

READBEAST

BEASTIALITY STORIES



Chapter One: The Capture

He ran, without knowing why. He knew that he was lost. They were mounted, he was on foot. They could have taken him anytime, but they were probably playing him, the way you play a fish on a hook.

Why, by the Nether Gods, had he been dumb enough to try to cross the Grasslands? Especially on foot? Out here, he was helpless. He should have found a way through the forest instead. It might have taken him two weeks, three weeks, but so what? He would have made it. But now... he tried not to think of what lay in store for him.

Instead, he ran. Not that it would change the outcome; but there are times when reason is not applicable. His breath seared his throat, his lungs fought for air and his legs were growing ever heavier. Still, he ran, while the horizon rocked slowly in front of him and the ochre grass grew fuzzy.

The Coastlands and the Marches were alive with the rumours of what the Horsewomen did to the males that fell into their hands. If you were lucky, they knifed you before cutting off your member for a trophy, but you could just as well be out of luck. Those who screamed were sometimes silenced by having their testicles thrust down their throats.

If you were really out of luck, you would be spared for the moment, only to be slowly tortured to death later, for the amusement of the sisterhood. These women were said to delight in torturing males. Even staying with the Lord En-Tor and accepting your punishment for insubordination would have been better. At least, he would have stayed alive... presumably.

They were close now. He could hear the sound of hooves, hear the pursuers yelling in their harsh voices, like birds of prey on the wing. There were other stories of course, about how captive males were used, yarns that had been spun with delight mixed with horror. It was known that the horsewomen kept male slaves, too. But just now these stories lacked credibility. Therefore he kept running in a gathering red mist.

The ground was rising in front of him, and the horizon closed in. He felt his legs wobble. Near the top of the little rise...it was not six feet high...they folded under him and that was the end of it. The ground reeled under him. The grass was dry and coarse and tasted of dust, a bitter mineral taste. He heard the rumble of thunder coming up close; or was it the hoofs?

He stayed face down, desperately clutching at the grass that stung his skin, waiting for the cold steel between his shoulder-blades. He would have preferred to meet them standing, but his body deserted him. Now he felt a knee in the small of his back; he froze but caught a glimpse of a leather boot, and further away the other horsewoman, mounted, black against the sun and with a lance pointing in his direction.

He fought desperately for air. The woman behind his back yelped a command and gripped him above both elbows. He felt her strap his arms together behind his back, very hard, very close to each other, and his face was again ground into the warm, bitter dust. His brain seemed to have ceased to function; his wits had deserted him completely.

She rose and nudged him between his ribs with the toe of her boot. Again she yelped; groaning, he rolled over and saw her as a shadow above him. Her foot against his shoulder, she pushed him down and tore off his loincloth. The mounted woman barked and they laughed, both of them. A knife flashed. His belly muscles contracted, but the dismounted woman put the blade between her teeth,

and in her hands she held a long lariat-strap of rawhide.

Then the knee again, and roughly, roughly the strap was tied around his testicle bag. Her hands were hard and purposeful and awakened no response in him. She jerked the lariat, no misunderstanding on his part was possible- and she rose, standing over him with her hands on her hips, dark against the dark blue dry- season sky.

So they would not kill him at once. The only thing he could do was to obey them and bide his time. Perhaps an opportunity to escape would offer itself, if only the two horsewomen would grow careless. His eyes were working better now, though his throat was still hurting and his heart thumped; he could discern the women clearly. He had never seen horsewomen before.

They were naked like thrall-women... well, nearly... but they had no masters, that he knew. The mounted one, with the feathered lance that was still pointing at him, was older than the woman who had captured him. The young one had a quiver on her back, the strap tight between her breasts, the older one a rawhide-lariat with a eye made of bone, looped across her shoulders.

The older horse witch wore her straight, raven-black hair in a topknot slightly to the side of her head, the young one had gathered it in the same place but in a waving plume. Both wore necklaces of animal fangs on strings. Their only real article of clothing was a crotch clout. From their broad belts, decorated with cowrie shells, hung pouches, ivory cases, knives with fringed sheaths and carved bone handles and the straps that held the crotch-length soft boots, also embellished with fringes and lines of cowries.

But the most striking thing was not their nakedness or their strange outfits but their tattoos. The dark blue patterns began at the hairline, changed their faces into cruel tiger masks, covered their arms and bodies and continued into the tops of their boots. Even the nipples of the young one were tattooed.

The right breast was completely covered by a whirling pattern, on the left one the skin shone untouched between the starry rosette of the aureole and the ornaments of her chest, where birds and beasts seemed to be tearing each other to pieces among swirling lines and tatters of blue-black ornament. The older one was so dark of skin that her patterns were difficult to discern.

The impression of unbridled savagery was overwhelming. If the rumours were only half true, the impression would be correct.

Their horses were shaggy, with long manes and tails. The women rode with wooden stirrups and with furs over their saddles; when the hand-horse walked past he could see the bow in its case by the saddle. They seemed to use no other rein than a strap around the lower jaw of the horse.

The young one was jerking at the lariat again, pulling him to his knees. The horizon was still unsteady, and he was not getting enough air. An inner voice told him though, very insistently, that he must not make these strange women impatient.

Submissively, he tried to rise, but got only to his knees, reeling. Now the woman was holding a leather flask. With her other hand she grasped his hair, with her teeth she pulled the plug and then she stuck the neck of the bottle into his mouth. It was water. It had a stale leathery taste, but it was life. He shook his head and he regained his feet, reeling. More water? He shook his head again, but gratefully, hoping that his emotion was showing. What more did he need? Freedom? Just keeping alive, perhaps.

The young one mounted her horse. She paid out enough lariat so that he could march behind her

horse, and started out in an easterly direction at a walk. The older one brought up the rear with her lance nonchalantly balanced across the withers of the horse. What could a prisoner do, on foot, his hands tied behind his back and towed by his balls? They rode slowly, fortunately.

He felt dejected, as if walls had suddenly closed around him. He had briefly tasted freedom, and now it was gone. The sunlight and the sky had lost their sparkle. His limbs felt heavy, and there was a metallic taste in his mouth. Was it real, or was it the taste of captivity? The water had helped, however. He felt stronger, and soon he no longer experienced that stinging sensation in his back when he was thinking of the lance point. The woman in front kept the strap taut, however.

He trotted along, his eyes fixed on her. They followed the back of her head with the tightly gathered hair, the slender but strong neck, where the pattern lines of her tattoos ran from her cheeks down to the muscular back; her shoulders, broad for a woman, her narrow waist and curving hips. Her buttocks rested in the saddle-fur but her thighs were hidden by the boots. Without noticing the change, he was starting to see her as a woman, not only as a mounted she-savage. She would have been comely without her strange body decoration and in proper dress...or completely naked, for that matter.

What sort of woman would she be, this being out of a tale only half believed, a story out of the plains that had given birth to so many legends? Was she a merciless killer, or an equally merciless user of male flesh, as some would have it...or was there some trace in her of humanity (whatever that might mean), or even of womanhood as he had known and appreciated it? She would not be soft and submissive, of course. Mastering her would be like taming a wild animal. Still, in spite of her fierceness, she would be good to touch, good to bed.

It was perhaps idle thoughts like these; perhaps it was the sight of her shameless nakedness, he was used to seeing civilized women, well protected from unchaste eyes — or the constant pull of the strap around his testicles, but after about one hour's march he had a respectable hard-on. When he became aware of it, he was terrified: would his guards discover it and be offended? On no account did he want to arouse their ire, now that he was completely in their power.

