him, the dragon dropped the warrior onto the ground and killed him.”

Haleon slams his fist against the table. “Liam. I knew him well, when we were kids. I didn’t sound the war horn early enough to warn him.”

I gently touch my hand on Haleon’s arm. “You did everything you could.”

He nods, but his green eyes suggest he doesn’t fully believe my reassuring words.

I brush aside such things – we have no time for them. Not right now.

“Think, my love. The dragon would not eat an Aurelian who has Scorp venom in his veins. It’s poison to it.”

“Indeed,” Stryker nods. “Occasionally, we’ve seen members of the tribe attacked by mountain lions and tigers; but all the creatures that have feasted from a marked member of the tribe have died in agony as a result – the flesh of a marked warrior like poison to them. It is only a truly starved beast that will try... they prefer to eat the unblooded.”

I nod. It's horrifying to think of young Aurelians being hunted down by beasts, but there's no time for anything but the matter at hand.

"The dragon knows that. It will kill the members of your tribe, but not eat them..."

My eyes flash.

"Yet, it would eat a deer. We've seen it do so – stealing another predator's kill."

I see the understanding flicker in Brigg's eyes. The gold flakes seem to flicker more brightly somehow.

"By the Orb-God, Aubrey. You're right. We poison the dragon."

Stryker considers the plan, pacing anxiously.

His face is a mask – but at least he's thinking about what I proposed, instead of dismissing it out of hand. He saw reason before when I counselled him to bring me to Ripper despite him not wanting to put me in danger. If I am going to have a future with these three warriors, I need to know that they take my advice seriously.

"But - one taste of poisoned meat, and the dragon will spit it out," says Stryker, and I know from years in the boardroom that I am winning. He's looking for any reason that my plan might not work. He's grasping at straws and I go for the kill.

"The dragon ate the deer whole. It's greedy. Besides, a taste might be enough – if not to kill it, then to weaken it. When the dragon is weak, then we fight it."

Haleon shakes his head. "It's a good plan, my love, but we can't let you be in danger. I don't want to live in this world without you."

I gently pull Haleon's hand up, kissing his knuckle. "You must not think of me as less than you. I will stay back, hidden, and only attack from afar. This pistol will fire farther than even the magma breath of the dragon.

Brigg wraps his arms around me from behind, kissing my neck. "I don't want to lose you, Aubrey. I don't want to wake up and be tormented that you're only a memory. Your plan is excellent, but we can't risk you."

I turn, pushing him away. "And so, you expect me to sit in this cave? And wait and wonder if any of you three will come back alive? Why would losing you three be any less painful for me, than losing me would be to you? "

Stryker growls, the sound low and animal in his throat. "Aubrey speaks the truth. She comes."

"Are you insane?" Brigg snarls. "If she dies to that beast, I'll be the one to end your life, Stryker – for this foolishness!"

Stryker gives Brigg a threatening look. The three of them explained something called the Bond to me – how the members of an Aurelian triad can feel each other in their heads. I never want to see them come to blows, but I know their passions are at a peak.

"We cannot leave her here, Brigg. Not with Ripper so close. He aches for her – you saw it in his eyes. If we're gone for days, he may come for her. Aubrey will be safer with us, even if we face the dragon."

Stryker's voice is calm. Yet again, I understand why he is the natural leader of this triad.

He turns to me, grabbing my arm in a vice-like grip.

“You have never been in battle, though, Aubrey – not like this. You must obey my commands instantly, you understand?”

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I nod. “Yes. I understand.”

“Good,” he says, and licks his lips. “Now drop to your knees, my perfect little pet.”

The sudden command is so bold and incongruent to our tense talk of seconds earlier – and yet my body responds instinctively.

Stryker watches me sink to my knees, and pulls down his loincloth. His massive cock rears out – huge and proud.

My mouth waters.

If we’re going to be slain in hopeless combat against a tyrant dragon, I at least want my last days with these men to be filled with endless pleasure.

I open my mouth, and prove that I can be both their submissive slut, and their equal in bravery and cunning.

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Brigg

I have never felt fear like this before. Cold, insistent, gripping my heart.

It's not the flames of the dragon's breath washing over me that terrifies me – I have faced those flames before, and even felt their bite.

I run my hand against the old scars from that night where I thought I lost Aubrey, all those years ago.

No, my fear is of something else – something I also first felt the bite of that night so long ago. I remember the feeling of absolute grief when Aubrey first left through the portal, leaving me in a darkness that felt like an endless abyss.

I will never lose her again.

I hate the idea of her being near that creature, but Stryker is right. Aubrey will be even less safe in our cavern, especially now that we've challenged Ripper's authority.

He is growing old and unstable, and will be feeling even more vulnerable in his position as Chieftain. Like the barb of a Scorp, he has been stung by our words, and poisoned by our doubt. He knows his leadership has led to the tribe dwindling. The rumors will have spread that we are going to face the dragon, and that makes him look weaker still.

But a wounded, frightened animal is at its most dangerous – and what is an Aurelian if not just a stronger, smarter animal?

Ripper may now try something desperate or insane, like coming for Aubrey and killing her; in a foolish gamble to appease the tyrant dragon. If his theory that she is a Cursed Mate responsible for the dragon's rampage was correct, he would regain the trust of the tribe.

He is, in some ways, as dangerous as that black-winged, fire-breathing beast.

I consider this, Aubrey packs a sack with dried meat – enough for a week’s journey. I grab her wrist gently, and she turns, meeting my eyes.

“If you die, I’ll never forgive you,” I say, wanting her to feel my love fully. She gives me a sad smile and I kiss her. As our lips meet, I wonder how many more times I’ll kiss her in my lifetime.

Is this one of the last?

You never truly know. At any moment, it can all end, snuffed out by some random cruelty. I ache to protect Aubrey from the cold violence of the universe, to build with her a beautiful life. The southern lands will suit her. Though the Aurelian tribes there are not as ruthless and warlike, important qualities for my sons, perhaps a softer life is best for her.

But we cannot think of those things right now. Not until we have finished what we started thirty years ago.

The four of us step outside, into the warm jungle, and we exchange nods of solidarity and comradeship. Then we set out together, closing the boulder behind us and leaving our home for what might be the last time.

I’d almost given up on seeing Aubrey again. How cruel fate would be to bring her back to us... and take her away again.

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Stryker

We set off northwards, towards our old home. I'm on high alert. My skin prickles as if Orb-Power is flowing through me, and my eyes constantly scan left and right, upwards and down, scanning for any sign of the winged beast.

I know the greatest danger is from the sky. We must never take our eyes from it.

For many nights over the past decades, I've fallen asleep imagining conquering the dragon. I've ached to rid our world of the scourge of this creature. Now, though, I finally feel like we have a plan. A chance.

A slim chance – but more than has ever been offered to us before. I spare a glance at my mate, feeling as though she is secretly the leader of my triad. Twice now she has swayed my mind on important, life-changing decisions in a way that Haleon or Brigg never could. This morning, when I made the decision to fight the dragon, I never would have considered for a moment putting my mate in front of the flames. Somehow she convinced me to let her come, and I'm still not quite sure how she did it.

I can never underestimate that beautiful woman. Her mind is sharper than mine. Instead of feeling foolish knowing that she can see more clearly than me, I simply feel grateful that she is on my side.

Yet, to get to the dragon's lair, we will have to pass through the northern tribal lands,

where a clan we have an uneasy peace with lives. The north-tribe survives underground, like us, in a vast network of caverns in which they can hide from the dragon. Up above their subterranean home, the luscious jungle climate turns raw and hot, filled with an ashy heat that rakes at your lungs with every breath.

As we walk, I look back at my fated mate. Aubrey should not have to bear such discomfort. More and more, I understand that she deserves to be in the softer southlands, eating sweet fruits and spending her days relaxing. Her bravery draws me to her, bonding us even closer together. I know that our sons will be proud and strong.

“Tell me more, my love,” I ask her as we walk. “What did you see in the Orb?”

She smiles. “I saw victory. I saw... I saw sons. Many sons. I watched them go to a strange world and save a woman and small children from certain death. I watched them battle Scorp Queens and earn their right to mates. They grow up and live healthy, strong lives. Our lineage will prosper throughout eternity.”

Her words make my chest puff out. Most of our tribe die out, their bloodline ending when they cannot earn the right to females destined to mate with them. Most of our tribe member’s bloodline ends in a brutal battle underground, fighting for a sacrifice.

Mine will continue, though – strong, and vital; my sons forging themselves in the histories. The dragon will be the greatest foe I face, and he will die by my sword.

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Aubrey

We get to the cavern where it all started, oh so long ago.

It's not nostalgia that brings us here. The cavern is a natural mid-point between the triad's new home and the lair of the dragon.

It's also safe and secure – the perfect resting place.

“It seems so long ago,” says Brigg wistfully, as the three towering aliens push the boulder aside. Once again, I'm in awe of their flexing muscles as they exert themselves – the perfect specimens of men.

“It was so long ago,” I say, and Haleon laughs.

“Thirty years will feel different to you when you have lived hundreds. Tell me, how many suns and moons are in an Earth year?”

We walk down the hallway and into the cave.

“365,” I tell him. “Well, 366 once every four years.”