He did not escape his fate however. The young one looked behind herself, saw his impudent erection and reined in her horse. His heartbeat came to a dead stop. But a grin cleaved her grotesque mask, and she called to her companion, who came up alongside them, thrust her lance into the turf, jumped off her horse and stood close to him; the corners of her eyes wrinkled merrily. Unceremoniously, she gripped his shoulder with one hand and his member with the other, while she exchanged comments with her companion.

To his amazement, he felt himself grow even stiffer. How could this horse-witch make him horny, in spite of the fear that he felt of her (he admitted this to himself: when she laid her hand upon him, only his stiffness had saved him from pissing out of sheer terror). The young horsewoman put a question to the old one; the witch laughed and shook her head. She mounted her pony again and the caravan moved on. But for a long time, the two women continued to crack jokes about him and laugh loudly and without restraint, and he could only guess at what they were saying.

They travelled slowly and with many pauses while the sun drifted west. Near the evening, when the shadows were long and the sunlight was an orange glow suffusing the world, carrying only a memory of the searing heat of the day, the ground began to sink ahead of them and look greener. Bushes were growing in denser clumps now, and a little later, they became sparse trees; the steppe had changed into park-like savanna.

They were now following a clearly visible track, running alongside a skittish little brook bordered by

green foliage. The track rounded a rocky knoll where the boulders seemed to have been shattered like skulls by a giant's axe in ages past. Behind it, the brook tumbled noisily into a little pond edged by gravel and small stones, and there were sheltering walls of stone and a hut or rather a windbreak, open to the south, of loosely piled rock and with a simple ridged grass roof held down by more stones. Here they halted.

The women did not take the trouble to tether him. He could not hope to escape anyway, with his arms immobilised and without a horse. They busied themselves with the horses, which were hobbled with straps around their front legs, and then put out to graze on their own. The water-skins were filled. The older woman made a fire and fetched water in a leather pail. A bronze kettle was lifted from its hook under the ridgepole and put on the fire.

Now he could have a closer look at them. The young one might be twenty or a little more, it was not easy to judge the age of a woman of such strange aspect. Her skin under the tattoos was olive brown, smooth over firm muscles; she was very erect and walked with a nonchalant swagger that he had hitherto seen only in men and only in the strongest and most self-assured among them.

The older one was even more difficult to assess, but she had a few grey hairs in among the black. None of them had an ounce of superfluous fat on their bodies, but while the young witch was made up entirely of muscle, the older one seemed to have been braided, knotted and twisted out of bundles of rawhide. Both had small, pointed breasts, the young one's firmer, but the older woman's were still springy.

What did their faces look like behind their bestial masks? His first impression was that they were outlandishly ugly. They had slightly sloping foreheads, long prominent noses (the older one's boldly hooked), high cheekbones, broad mouths and receding chins. In the face of the older woman, wind and sun had wrinkled the skin around her eyes, and decisiveness and cruelty were written around the corners of her mouth. Both of them had peculiarly light brown, nearly yellow eyes, like animals. But boldness and power shone like an aura around them. They moved like lionesses, and suddenly he saw that, though abominable, they were beautiful.

The young witch rested her quiver against the saddle, by the wall, and without embarrassment she took off what little she had on. He tried not to show that he was stealing a look. With the aid of her teeth she untied the left arm's leather bowstring guard, unhooked the bronze buckle of her belt and stepped out of her boots. Her tattoos continued down to her toes. Then the crotch-clout, and she was naked, apart from the necklace.

Without condescending to give the captive a look, she walked into the water-hole up to her hips and washed with visible pleasure. When she emerged from the water, she shook herself like a wet dog, shedding water in all directions while she passed close by her captive. Now she stopped and looked at him, covered with sweat and dust as he was. Then she smiled inscrutably, but still a smile... picked up the strap and led him into the water.

It was cool and refreshing; the bottom of gravel and stone was firm. She was quite considerate: she made him sit down and she washed his face and shoulders; she stood him up and rubbed him clean with her hands. Now they had the older witch for company, just as naked as they were, and she scrubbed his back and behind while the young one washed his member and balls carefully.

She was very close now; while her companion washed, she grasped his shoulders and rubbed herself against him. Though he was tired and cold, her touch lit a spark of lust inside him. Her face was very close to his, but he could not bring himself to look into her eyes...perhaps he should avoid doing that and try to look completely subdued. Instead he looked past her and saw the older horsewoman, her

arms raised while she gathered her wet hair; and to his amazement, she too fanned that spark. What could make him lust for women such as these?

Back on dry ground, the red sun was still giving off a feeble warmth, but he started to shake. He felt desperately tired. They rubbed him dry with a bundle of hay, as if he had been a horse, and put a coarsely woven riding cloak around him. When his shaking had ceased, they stood quietly watching him. The young one caught his eye, laid her hand between her breasts and said, "Sarissa." Then she indicated her companion and gave her a name too, "Atossa."

It was an introduction. Of all the things that had happened to him since his capture, nothing had reassured him more than this simple act of communication. You do not formally introduce yourself to somebody you intend to torture to death. He told his own name but got shakes of heads and two indulgent laughs for an answer. "Ha ha! Androu! Androu!" Were males not allowed names in their world?

They rested around the fire. He was beginning to feel warm again, and more at ease. Slowly, strength was returning to him. The women, who had dressed again (if one may call it that) gave him to drink and fed him strips of dried meat, boiled with herbs. His arms were still tied very uncomfortably together and they had not taken the trouble to remove the bag-strap either, but the fire gave comfort, the sight of female bodies was somehow comforting too, and the behaviour of the two women was not in the least alarming.

Sarissa and Atossa talked softly between them; now and then they glanced at him with a mischievous look in their faces. By and by, they grew exhilarated. They laughed between them, sat down on both sides of him and pushed him over, felt and squeezed him.

Soon, they were caressing him. He was resting in an uncomfortable position, his back arched and his hips high as his arms were tied under him. Still, he felt it prudent to accept this. The two women set to work in earnest. They were good, even the young Sarissa seemed to know exactly how to make a male randy. An unreasonable but uncontrollable fear of what their hands would do to him, when they got down to business, possessed him at first.

When finally this fear had abated, his real excitement began. He banished all thought of what would become of him and thought of the present only. He groaned with pleasure while Sarissa pulled the skin of his member up and down. Atossa tickled, pulled, wrenched, pinched and bit his nipples. She hurt him, but curiously enough, the pain increased his randiness instead of quenching it. They both observed him carefully: obviously, they did not want to lose control of him.

Atossa departed but returned with an oblong object made out of horn, in the shape of a thick male organ. He looked at it in dumb horror. He had begun to expect a pleasant night; had he misjudged the situation completely? Gesturing at their knives, the women had him lie face down across Atossa's saddle.

He knew better than trying to resist; after all, torture and death were not quite the same thing. Torture could be worse than death itself: he had seen this himself, and this fact was the very foundation of Lord En-Tor's rule. But it could also be a temporary horror, possible to survive. Atossa gave him a last shove, and then she put the tip of the unspeakable instrument to his anus. Then, slowly but inexorably she pushed the rod into him, impaling him.