Stryker is silent. He's been brooding ever since we set off on this mission, completely focused on the task that lies ahead. He reminds me of a coiled spring. I'm terrified of what will happen when he unwinds.

The dragon should be, too.

“On this world, there are 460 days in a year,” says Haleon oblivious to my thoughts about Stryker. Yet Stryker's darkness is infecting us all. I know that there are terrors in the near future, but like Haleon, I prefer to distract myself and not think about it.

Stryker is the leader, however – and his word bears the most weight out of all us. With this power comes responsibility; and it's understandable why he wears it heavily. I'm just grateful that he treats my counsel as equal to his. If he was always steamrolling me in important life decisions, I'd truly feel like coming to this planet was a mistake.

Torches are lit, and we set up a meal of dried meat and nuts on the old stone table, chewing silently. My jaw is aching by the time my belly is sated.

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I marvel at my hands as I eat. I'm sixty-four years old, and yet they look so slender and youthful. If I had never met these three Aurelians, there'd be a crisscross of wrinkles all over my hands and face. Instead, somehow, my pairing with this triad has given me some kind of extended youth. At the rate I'm aging, I'll live perhaps longer than twenty generations of humans could – and every day of them with my beloved triad at my side.

I hope – because I know that the promise of all that time might soon disappear if we are killed by the beast we seek out. While all the animals – and even the other Aurelians of this world – cower in fear of it, we are going to find the dragon that lays waste to so much of this land.

But what if we fail?

I imagine the flames of that horrific tyrant licking at my legs, covering my body until all that remains of me – and of all my hopes and dreams – is nothing but ash and dust. The vision that the Orb showed me was not certainty, I know that. It was just one possible future.

I shudder, the cold tendrils of fear churning in my stomach.

I look around at the three huge, powerful men. I don't see a hint of fear in their eyes.

Do they feel fear? Or are they hiding it, just for my sake?

Regardless, I ache for them. If these three gorgeous warriors are going to be taken from me, or I from them, I need to experience them just one last time. I need to

embrace the complete surrender of lovemaking with these God-like men.

I remember back to the first time – when Stryker put me over his lap and turned my bottom red for endangering his triad and nearly getting them all killed.

I need that – right now. I need to stop thinking. I need to lose myself, to give up all control and simply exist as a woman. It's an escape, and it's one that I need more than anything right now.

Seeing Stryker so serious and grim earlier, his face a mask of barely-restrained violence, somehow turns me on more than when he's at peace.

I want him to explode on me with rage – to work out his feelings of anger on the canvas of my body. I need him to fully and utterly take me, and claim me as his.

Visions of fire and bloodshed are suddenly filling my mind, and I need an escape from them. I need to lose myself in Stryker's strength and power.

I stand in my chair and lean over, to gently kiss Stryker on the cheek. He doesn't move. I bring my mouth to his ear instead, kissing his earlobe.

"Make me yours," I murmur in his ear, and then he stands, towering over me.

"You are already mine, my sweet," Stryker growls, his voice nearly cracking with strain. I suddenly realize he is bearing the burden of the battle before it's even fought – his thoughts concentrating on the bloodshed he knows awaits us all.

"Show me," I whisper, running my hands across his chiseled abs. Stryker's cock surges, thick and hard – his body instinctively responding to my submission.

His hands suddenly move with inhuman speed, grabbing me and throwing me over

his shoulder. I'm wearing the same skirt I came to the planet with, washed every few days in the stream, and nothing underneath. He pulls my skirt up, exposing my bottom to his triad, and brings his huge palm down hard on my fleshy bottom.

"You are mine, for eternity," he growls, spanking me again.

The delicious pain is a perfect escape. Nothing else matters but the heat growing on my ass and between my legs. For this moment, thoughts of fire and death are pushed back as life and lust fills my mind instead.

Stryker brings his huge hand down again and again across my ass, and instead of feeling humiliated or ashamed the pain only makes me want him more.

My pussy tingles for this man, and no matter how badly it hurts I just want more.

"I will defeat the beast for your honor, and your belly will swell with my child!"

Stryker's voice is a roar, as he spans me again – the crack of flesh on flesh filling the cavern. Tears come to my eyes – not just from the pain of his harsh discipline, but from imagining the beautiful future that hangs so precariously in the balance.

Of having sons for these three men – of having the future I always dreamed of, even before I'd dreamed it. The love and acceptance I thought I'd never have.

All my life I've wanted children. All my life I've ached to be a mother of my own flesh and blood.

Now we must risk everything for the chance to make that happen.

Stryker eventually pulls me down, so that my legs are wrapped around his broad torso. He kisses me deeply, his passion inflaming me. I feel a presence behind me,

and I know it's Haleon. My other lover plants gentle kisses on the back of my neck, running his hands against my red, hot bottom and soothing me.

With one hand, Stryker reaches down and tugs his loincloth lower. His huge dick surges up, pressing against my wet, desperate slit. He impales me on his cock in one powerful motion, and I gasp as I'm filled completely.

Haleon toys with my bottom, pressing his thick, wet finger against my asshole and past the resistance of my tight ring. Stryker's mouth is so hungry for mine, kissing me with a passion unmatched by anything I've experienced; even with these three.

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I know it's because we all fear we may never kiss each other again – that our bodies may be burned and turned to ash, and that we may be taken by the wind and separated for all eternity.

Haleon removes his finger from my ass, and though it's a shameful desire, I feel empty already. My eyes roll back as his huge thick cockhead presses against my asshole instead, so slick with his Aurelian pre-cum that my tight ring offers no resistance against this rock-hard intruder.

Together, front and rear, they fuck me in hard, powerful thrusts.

Then Stryker and Haleon squat, lowering me to the ground, and Stryker lays back against the stone floor of the cavern, his cock still buried deep inside my pussy.

Haleon kneels behind me, still rutting me, his cock surging as he fucks my ass.

Brigg then stands, his cock standing straight out. I gasp, aching for it. My lips are the perfect height for him to enter my mouth, and I let him – hungry for his cock.

Brigg's pre-cum tastes so right -and finally I am filled by all three of the men I love.

I try to moan out in the intense pleasure, but I can only gag around Brigg's huge dick as spit and cum drools down my chin.

Nothing matters in this moment exceptus.

They fuck me as one, their minds merging in the Bond and taking me like their lives

depended on it.

In some ways, they do.

Haleon reaches around me, pinching my nipples hard as he growls in my ear, his huge dick stretching my ass to the very limit.

Stryker, meanwhile, reaches up and grips my hips – forcing me down onto his massive dick. His thrusts are so hard that they almost hurt, as he fills me deeper than anything I ever thought I could take.

I cum hard, my orgasm rippling over my body and making every muscle twitch as my pussy contracts, milking Stryker's dick.

Yet, he isn't even close to being finished. The three of them are still rock-hard, and they fuck me harder and harder, causing my orgasm to continue, flowing into a second. I can't stop as golden pleasure washes over me again and again, and I almost black out from the intensity of the sensation. I want to scream out their names – but I'm gagged by Brigg's huge dick as they ravish me.

Finally, when I can hardly think from the pleasure, the three men finally cum all at once, and I am in heaven once more as they flood my holes with their seed, perhaps for the last time.

I lay there in the afterglow of orgasm, held by their bodies, and all I want is for this moment to last forever. Tomorrow, though, we'll be in the northern lands – to meet the destiny I've been working towards for thirty years.

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Aubrey

“I once fought a northern tribesman. Unarmed combat. He was tough. It was a draw. They’ll not suffer intrusions on their land lightly.”

I speak in a hushed voice, even though we’re still safe in our cave. When we first left Ripper and the caverns of the main tribe, we deliberately chose to live at the northern border of our tribe’s territory. Up north, there are fewer animals to hunt and more animals that try to hunt you – but that’s the kind of challenge that appealed to us.

Further north, though, those challenges become even more extreme. It’s led to the northern tribesman being thinner, leaner, and even more prone to violence than our tribe.

As day breaks, the four of us set off north at a quick pace, all of us wanting to cover as much ground as possible. The waiting is the worst part. The anticipation of battle with the dragon is a dull tendril of horror deep in our minds. I can feel the auras of Brigg and Stryker in the back of my mind. We all have the same resolute emptiness before a battle for our lives. The air changes as we go north. Nearer to our home, it’s hot, wet and humid. The farther north we travel, the more acrid the air becomes, the ground going from wet-packed earth to scorched dirt and rock.

It becomes more sparse, too – and I wish there was more cover as we travel further. But the open, dirt plains work in our favor. Other predators can’t stalk or hide from us any more than we can from them.

The only real danger comes from above – but to the best of our knowledge and experience, the dragon doesn’t like to hunt early in the morning.

Although not too long ago, the dragon didn't like to hunt in the late day, either. It could change its habits once again today.

As we travel further north, we're eventually challenged by a triad of northern tribesmen.

"Halt!" Yells the first, brandishing an Orb-Spear. We don't draw our weapons, though it puts us at a disadvantage if these lean, wiry Aurelians decide to attack.

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“We are of the Scorp-Blood tribe. We seek safe passage through your lands,” announces Stryker.

The leader of the northern tribesmen wields a long, thin Orb-Blade. “For what reason? You southerners are soft. There is nothing up north for you except fire and death.”

They think of us as soft, just as we think of the valley tribesmen south of us as soft.