It hurt him, but he would not reward them with more than a groan, in spite of his fear. This seemed to be all that they required, however. Atossa pushed and turned the tool; when he felt it moving inside him, a warm sensation spread across his crotch and reached his sex in spite of the pain.

Again, his member stiffened.

But his suspicion was aroused again when Sarissa hammered down four tethering stakes into the floor of the hut with a stone maul. Now they released his arms, but Atossa stood erect with her hand on the knife: no, he was not going to provoke her. Moving clumsily because of the rod, he suffered Sarissa to turn him on his back and tie his wrists to two of the stakes, then his ankles to the other two. The straps were pulled taut, and he was utterly helpless. He was telling himself again and again that nothing in their behaviour threatened actual death or mutilation, at least he tried to convince himself that it was so.

Fear and excitement were struggling for his attention; excitement won. Then the two witches started their game anew. They threw off their crotch-clouts and were naked again, except for their belts and boots. They met, kissed avidly, sucked each other's breasts and stuck their hands into each other's sex in a rising fury. Panting, they rubbed their bodies against each other.

Nothing had prepared him to believe that these women would actually make love to each other. With the usual smugness of the male, he had believed and nothing in the tales of the plains had suggested otherwise, that the horsewomen had to rely on males exclusively for their sexual pleasure. That this was not so was a deeply disturbing thought, but at least, they did seem interested in him in his capacity as a male. He was so fascinated with the spectacle of the two furies in front of him that the thought never occurred to him that his virility might desert him.

Finally, Atossa disengaged; she crawled all over her prisoner, straddled him and rubbed him with her wet vulva. Soon she was sitting on his face, and his mouth and nose were enclosed by her labia. She had a wild smell in spite of her bath. He saw her body in a grotesque but exciting perspective, the demon-like face looking down on him between the jutting breasts, and then she changed her position so that she was facing down his body.

She pulled roughly at his nipples, and, half suffocated, he felt Sarissa sitting astride himself, burying her nails in his scrotum and member. He whimpered. His signs of pain seemed to increase their excitement. Atossa rose, and he saw Sarissa's dancing body and narrow, slanting eyes in the flickering light of the fire.

Atossa returned a second time. Horrified, he saw the two long, coarse skewers in her hand. He scarcely noticed that Sarissa raised herself and guided the tip of his member into her body. Again, Atossa's sex was all over him. They rode him unmercifully, and now he was aware that he was inside Sarissa and pleasure was rising like pain inside him. But there was real pain, too: she was coming down hard on his balls every time she rode down on him.

He was close, and they noticed it.

This was when Atossa grasped his right nipple, pulled it savagely and thrust one of the skewers through the aureole. The pain was a shock that ran through his entire body. He screamed without restraint into her sex. The witches exulted and Sarissa took the gallop. Atossa pierced the other nipple while her dripping wet vulva suffocated his screaming and he came, unable to sort out the pleasure from the pain; Sarissa gave a cry. They collapsed on top of him while the jerking of his body slowly died away.

They were strangely gentle afterwards. Atossa was lying with her arm around him, panting, Sarissa was rubbing her face against his. But they would not set him free: that night, he had to sleep with his arms still tied to the stakes, and with both the rod and the skewers in place.

His last thought, before his soul began its night-walk, was that a repetition of this evening's

experiences was an idea too horrible to contemplate; but at the same time, he knew that he desired these two women so much that he would soon be willing to face the music again, just in order to earn their attentions.

Next morning, they continued their march, now with Atossa leading; she rode leaning back and swaying in the saddle; occasionally, both of them sang. His arms were still tied behind his back and Atossa was holding the lariat, but they had at least pulled the rod out of his ass-hole (and he had been made to wash it, of course, his anus still searing with the memory of it).

Sarissa rode next to him when the ground permitted it, and once or twice she looked down and smiled at him. But the two skewers remained where Atossa had pierced him, and they were spreading a dull pain which changed into a sting whenever he moved his shoulders. He was still afraid of the two horsewomen, but for a different reason: now he feared their caresses, not their knives.

At noon, Sarissa reined in her horse, gazed at the horizon and exchanged a few words with Atossa, who nodded and urged her prisoner on again. But Sarissa trotted north and disappeared. Atossa walked him toward a shady umbrella-tree nearby, one that he had already cast longing eyes at for a while. Here they paused. The witch spread her cloak on the ground and he was allowed to lie down. The horse was free to graze, but soon it too withdrew into the shade.

Around them, the grasslands quivered and danced with the heat. Atossa's mind seemed to have mellowed; she gave the prisoner water and felt his arms which were swollen around the straps. She thought for a moment. Then she tied his ankles together, freed his arms and pulled them up above his head. At first he thought that she would fetter him the same way as the previous evening, and to the same purpose, and for a moment, he was simultaneously scared and expectant; but she tied his wrists around the trunk of a sapling that grew close to the large tree, and then she untied the strap around his ankles again.

Relieved, he understood her intention: she wanted to keep him under total control while she rested, but at the same time, she would give him a chance to recuperate. The new position was a relief to his aching shoulders. She went as far as unknitting the strap around his scrotum that he had worn for a day and a night now without respite. He felt a sting of lust, together with the crawling sensation of the blood that circulated freely again, but Atossa was businesslike and quick and it was soon over.

Now she bent over him and examined his nipples, still pierced by the two skewers. She grunted and fetched a box that contained a salve with a strong smell of herbs; she put on a little of it with her finger on each nipple. It hurt, but he kept a straight face. She clearly wanted to help and heal him, not torture him. And strangely enough, her touch awakened a vivid memory of the past night, and not only of the pain and the terror but also of the lust and the pleasure, which now seemed to him the greater and more important memory.

Involuntarily, he sighed. Atossa pricked up her ears. She regarded him for a while and this time he returned her gaze, looking straight into her yellow eyes. Not a muscle moved in her face. Then she laid herself down by his side and grasped his member. Gradually, it stiffened under her fingers. She squeezed, and then she began to caress him slowly. She took her time, lots of time. But when, after what seemed an eternity, his breath grew irregular, she pressed her nails into his rod and slapped it with her palm.

She saw him grimace and she smiled a she-wolf smile, but her eyes were more amused than cruel. She gripped his testicles and squeezed them, but now he had gathered his wits and he did not show any fear. Atossa looked searchingly at him; then she rested again, still with his bag in a firm grip. He wished she would caress him again, but she did not.

After a while, his excitement and his erection receded. Still, they were resting quietly, looking into each other's eyes when Sarissa returned much later with a little grass antelope slung in front of her saddle.

Again, the two women made a fire with a stone and a piece of steel out of Atossa's belt pouch. The meat was grilled and eaten, and the captive too was fed. When the sun moved west, they continued through the heat and the blinding light. Atossa was her harsh self again, but the memory of her unexpected charity remained. She was human after all. She could even be tender.

His arms were tied behind his back again, but by his wrists now, and he was better able to move his shoulders. But he was still treated very unceremoniously. After a while, his bladder began to trouble him, but he dared not try to make the women halt. When the urge grew so strong that he could not restrain himself but began to urinate, writhing inwardly with shame, he had to continue to do so while walking. But when the women understood that he had to ease himself more, they stopped and had him squat in the high grass.

That night they slept in the open, under another umbrella-tree, warmed by a dying fire and by each other. Atossa shared her cloak with him. She seemed interested in his welfare, even protective. He had wondered, half scared and half expectant, if they would amuse themselves by playing with him again, but they seemed to be completely sated. He rested for a while, listening to the deafening night concert of the grass and tree creatures and the sound of the wind in the high crown of the tree, but at last he slept. What his spirit did that night, he did not know.

He woke up with a hard-on, and again, he felt Atossa's hand around his member while he disentangled himself from his night thoughts. But that was all, and after a quick and frugal breakfast, they continued their way. They marched for most of the morning, rested without eating, but also without tying him up, and continued. The ache and the swelling around the skewers were subsiding, but he wondered how long the march would be, and how many days he would spend walking on a leash.

Still, it was with some trepidation that he saw Sarissa halt on the crest of a ridge and understood that this was the end of the voyage. Below, a watercourse zigzagged through a nearly dry bed...months had passed since the great rains. Beyond it was a cluster of brown tents. Smoke rose, dogs barked, horsed moved on the slope beyond the camp.

Atossa rose in her stirrups and gave a call that seemed to turn somersaults in her throat. Human figures stood up and emerged from the tents, and the call came back, faint because of the distance. They continued down the slope, crossed the brook where the water felt tepid around his ankles, and the march was over.

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## **Chapter Two: The Camp**

They struggled up from the bed of the brook, he with a real effort. Women, girls and hags gathered around them as they entered among the tents. The women of the camp greeted Sarissa and Atossa

with embraces. One of them, a girl of fifteen or sixteen, showed more emotion than the others; she reached out and touched Atossa briefly and the woman spoke softly to her in passing. All the onlookers were very curious about the prisoner; the skewers gave rise to lively comment. A few hands reached out and touched him, but Atossa growled and the fingering ceased abruptly.

He observed the horsewomen intently but fearful of appearing to ogle them. The young girls were still not tattooed and fairly light of complexion; they went completely naked except for some kind of charm on a narrow string around their necks. The adult women were much like the ones he already knew. Here around camp, they did not wear boots however, but half-high moccasins.

It struck him suddenly that the difference in looks between Sarissa and Atossa was not simply caused by the difference of age: young or old, all the horsewomen he could see belonged to two obvious groups, one that mostly looked like Atossa and one that had more in common with Sarissa.

The two groups had differently patterned tattoos, too; but what all this might mean he did not know, and he was not of a mind to be bothered about that just now. The hags were incredibly wrinkled and weather beaten, but straight and proud; their teeth were remarkably sound, though yellowed like animal tusks. But in their eyes, he discerned a glint of cruelty that worried him.

It gave him a nasty shock to discover that a discussion had broken out, and that he was the subject. Some of the women made gestures that could not be misunderstood, one or two even had their knives out. They were looking forward to entertainment, and one of them became quite insistent. But Sarissa and Atossa stood their ground. Especially the older woman spoke forcefully and with authority.

In order to underline her point, she pulled the prisoner forward by the bag-strap (it had been put on again early that morning), squeezed his arm muscles, slapped his buttocks and finished by pulling his member. She raised her palms, quite a distance from each other, and there was general laughter. He did not bother to produce more than a tired grimace of a smile. But one of the women...he knew not which of them...cried aloud, fallou, fallou! And though he did not know it then, this was to become his slave-name.

Now one of the oldest hags spoke up. She seemed to be a person of authority, though she wore no outer sign of it. Everyone listened respectfully, and when she was finished, all nodded assent and indicated that they had accepted her verdict. Atossa and Sarissa looked relieved. He felt gratitude mingled with a strange warmth. They had defended him, energetically and successfully, and that old witch had saved him. When he had time to think of just what she had saved him from, he felt sick and his knees trembled.

He got no time to nurse his fear. Now he was marched toward of one of the tents. His owners...obviously he had to call them that...had a lively conversation with one or two of the other women; some of them were looking appreciatively at him, whispering between them. The recent decision was clearly not unpopular. Dogs ran after them and they sniffed him suspiciously. Now he also saw two or three males that stared back at him. One was a boy that had not yet reached puberty, the others were grown men.

They looked sleek and healthy enough, but they seemed shy and they kept meekly out of the way of the women, who ignored them. Except for the boy, they wore thin golden rings through their nipples; so this was why Atossa had pierced him! One of the males stepped clumsily aside, and he wore leg-irons, riveted in place with a short chain joining them; leather rags around his ankles protected them from chafing. Had he done something improper to deserve this punishment? Or was this just an example of wanton cruelty?

Bending over, the prisoner entered the tent they had led him to. His eyes, blinded by the strong noonday light, perceived at first only a darkness inside. There was a smell of sun-scorched canvas and hay. Stumbling, he was brought to a resting-place and pushed down on it; furs tickled his skin. At last the strap around his sex was removed, but he was not relieved of the one around his wrists. Atossa spoke sternly to him, and he understood that he must remain here. Then he was left alone.

For a moment, he thought of escape. But he knew too little about his situation and its possibilities as yet, and his back-bound hands were a difficult obstacle anyway. Later, he would think that he had abandoned his escape plans with suspicious haste.

Now when he knew that he would live and that the rumours had told the truth about the horsewomen's use of their man-slaves, the need to escape did not seem so urgent any more. Anyway, he would be safe from En-Tor here. He made himself as comfortable as possible and reclined, listening to the sounds outside, the yelping of dogs, the clanking of metal vessels, voices, someone who was cutting firewood and a horse neighing in the far distance.

The darkness lifted by and by and he could take a look around. The tent was furnished with furs, painted iron-bound travelling chests and variegated textiles from the coast peoples. Ornate fittings of iron and bronze and a hanging lamp of brass indicated a certain prosperity. He sighed and tried to doze. He did not dare sleep, and he was too excited anyway.

His solitude did not continue for long. The entrance darkened and a girl entered and squatted down beside him. She would be twelve or thirteen, and though her lack of tattoos indicated that she had not yet been taken into the circle of women, she had several animal teeth in her necklace. She looked faintly like Sarissa, a very young Sarissa. The girl scrutinized him without embarrassment for some time, and then she started a lively but for the moment somewhat one-sided conversation.

Her name was Niki. Like Atossa and Sarissa, she was not the least interested in his name, but she ferreted out where he came from. As far as he could understand, she was the daughter of someone called Lykomaki. Then she began teaching him the names of various body parts, and she laughed with a gleam of white teeth when he made a fool of himself. After some time she tired of the language lesson, fell silent and regarded him pensively. She felt the skewers.

He did not dare show that she was hurting him: that might have led her thoughts in the wrong direction. The children were probably no less savage than the adults. Come to think of it, children were often more cruel than adults. She moved her attention to his sex and she took a hard grip on his member. He did not dare but let her have her way; that much did he understand, that he had no will of his own anymore, and that every horsewoman must be obeyed.

Still, he worried. What would happen if they were discovered? The girl was not sexually mature, and he belonged to Atossa and Sarissa anyway (mostly to Sarissa, he hoped). What if one of them returned? Slaves were usually punished for the wrongdoing of the freemen, and he understood that his position in the Sisterhood was still insecure. But he could not stop himself from growing randy, and from showing it.

Niki grew noticeably interested. She was obviously enjoying the impression she was making on him. At the same time, she was showing signs of excitement herself. That children too are erotic beings was an insight that was suppressed among his own people, but the years at En-Tor's court had disabused him of his innocence, and he was not surprised now. His apprehension increased, however. What was this girl-child going to do with him?