“We come to slay the beast that terrorizes you,” Brigg declares, drawing himself up to his full, towering height.

Their leader laughs, but there’s no humor in it. “Many have tried, and many have died. Your Scorp-Blood tribe has chosen to hide and cower thus far. Why have you three taken up the challenge?”

Aubrey pipes up. “The Orb-God spoke to me and told me that we must.”

Her voice is calm despite the tightness of the skin around her eyes – betraying her fear to my blood-brothers and I, but not to the other Aurelians.

The leader of the northern Aurelians gives her a long, slow look, then puts away his weapon in unison with his men.

“I tell you for your own sake: Turn back. We’ve already lost twenty-four men, twelve women, and two children to the dragon. We’re not friends of yours, but we’ll take no pleasure in seeing your numbers added to the count. Especially nother.”

He points to Aubrey.

“Women are a sacred force, and you three should be ashamed for bringing your mate into such danger.”

Aubrey shakes her head. “I can bear no children – not until we bring the head of the dragon to the Orb-God.”

The leader nods. “Ah! And for this, you risk everything?” He draws in a deep breath, considering. Understanding fills his eyes, for he too would risk everything for an heir. “That is honorable, at least. We have nothing to spare you, but we will grant you safe passage. If you return with the head of the dragon, I will personally write a ballad in your honor. We wish you only luck.”

We walk past the tribesman, and they watch us leave with a quiet respect. The northern triad stand like wiry statues as we stride out of sight.

“That went better than expected,” Brigg admits, trying to look on the bright side.

Yet it’s hard to think optimistically when the volcano – where the dragon lives – starts looming up ahead of us. Now that we are close enough to see it, I realize it’s not shrouded by clouds, but choking smoke.

I can only imagine the sound of the dragon roaring down upon us, and the scream I’d hear before those talons gripped my shoulders and pulled me up to a plummeting death.

Aubrey said that the dragon did not even eat the Aurelian she saw it snatch, but dropped him from a great height. I can barely imagine the horror of those last seconds, as the warrior flailed before hitting the ground like a sack of wet flesh.

I turn. The northern tribe are still there, watching us carefully, ensuring we go on our way. They wish us well – but also are not discounting the chance that our story could be a subterfuge.

If only.

“What does the dragon eat in the northern lands?” I call back to them, my voice echoing.

“The dragon prefers to hunt south. Here, there is little meat. But if he catches a firecat, he will gulp it down in one, greedy bite.”

“Thank you,” I nod, and we continue.

“What is a firecat?” Asks Aubrey.

“A red lynx, not much bigger than you,” replies Stryker. “It’s so named for its affinity for heat and the red color of its fur.”

“So, we must find one of these creatures, and a Scorp,” says Aubrey.

“Scorps will find us,” I promise ominously, knowing that this far north the area will be teeming with them. Even with Scorp Warriors moving south, everyone knows the northlands are filled with them.

It will need to be. I won’t risk the venom of a single Scorp placed in the corpse of the fire lynx. I want to take this dragon down– and so I intend to pump the creature full of as many Scorp stingers and venom sacs as possible.

We walk for another hour before my promise comes true.

I feel them before I see them

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“Alert!” I telepath, not wanting to vocalize the words and warn the Scorps ahead of time that we notice them.

Aubrey senses the change in mood instantly as we tense up, drawing our weapons. She steps back – not out of fear, but from the knowledge that she will aid us best by staying out of danger.

The first Scorp appears over a ledge, and rushes towards us with five of its beastly compatriots scuttling along behind. Aubrey draws her gun, but I know she has only eight shots.

“Save those metal arrows!” I yell, not knowing what else to call the things she says will come racing from the point of that tiny metal weapon.

She lowers her gun, as I activate my axe. I run forward to join the fight, and together my blood-brothers and I quickly slaughter the Scorps – moving amidst them like violent dancers, and cleaving them effortlessly with our Orb-Weapons.

Once they’re dead and twitching, we cleave the venom barbs off the Scorps and carefully put them in our pouches. Even Scorp-Blooded, if we’re so much as pricked by those venom-dripping, razor-sharp barbs, we’ll have a terrible few hours of pain, increased strength, and violent rage before the blood works through our system. It’s a trade that is sometimes necessary.

Next, we hunt a firecat. Brigg uses his skills to track one, and it’s easy enough to find in this open and barren terrain.

We corner the creature, and it snarls as it realizes the impossible; that the predator has become prey for more dangerous animals.

I finally cleave the throat of the firecat open, and it falls to the dry dirt, flailing and gurgling.