She sat astride him. But surely she would not... But she contented herself with rubbing her hairless

vulva against the underside of his member. She looked down on him with moist eyes and panting, half-open mouth. His back-bound hands made his position very uncomfortable, still he found himself moving his hips rhythmically.

Soon he had to concentrate on not letting his rising excitement run away with him. Now Niki leant over him and presented her nipples; she had no breasts yet. He kissed them obediently, and when she pressed herself against him he sucked them cautiously. Slowly, the pleasure ache receded in his abandoned sex. Her panting increased. She rose, and for a moment she was standing on all fours over him.

He knew beforehand what she would do. She sat down on his face and pressed her sex against his mouth. This was only the second time in his life that he had been forced to do the cunnilingus (at Entor's house, where women were objects of pleasure, fellatio was the thing) but he responded bravely. The sooner the girl was satisfied and left him alone, the better. But as he could concentrate on the act this time, he learnt more.

Niki showed him clearly what she wanted and what she enjoyed. He kissed her clitoris, ran his tongue along her smooth labia and stuck it into the opening of her tight little vagina to the accompaniment of her encouraging squeaks and gasps. She tasted of salt; she must have urinated since she bathed last. All the time she kept a hard grip on his hair. At last she came. She jerked convulsively and she fell forward. This was exactly the moment when he discovered that Atossa was in the tent. His heart froze.

Niki looked ashamed. Where Atossa was standing, dark against the light from the tent door, he could not see her countenance. He sent her a pleading glance. But she gave her attention mostly to Niki. She spoke to the girl with a sternness which the listening slave suddenly discovered to be feigned. The child was sent out of the tent with a slap, and Atossa stood above him, looking down at him.

He was not punished. Instead, she leaned down and smoothed his hair, tousled by Niki. She regarded him for a moment; her face was immobile but she breathed heavily. Then she untied her breech-clout and took the girl's place. Without demur, he started all over again. By the bones of Hurri, he thought, I do hope they do not prefer this kind of pleasure all of them all the time!

But Atossa withdrew before reaching her climax. She left him after releasing his hands. He did not think of escape anymore, and she seemed to understand it. That evening he rested very quietly on a thin bed near the opening of the tent, covered head to toe with a black sheet which he did not dare throw off; but he heard how the two women made love long and intensely. Atossa cried out aloud from the crest of her ecstasy. Then the two rested together for some time, talking. They seemed to have forgotten him, and finally he went to sleep, still under the sheet.

He woke up in the middle of the night, half suffocated and sweating, and pushed it away. The moon was up, and in the faint light that reached the interior of the tent, he could barely make out the sleeping figures of Sarissa and Atossa. The older woman's arm was thrown across the shoulders of her lover. He rested long, looking at them, without being able to untangle his emotions; but at last he went to sleep again and slept like dead until the morning.

Thus began his life among the horsewomen. His two owners kept him under strict surveillance, and he was constantly in their company, except when one of them was out hunting. Now and then, the two women were briefly joined by the very young but fully tattooed girl who had greeted Atossa with such affection on her arrival back in camp. And he gathered that she was Atossa's daughter, and that Halanna was her name, but where in the camp she lived and with whom he did not know. She visited her mother in her tent occasionally, but obviously she slept somewhere else.

His early weeks in the camp shaped up into something that he soon understood to be a kind of obedience training. He was constantly in the presence of one or both of his mistresses, and gradually, his entire conscious mind came to be centred on them. Never was he left to his own devices; instead, the two women were constantly forcing their will on him, and with less and less effort. This did not mean that their demands on him grew less.

He was not only required to attend his mistresses and do chores such as fetching water and grinding grain, but was also burdened with tasks that were unpleasant and seemingly meaningless, such as being led, on a leash and on all fours like a dog, around the camp among amused women and giggling little girls, or lying immobile on his back on sharp stones.

Staring into the deep blue sky, he more sensed than saw his surroundings. The stones soon grew painful, digging into his back, but he was also uncomfortable because of the way his back was arched and his head was slumped down on the other side of the heap.

His legs were slightly parted and his arms were thrown out to the sides; he did not dare move a finger, for Sarissa was standing guard, and she looked implacable. To his annoyance, he had an erection, and, again to his annoyance, both Sarissa and three or four other women noticed it. Damn it, why did these things stimulate him? He was not born a slave.

Submission should not come natural to him, even less be pleasurable. But the fact was incontrovertible: he did enjoy it. Yes, he did enjoy it even though the stones were hurting him like hell, for he knew that this was part of the whole, of his entire relationship with these two women, and that relationship revolved around the moments of closeness and pleasure he experienced with them, in spite of the fact that they did not grant him sexual release. His celibacy was a mortification of the body, not of the soul.

It dawned on him that Atossa's methods (for it was mostly she that handled the dressage) were subtle enough. The obvious uselessness of the things they forced him to do made obedience itself the main object. And he obeyed. Attentively, he tried to read the gestures, faces and words of his two owners. His reward was that they encouraged him more and more often.

He frequently gave them pleasure with lips and tongue, but he was always himself denied it, and his pent-up desire for the two women grew constantly. But this too was clearly part of Atossa's intentions. His fantasies about what he would do to them, given a chance, changed with time into expectation mixed with fear of what they would do to him next. He knew that he was not just any slave. He was a manslave, a tongue-slave and a penis-slave, and the power and the glory of his two mistresses was his also.

If they had tried to whip him into submission, he would have resisted or at least thought of escape, but games like these were something else, and he felt himself slowly being drawn into an implicit understanding with the two. The games were his too to play, and he played them. As long as Atossa and Sarissa continued to play by these rules, he would stay with them.

Already the day after his arrival in the camp, he had been pushed down on his back and tied, and then Atossa had pulled out the skewers. She had replaced them with short studs. It hurt and some blood came, but he was still relieved. The skewers had been far more inconvenient. His nipples healed rapidly around the studs, helped by Atossa's salve, and they were now permanently pierced.

He ate the same food as the women. By this time of the year it was frugal but satisfactory, consisting mostly of wild herbs, roots and seeds, with some dried meat or pemmican. He knew enough about the grasslands to understand that the game had dispersed over enormous areas now at the end of

the dry season, and that large- scale hunting was impossible.

Groups of women went out every morning to gather foodstuffs, each accompanied by one or several man- slaves. Even the chained man was relieved of his leg- irons in order to participate in the labour. The threatening behaviour of the women made it clear that the prisoner had made an attempt at escape, had been captured and had been forced to wear irons as a punishment.

He was himself taken out to forage several times. He was kept to hard work, but Sarissa and Niki taught him to recognize and name many edible plants. But he was frequently left in camp while his two owners were out hunting. The first time this happened, they led him to a stake in the centre of the camp and tied him to it so thoroughly that he could not move a hand. Chest and hips, arms and legs were bound separately with crisscrossing straps.

He was terrified though he did not dare show it; he thought that the women had changed their minds and would kill him slowly for their own entertainment, as was notoriously the habit of these people. His relief was great when Sarissa patted his cheek and rubbed her face against his before leaving him. Obviously, this was just- just... part of the training he was undergoing.

Several other women had looked on with interest from a distance, but they left him alone for the moment. The straps were firmly but not brutally tightened, and apart from the burning sunshine, which had already tanned his constantly naked body a dark brown, standing at the stake was no great suffering. After some hours though, his immobility was growing intolerable, and he smiled again inwardly when he understood the cunning of the women.

No pain, no threats and no excitement drew his attention away from the bonds themselves, which were instead constantly present in his consciousness and underlined his helplessness. He longed for the return of the two women, and he found himself hoping that they would use their hands on him before releasing him.

The sexual fantasies which were now occupying all of his free time and which the combination of celibacy and constant stimulation made ever more torrid, had actually grown more and more cruel too. His experiences made it difficult for him to imagine himself as the active party in a love-game with Sarissa (not to speak of the savage Atossa). Being used by them meant being raped by them, and they would give him pain as a matter of course. He did not fear it. Well, not too much, anyway.

He was dwelling on thoughts like these when he discovered that two other women were looking at him. They saw that he had an incipient erection...he had not himself been aware of it until then and they smiled sardonically. They were Niki's mother Lykomaki and an old woman called Timesse. Both had been among the women who had demanded to be allowed to torture him; he hoped that his fear did not show.

But this was obviously not the kind of entertainment they had in mind.

They felt his straps and then they let their hands slide across his body. They continued by rubbing themselves against him with increasing excitement. Half against his will, he felt his own mounting randiness. Lykomaki clutched the skin at the back of his neck with one hand, and with the other she gripped his member. Her nails bored into its soft underside.

Timesse put her claws into his bag and squeezed his testicles. She increased the pressure slowly. Lykomaki massaged him brutally, but the pleasure was counteracted by the increasing pain from the balls. Finally, he had to groan. They squeezed with all their might, their eyes shining with lust. He barely kept himself from screaming, but his pain was there nevertheless for them to enjoy. Then they drew away. The pain died away, but he felt sick. He felt no pleasure anymore, and he understood

that he had lost his hard-on. Niki stood at a distance, looking delighted.

Timesse departed and was away for some time. Lykomaki's hands were soft again, and slowly he regained his virility. She made reassuring sounds and he managed a smile. He would do well to ingratiate himself with these two women! When Timesse returned, she was carrying a long, soft thorn-vine. She knotted the large end around his sex.

Handling the vine with heavy palm-gloves, she wound it as tightly as she could, turn after turn, around the bag and his member, while Lykomaki egged her on. The thorns stung and burned his skin. The thin end of the vine Timesse tied carefully around the tip of his penis; his foreskin had been pulled back as far as it would go.

It hurt like the very devil. All living and moving things of the grasslands avoided the thornvine with its thousands of sharp needles. Timesse and Lykomaki stepped back, cocked their heads and enjoyed the effect, cackling merrily. Then they departed, their arms around each other's shoulders.

Niki remained. With his eyes and with pleading sounds he tried to move her to relieve him of the vine, but without success. She was too obviously delighted with the experiment and was in no mood to interrupt it. Instead, she came up and tested the vine by pulling it. His pain increased and he grimaced. Niki found this a wonderful new game.

She pushed a stick under the vine and twisted; while doing it, she looked at him attentively in order to ascertain his reaction. He begged her to stop it. She did not understand what he was saying, of course, but she understood very well what he wanted to say, and his entreaties had rather the opposite effect of the intended one.

At last she tired of the game, let go of the stick and skipped away, clearly thinking of something entirely different. His eyes followed her. In spite of her childishness, she was entirely a horsewoman, and a sexual being; he wondered what she would be like in a year or two? In spite of the pain, or perhaps because of it, he was now nearly desperately randy. He actually found himself wishing that Niki would come back to him, or even her mother.

Nobody else took pity on him. The women that walked past looked at him and smiled but did not come to his aid. He remained standing thus the whole afternoon; slowly, the acute pain changed into an ache that with time became intolerable, mostly because he could do absolutely nothing about it. Very clever of them!

He invented complicated forms of revenge: the two hags themselves deserved to be tied with thornvines around their crotch and breasts (Lykomaki was only Atossa's age and attractive in her way, but for the moment he had no eye for her advantages). His owners returned at last, but they just laughed at him. They did release him from the stake after quite some time, but they prohibited him with threatening grimaces from touching his sex.

He had to wear the damn vine until nightfall. He was still wearing it when Atossa pushed him over on his face and impaled him on the horn-member again. This was nearly too much. The training in self-restraint that the women had given him, perhaps unintentionally, helped him to endure in stoic silence however, which obviously made some impression on his owners. They played with him speaking with mild voices, and their hands were tender.

They pushed him over on his back after a while and bound him in the same way as that first evening, when they had just captured him. He suspected that he would now collect the reward for his obedience. Again the women caressed each other, and he could now look at them with as little shame as they were showing themselves; he had learnt to accept that the horsewomen, all of them

and not only Atossa and Sarissa, lived in loving relationships which were both intense and lasting. Their use of males seemed to be an entirely different matter; males were tools of their physical lust only (a fact which did not exclude an attachment of the kind we feel for pets).

It was Sarissa's turn to be served by his tongue. While Atossa was ridding him of the vine at last, Sarissa sat astride his face. In the dim light he saw her supple body above himself in a violently foreshortened perspective, which was at the same time peculiarly attractive; he wished intensively that he would have been able to caress her with his hands. She took her time, and Atossa was now relieving the stinging sensation in his member by holding it in her warm hand.

Sarissa seemed several times to be balancing on the brink of orgasm, only to retreat from it again. When she came at last, with the tongue of her slave pushed as far inside her vagina as he was capable of, he felt a curious satisfaction, the cause of which he was unable to understand rightly; for his own lust was still a torture inside him.

Sarissa dismounted, still panting. It was Atossa, not him that she kissed gratefully, but he was nevertheless given a smile and an appreciative smoothing of his hair. Now it was Atossa who sat across his hips and looked searchingly at him.

What would she do with him? The last time around, she had caused him the most cruel suffering he had yet experienced, more cruel (though not more brutal) than any that he had expected from the minions of En-Tor, and still his member was stiffer than ever. But Atossa grasped it, and it slid slowly into her while she let herself sink downward.

He froze. The initial sensation of penetration was intensive, and he felt as if his own member was being pierced lengthwise. His eyes half closed and his face stiffened. Atossa seemed herself to notice his situation; the tattooed body of the she-savage, the face with the burning eyes, the waving plume of hair...she did not wear it in a bun today... all was still. Then she came down carefully in position on top of him.

She was quiet for a long time before she began to move like a reptile on top his body. Her face was only a couple of inches above his. Again his lust was rising in him. He raised his hips and met her, and his maltreated member ached inside her. He had to get a grip on himself, he had to continue to be useful to her until she came.

He closed his eyes, for the sight of her face was making him lose control of himself, and as a diversion, he tried to recall to his memory the details of her back tattoos, but he found to his horror that the very thought of her backside was stimulating him; he began counting the horses of the Sisterhood instead. Atossa seemed to sense his predicament and reined herself in again.

The ecstasy subsided, changed its countenance and was transformed from a threat into pleasure. Now he felt that he could let himself be fucked forever without losing either his self-control or his ability.

He moved his hips, and the muscular female body on top of him responded rhythmically. Atossa was still piercing him with her eyes. In a state of intensive concentration, he felt his pleasure slowly intensifying and approaching the threshold of pain.

Atossa noticed it too and quickened her pace. She gripped his shoulders mercilessly, and her breath came in bursts from her throat while she threw herself violently up and down as if she were trying to tear his member off his body. His anus contracted in cramps around the tool that had penetrated it. The horsewoman cried out like a bird of prey. He came. After weeks of abstinence, the orgasm was so brutal that it hurt physically; for a moment he thought that Atossa had harmed him.