Aubrey gently pats the dying creature, soothing it. “Thank you for your sacrifice,” she murmurs to the dying lynx, truly grateful. When it is dead and gone, we administer the Scorp venom, picking the veins of the firecat and gently squeezing the venom in it’s bloodstream. I only hope that it will be enough to affect the monstrous dragon.

We heft up the body of the slaughtered beast, and climb towards the volcano.

Once we stand at the base of the towering, flaming peak, we throw the carcass of the firecat on the ground lay in wait.

Hours pass – but I could have happily waited hours more.

Much later in the day, the scream of the dragon chills me as I hear it waking up. My muscles are sore from standing shock still, but I have no desire to move until we spring the trap and I spring into motion.

Overhead, the sun is a boiling circle, casting heat down, and my throat aches from the acrid smoke of the volcano.

We hide as the great dragon suddenly comes swooshing out from the mouth of the volcano. The ferocious dragon soars up, arcing in a wide circle overhead, and then sees the body of the firecat on the dry, barren dirt.

Take the bait, tyrant beast, take the bait.

With a screech, the great, angry beast swoops down and snatches up the body without even slowing its speed – gulping down the animal eagerly and flying away.

“The venom didn’t work!” Aubrey gasps, watching the dragon beat its mighty wings and rises into the sky. Fear and disappointment is in her voice.

“Patience,” Stryker offers soothingly, holding her arm. Higher and higher the dragon climbs, and each beat of its wings fills me with anticipation.

Higher, you damned creature, higher! Fall to your death like you killed my tribemate, Liam!

High up in the sky, the dragon suddenly dips as it flies, then flails in the air as if in burning agony. The creature’s wings thrash and beat, but it’s as if the huge creature struggles to stay aloft. Then, finally, it comes plummeting down from the sky – before crashing hard into the rocks blow with the force of an explosion.

I hear the snap of its massive wing breaking. In agony and crippled, the dragon tries to get up, then falls again.

We run towards it. I don’t know how long the venom will incapacitate the dragon, but we’ll only have one chance to kill the beast ourselves. It will never fall for the trick of a poisoned carcass again.

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Brigg

There is no fear in my mind as I rush towards the dragon, my Orb-Mace drawn.

It's still alive, flailing and thrashing, but the Scorp-venom is clearly coursing through its veins. The dragon raises its head weakly, screaming out in agony, and I suddenly understand its pain.

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This dark beast was born on a planet with no mate – with no chance of companionship, or to sire children. It kills for the same reason it will die; for I too have the primal need to seed my mate and raise a strong family.

Stryker rushes in front, his Orb-Blade stabbing into the dragon's side. The dragon reaches out with its claw, but the crippled beast is too slow – merely grazing Stryker's leg as he dodges past.

Haleon jumps onto the back of the dragon, hacking at its bony spine. I run forward, leaping and smashing my Orb-Mace against the dragon's head.

The dragon is being pulled apart, cut, and killed. It opens its gaping mouth and shoots out a stream of flame, but the scalding magma misses us entirely. I remember the burn of that fire as heat waves from the proximity of the flames sear me. I leap over a puddle of magma to finish off the dragon.

In agony, the dying dragon thrashes its tail, and knocks Haleon off its back, but when it tries to use its wings to rise into the safety of the air, only one of them works.

The dragon screams out in pain as Stryker stabs his Orb-Blade deep into its side. Red blood is flowing –gushing.

So much blood.

Then the dragon snaps its neck sideways, moving faster than I thought possible. It grabs me in its jaws and I yell out in agony as it crunches down with those sword-like teeth.

The teeth pierce my skin and I know I am slain, that only my blood-brothers will survive.

Thunder booms once, twice, and then six times more in quick succession – and the dragon’s crushing bite weakens.

I fall free of its snarling jaws, and see in horror that the eyes of the dragon have both been turned into smoking holes. I look over to see Aubrey, with that Earth weapon in her hand, pointing the smoking tip of it at the dragon.

Her hands are trembling. Mine would be too.

I glance down and confirm that my wounds are not serious. I can still feel the huge fangs of the dragon pressing down, about to end me. Marks bleed lightly, my green blood dripping from the holes as I look up at the evil beast that nearly killed me.

If Aubrey had been a second slower...

“You saved my life,” I murmur, as the dragon gurgles its last, bloody breath.

We stagger into a semi-circle and gaze down at our conquered foe – the creature that had terrorized this world for more than four decades.

But no more.

Stryker’s Orb-Blade hums into life, and Haleon and I fire up our own weapons. We cleave the head from the dragon’s muscular neck and start dragging it back south.

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Stryker

Midway back to the caverns of our Scorp-Blood tribe, we pull the dragon's head into our old cave and set up base for the night.

"I was wrong to doubt you, Aubrey," I murmur, stroking her hair. "If you had not been with us, Brigg would be dead, and maybe us as well."

My words are filled with pride for my mate. We fought and killed for her, as is only right in our tradition – but she did the same for us.

"You were wrong to doubt me, Stryker, but you never will again." Aubrey smiles up at me, with such sweetness that my heart throbs. It's so strange to think of such a small, vulnerable creature possessing such strength and courage.

But the Orb-God selected the perfect mate for us, as living in this world, with my triad, will require nothing less.

How did I - one so violent, and full of rage – ever deserve a mate as perfect as Aubrey?

I will not question good fortune too long. We are alive, and that is all that matters. I gently touch Aubrey's cheek, tracing my finger down her beautiful features.

"I will bring you to the southern tribes. They are a valley people, and they have territories more suited for a woman like you."

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Haleon breathes in sharply. “But they hate us, Stryker. They’ll never accept us in their lush lands.”

I shake my head. “We are the dragon slayers, now. We’ll see if they make an exception for us. I have a suspicion they will.”

Brigg snorts, rubbing his hand against his wound, pushing in a new compound of mushroom paste to heal himself. “They are not even Scorp-Blooded.”

Aubrey looks at me, confused. “I thought the Scorp-Blood is what allows you to bear children?”

I nod. “For our tribe, it does. The tribesman of the southern valley believe that our Scorp-Blood markings makes an Aurelian too violent. They drink a brew, instead - laced with Scorp-Venom – before their mating ceremony.”

The issue of breeding – of fathering heirs to continue our heritage – is one that has long plagued the Aurelian people. Each community that we encounter has different practices and beliefs. We have learned that Scorp-venom, properly ingested, can allow an Aurelian to father children with any human female.

In other Aurelian cultures, some say only the leaders of the community can grant that honor, or that an Aurelian must find a destined mate – one woman out of a billion who shares a Bond with them and their triad – to sire a child the natural way.

I know little of such things – only that the path we have trod to earn the right of fatherhood has been a long and dangerous one.

We have the sacrifice the Orb-God demanded.

Tomorrow, we shall accept our reward.

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Aubrey

I can't believe that we defeated the dragon. I trusted in my triad, but not a one of us thought we would survive.

Together, we worked to take it down. I felt horror grip me when the crippled beast grabbed Brigg in its huge jaws, but my aim was steady as I shot those last eight bullets in quick succession – just as I'd been trained to back on Earth.

My gun was now useless – a hunk of metal, as my triad had described it. I cared little. It was incongruous here – such a human weapon in such a wild world.

Instead, I watched the three Aurelians use their own Orb-Weapons to cleave the head from the dragon, and then drag their bloody prize back to the cave we'd once shared; thirty years ago, when I first arrived on this world.

We rested, and the following morning the triad felled a tree, using the wood to craft a makeshift sled for the dragon's head to be pulled on back to their jungle home.

We were so close now – and beyond returning home, the promise of a softer, valley land filled with fruits and respectful Aurelians had been offered as a further reward.

I knew that bearing children with the Scorp-blooded Aurelians would give us strong sons, but I was still worried that they'd be vicious and angry – a product of being raised in a dangerous, jungle environment.

A softer life would contrast with their innate potential for violence. It would temper all the strengths my beloved triad would teach our sons about violence, honor, and strength.

We reach the jungle, and trek down toward the caverns of the Scorp-Blood tribe. Horns sound as we enter.

The guards meet us outside of the jungle. Ripper's jaw drops when he sees us, and for a moment he looks like he'll confront us yet again.

I wonder what Ripper will say, but he stands mute, staring at us. I imagine he can't believe that we really have the head of the dragon that has plagued the tribe for so many decades. There's nothing he can do. The tribe comes out into the jungle, hushed as we approach. Not a word is said.

For a moment, we don't know if he'll respond with anger, violence or jealousy – our victory highlighting his insecurity...

...but eventually, Ripper spreads his arms wide.

“You are heroes!”

His tribe roars out in admiration behind him. Children and women pour from the safety of the caverns, and begin to dance and play under the watchful eyes of their mothers.

The air is filled with jubilation – although the guards are still tense, and watchful for

jungle cats and other predators.

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As I watch them scan the perimeter, I realize the truth. Even with the dragon gone, I know this jungle is not the place I'd want to raise my children.

The tribe starts to chant our names as we drag the dragon's bloody head inside the cavern. It barely fits down the tunnel.

As we enter the main cavern, I sense a blackness emanating from one of the tunnels that leads off. There's a dark eagerness coming from the cavern that houses the tribe's sacred Orb – as if the otherworldly object can sense the sacrifice being brought to it.