She remained long on top of him, warm and heavy, until she had calmed down. Then she raised her head again and looked at him, until she rolled away and left him. When they freed him much later, he was granted an unexampled privilege: he was permitted to sleep by the feet of the two women.

There was no doubt that he belonged to Atossa and Sarissa (mostly to Atossa, and now he found this quite natural and even right). But it soon dawned upon him that this ownership was more of a prior claim than a monopoly. It was obvious that they had no exclusive rights to him, and they in turn found it natural that he had to serve nearly every postpubertal woman of the Sisterhood, one after the other, from half-grown girls of fifteen to wrinkled witches with breasts like pieces of leather. Atossa's and Sarissa's permission was always sought, but clearly only as a matter of form; the permission was always given.

Without exception he had to lie bound on his back while the women rode him. Several of them kept their knives hanging between their breasts during the ride, some wore their whips wound and knotted around their waists; but there was no need to chastise him and they all seemed to find him satisfactory.

Remarkably enough, Lykomaki gave him one of his most satisfying experiences, and he wondered after it if the memory of the pain she had given him, and his fear of her, had not contributed. He had worried about his ability to be useful to the old witches, but was soon relieved of his fear. They preferred to make their rides at night, in the darkness of their tents, and in its cover their vitality and their clever hands made him forget their looks.

Afterwards, it was the common experience he remembered, and he was beginning to see their bodies as the worn sheaths of powerful, fascinating personalities. It was nevertheless these women who, next to the very young girls, showed the least consideration of his own feelings, and they often left him physically un-released. No matter. To be allowed to satisfy them, and to receive proof that they were pleased with him in their reserved way, was a distinction. He found himself admiring these old women, queenly like greying old lionesses and the unquestioned mothers and leaders of their pride.

He found the girls touching like pups. Among the most interesting was Aryana, Hakki's daughter. She was still light of skin under her tattoos, which she must have received recently, just like Halanna; she was clearly proud of them and of her position as a full horsewoman. She was deliberately hard on her prisoner... she was actually the only one to deliberately give him pain.

She had given him several lashes with a short scourge, while standing astride him on her knees. But he suspected that she had held herself back, that she wished to be a merciless and cruel brave, and again and again, the hard mask fell away momentarily and afforded him glimpses of another Aryana, merry and girlishly tender. He often found himself thinking of Niki.

Was this what she was going to be? He remembered the vine and how she had tightened it around his sex, and he thought, no; but then he saw her in his mind visiting him in the tent, on his first day in camp, and changed his opinion.

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Chapter Three: Winter

They tied his hands behind his back, not cruelly but in a matter-of-fact way, just to keep him under control, and marched him to Ariti, the smith. She had her little portable forge going and she was clearly expecting them. Sarissa offered to work the bellows. They made him kneel before the little anvil, and then Atossa carefully removed the studs from his pierced nipples, which had healed

completely now.

She handed the studs to Ariti, who had obviously lent them to her. Instead, rings of red gold were pushed through the holes, and he wisely kept as immobile as he could while Ariti bent the ends of each ring so that they overlapped, fished out a red-hot little rivet from the charcoal-fired forge and joined the ends together.

She repeated the procedure with the second ring, and he was truly a horsewoman's slave.

He was told to stand up, and obeyed (he understood enough of the language now to know what his owners expected of him). Both Sarissa and Atossa felt the rings and looked very pleased. Atossa looked him straight in the eye while she twisted the rings gently, testing his reaction. He was not afraid of what she would do, and she sensed it. She smiled and patted him on his cheek. He had clearly been a good dog. All the while, the girl Halanna had been present, looking on in silence. And now he knew that Halanna lived with Ariti, and he presumed that they were lovers.

By now, the women moved camp very frequently, as the game and the edible plants and the grazing of the immediate neighbourhood were rapidly exhausted. The high-wheeled carts were rolled up to the tents, and each household — normally two women, occasionally three, or two and one girl — loaded their belongings, hitched the horses to the vehicles, mounted their steeds, and the horde left what had been a lively scene just minutes before.

Now only circles of flattened grass, the black hearths and the ubiquitous fettering-pole remained to tell a passer-by that horsewomen had lived here. The squeaking, ungainly carts made up the centre of the procession. Archers trotted off to form an advance screen, the main body of horsewomen rode ahead of the vehicles, and there was a small rearguard too.

The older women kept close to the chiefess Hikati, the woman who had decided that the captive Fallou should live—and the girl who carried the standard, the light pole with its grotesque array of horsetails, red ribbons, brass bells and the white male skull with the dangling jaw. The slaves travelled on the carts, one or two of them driving (the other carts were usually handled either by young girls or by very old women).

There was one exception: he had to walk, and he had to do it just as when Atossa and Sarissa were bringing him home after the capture, his elbows held by straps and with a lariat tied to his balls. It was perhaps deliberate cruelty. He felt honoured. Women riding close by him sometimes smiled at him, and occasionally they lashed him loosely and playfully with the end of their reins, still smiling their friendly smiles. He returned them with what he hoped was the right mixture of frankness and deference.

These marches were not in any way exhausting. He was hardened now, and the Sisterhood travelled slowly because of the clumsy carts, and in easy day's marches. At night, they slept under the open sky, which was no hardship either in this hot and dry weather. Then his arms were free, but never his sex; and he would long remember these nights, when he rested between his two mistresses in the ring of sleepers around the smoldering night-fire.

Nobody used him sexually while on the trail, but he helped keep the two women warm on chilly mornings. He enjoyed that. Those sleepy moments gave him much of the closeness that he craved, as a consequence of his growing devotion to his two strange owners.

At last, after just two days on the last campsite, there was a new tension in the morning air. Several of the old women stood outside their tents, sniffing the dry wind. He sniffed it too, but could not discern anything out of the ordinary. Then he saw the thin white chalk-lines across the morning sky,

the high feather clouds that boded a change of the weather.

They broke camp again and moved to the northwest with such haste that he had to ride a cart...males were never allowed to ride horses, that was a taboo or a superstition among the women. A horse ridden by a male would be skittish and unpredictable ever after. Trees were more frequently seen now, and late that evening they came to the edge of the forest.

The next day they entered it along a well-worn track, and after only three hours on the march they saw what was clearly the winter camp. It consisted of two longhouses, built out of sods and timber, and a couple of simple sheds for firewood, hay and diverse odds, ends and purposes. There were several hearths in each house, and little compartments around them, suitable for two or three to sleep.

They moved in and settled for the season. Rainstorms came and went, with occasional glimpses of the sun in between. Life was easy enough. Hunting parties went out; it seemed that much of the game had moved into the forest, too. There were camp chores to do, and edibles to gather from the woods when the weather permitted. But there were also long hours spent resting on or between the furs and the covers spread around the fires, under the smoke-holes. The time was passed with storytelling and singing, in between long spells of plain dozing. There was lovemaking after dark, too.

Occasionally, other women used him, but it was mostly Atossa that rode him. Being used sexually in the presence of some twenty savage women and equally savage little girls was a new experience to him, but clearly quite normal to them. Fortunately, it did not inhibit his performance. On the contrary: he had served nearly all the onlookers, too, and whoever used him represented them all. In his mind, he saw it as a gang-rape.