The three Aurelians pull with all their might, so close to their reward, and with the dragon's head leaving a bloody trail in its wake, we enter the shrine room together.

The Orb pulses and shimmers as Stryker, Brigg and Haleon drag their offering to it. Blackness seems to extend from the Orb, and it literally gobbles the dragon head; absorbing it into the blacker-than-black darkness of its shimmer, spherical body.

There's no sound as the Orb consumes the sacrifice – nothing except for a low hum. I shudder, wondering what thoughts grow in the mind – if it has such a thing – of the massive Orb.

Then, suddenly, a blue tendril darts from the Orb, and skewers me like a spear.

I gasp, staring down at the rippling black shaft of lightning, piercing my belly like a sword.

For a moment I'm fearful – remembering how the Orb back on Earth literally burned that guard from the inside out...

...but instead, I'm lifted up in the air, and feel my body filled with a crackling force like electricity.

And then it suddenly stops, and I drop to the ground, clutching my belly.

There's no wound where the shaft of black lightning pierced me. No burn marks, or scars. I feel no different, in fact...

...until I suddenly gasp; feeling a sensation I'd long since forgotten.

My panties suddenly grew wet.

"I-I just got my period," I mutter, in shock and confusion.

I'm sixty-four years old, according to the calendar of Earth. And yet, for the first time in over thirty years, I'm once again fertile.

Ripper enters the room, studying the four of us.

I fear he will yell, scream, or assault us...

...instead, he lowers his head in shame.

"I misjudged you," he murmurs. "I banished you. You have brought more honor to this tribe in a single day than I have in my lifetime – and I must recognize that."

And then, incredibly, this ancient and powerful Aurelian drops to his knees in front of us – offering up the chain he wore around his neck to mark his position as Clan

Leader and Chieftain.

“I would make one of you Chief of the tribe,” he says, looking up and holding his head high as he addresses us.

Stryker shakes his head. “We must refuse, Ripper. We travel south, now – to raise a family.”

I expect Ripper to mock the choices of the Aurelians. I know that the southern valley people have a reputation for being soft.

But, instead, he nods – his pride abandoned.

“The truth be told? I myself have longed for those lush valleys.”

Stryker extends a hand – pulling the old Chieftain to his feet.

“You honor us with your offer – but in making it, you have proven yourself once again worthy to be Clan Leader.” Stryker lays a heavy hand on the old Chief’s shoulder. “It takes bravery and courage to face mountain lions, or Scorps, or even a dragon itself...”

The leader of my triad bows respectfully.

“...but it takes far more to admit when you have been at fault.”

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Ripper takes a breath and blinks his eyes – showing how humbled he is by Stryker's words.

“It takes courage, too, to forgive. You honor me, tribesman. I'll earn that honor by bringing this tribe into new prosperity.”

The old chief extends his arm, one by one shaking the huge hands of my beloved triad. They accept the gesture, filled with new respect for their humbled Chieftain.

As they do so, one of Ripper's wives discretely hands me a plain, cotton pad, which I accept gratefully and find some privacy to use.

In the shelter of a dark corner, I pull down my pants and apply the pad.

The sight of my own blood makes me weep. I'd given up all hope of ever starting a family when my periods stopped, and more so when I got that fateful consultation with the doctor; pronouncing me irreparably infertile.

It had seemed like a curse at time, but as I pull my pants up I realize that perhaps it was a blessing, instead.

What would have happened to me if I hadn't been infertile?

I can see it so clearly now. Growing old with Joshua, perhaps never knowing who he truly was – as he put on a good front, but I believed he never truly loved me.

I'd have had a fake life and a fake love.

I'd have had everything I'd wished for at thirty-two-years-old, and hated every second of it.

Instead, my dreams were shattered – and it was beyond the best thing that could have ever happened to me.

Stryker, Haleon, and Brigg come behind me, and wrap me up their arms.

“The southern valleys are lush and fertile, my sweet. We will be lauded as heroes there, and we'll be able to create for you the future you deserve.” Brigg's words make me sob, for the first time in as long as I can remember, from complete and utter joy.

Most people get to have just a few, short decades with the ones they love – perhaps forty or fifty, if they meet early and are lucky.

Instead, I will spend thousands of years in bliss with my triad – loved forever.

Three gorgeous, brave, selfless warriors. I can feel how badly they ache for me, and I give myself utterly to their might.

I got the exact opposite of everything I'd planned for – and I couldn't have been luckier for having done so.

Partner at the law firm by thirty-two. Married by thirty-three. Two kids by thirty-six?

That all seems so small now.

A grin splits my mouth as I look at my mates.

Married to three men by sixty-three.

Ten kids by a hundred.

A laugh escapes my lips, and I feel true joy as the three Aurelians surround me with their love.

* * *