He understood that a rape was a bad experience for a woman. He remembered the girl that had been assigned to him in En-Tor's house, and though he had at that time regarded himself a civilized person who had tried to rape her in a considerate manner, he now remembered the expression in her eyes and felt ashamed of himself. Living with these women had taught him not only to obey them, but to respect them.

Using a woman against her will was not only physically impossible, it was also unthinkable. But for males, this was clearly another matter. He loved it.

There was one thing that really was a mystery to him. By now, he had already had sex very often with both Atossa and Sarissa, and at least once with practically every adult member of the Sisterhood. None of them had ever tried to withdraw before the ejaculation, and he had not been able to take any precautions at all, of course. That was not his business, anyway. Still, only two of the women were pregnant, and they had been pregnant already when they had used him.

It seemed that these women could somehow control their child-bearing in a way that he could not make out. None of the — often quite revolting — methods of erminating a pregnancy that he knew of had been used. The whole matter remained an enigma. And, by the way, just why were the daughters so uncommonly like their mothers?

He did not know the answers to these questions until much later, after the end of this story, in fact, and then because he had asked about them, and received an answer. But there was something that he did learn, and that was the language. This was in fact pretty easy to do: the guttural pronunciation had hidden from him the fact that the structure and much of the vocabulary were closely related to the Coast Dialect, which he was quite fluent in.

The rest of the words, relating mainly to horse-womanship and hunting, had originated somewhere to the east, among inland tribes that his people knew little about. Now when his two owners had time to spare, his understanding of the language progressed rapidly, and he was also learning to speak it, though more slowly.

Being able to understand Atossa and her lover, and to speak with them, deepened his attachment but did not otherwise change his relationship with them. Occasionally, he found his new role peculiar, not to speak of his easy acceptance of it. He had never thought of himself as a slave-nature. Slaves were of course different from freemen, submission was inborn with them. But come to think of it, many slaves had been freemen or freewomen earlier, was their nature different then? And he had also thought that women were naturally submissive, which patently did not apply to these ladies! Anyway, he found his slavery under Atossa quite natural.

Indeed, he sometimes caught himself wishing that she would treat him sternly, that she would be demanding, even deliberately cruel to him, without him knowing why, perhaps in order to have her reassure him that she really cared about him.

Yes, even cruel. He had always been proud of his manliness, and he had taken for granted that he would not fear pain if it came his way. Now, the pain that he had been given, and was occasionally given again, served as proof of his fortitude. His very ability to make a good slave, and to bear his slavery with dignity, was a matter of self esteem. He did not care what they did to him, he could take it.

Correction. He did care about it. For with a slight feeling of amazement, he suddenly saw that the thought of being tortured by Atossa (and Sarissa, and any one of the more attractive horsewomen and girls, such as Ariti or Aryana or even Niki, but especially by Atossa) aroused him sexually. Whenever his thoughts dwelt on his piercing, and his first rectal penetration, and the infernal thornvine, and the straps and the indignities, an erection was the inevitable result. During his life with these women, cruel treatment and sexual pleasure had become inextricably associated in his mind.

As long as she would not kill or maim him (and the better he came to know her, the less he feared this) he actually longed for Atossa to give him pain. And he was not the slightest ashamed of himself because of this. He did not feel debased by this strange desire, on the contrary, he felt stronger, more fully alive; and Atossa would surely not cast him aside as long as she found it sexually exciting to torture him, which she plainly did. And though she was cruel, she was also careful not to harm him, and she even seemed emotionally attached to him. At least he hoped that he was right in thinking so.

He was not alone in eliciting this cruel response in the hearts of the horsewomen. They delighted in making all their man-slaves helpless, in fettering them, chastising them, and making them suffer before using them, or preferably while using them. They felt that way towards all of them, including Mikrou, the young boy.

His face was still beardless, his body hairless. He rested, fear in his eyes, on his back on the furs by the fire, while the women were all over him. At first sight, their behaviour was not threatening. On the contrary, it would have been motherly if it had not been so overtly sexual, and if their intention ultimately to use him had not been so obvious. Lykomaki was holding his wrists in a vise-like grip, his arms pulled up above his head.

Ariti and Timesse controlled his widely spread legs. Sarissa, who was pinching his ear with two fingers while squeezing his little balls with the other hand, had her face close to his; Aryana was

busy with the boy's penis. Would any of the women bother to use it? Between them, Sarissa and Aryana had given him a hard- on that was quite respectable for a child, but it hardly seemed up to the job yet. The boy would not be ready for his first ride until two or even three years had gone by.

Sarissa raised herself a little and glanced at her companion, who let go of her toy, only to reclaim it when Sarissa came down on top of the boy. She rubbed herself voluptuously against him; he whimpered. Was she heavy? He nodded. Too heavy? He hesitated and she laughed out loud. He was still able to breathe, was he not? Both hands in his hair, she kissed him aggressively. She forced his mouth open and invaded him with her tongue.

He gave a choked sound but seemed to respond. Perhaps this was not his first tongue-rape. Sarissa disengaged, and they looked briefly at each other, face to face, before she left him, only to be replaced by Aryana. Aryana kissed him too, just as brutally; but she also wanted her nipples sucked. The boy obeyed, and the onlooker felt a pang of longing: he had often wanted to do this, or even caress his mistresses' breasts with his hands, but he had never been given an opportunity to do it.

All the while, Atossa sat close by, looking on; but she was holding a long, supple switch in both hands, flexing it expectantly.

One by one, all the girls and the women followed Sarissa's and Aryana's example. After leaving the boy, they began forming couples. Soon, all of them except Ariti and Atossa were writhing and squirming all over the place, lips around nipples, tongues meeting, fingers deep in each other's sex. But they began sitting up and taking notice, when Atossa tied the boy's hands while Ariti held them.

When the boy understood what they were going to do to him, he first seemed to want to protest, or at least beg for mercy, but then to change his mind. That was understandable. Even these two women, who had not yet participated actively in the orgy, were clearly too excited to care about his opinion. Atossa threw the straps across a rafter, she, Ariti, Lykomaki and Timesse grabbed the free ends, and the boy suddenly found himself suspended by his wrists, his toes a foot above the floor.

The audience was delighted. Girls and women gathered around the subject, caressing him and each other, slapping him playfully, pinching him. The boy was terrified. Atossa elbowed the crowd aside. She stood in front of him, speaking softly to him.

She soothed him with her hands. Murmuring inaudibly, she held his sex between them and restored his erection and his arousal, which fear had repressed. They were both breathing audibly. It was understandable that the child was sexually excited; but Atossa too was visibly aroused, with parted lips and a curious light in her yellow eyes. She moved her hips a little, and suddenly Fallou saw that she was lubricating so copiously that the tattooed insides of her thighs were wet. The other women went back to their previous activities, but with an eye on the show.

And then Atossa stepped back, raised her right arm and started to whip the boy. In a panic, he tried to evade her strokes, but in vain: he managed only to produce a helpless dance that simply served to increase the enthusiasm of his tormentor. He screamed, and Atossa screamed triumphantly back at him. In spite of her savage excitement and his attempts at evasion, she managed to whip him systematically, half inch by half- inch, from the shoulders down, until some twenty lashes later, she dealt the last blow just a finger above the root of his penis, which was now pathetically flaccid. Clearly, his only remaining sensation was pain. His shrill screams gave additional proof of this.

By now, the other horsewomen were quiescent. Ariti was the last to calm down: she had found Halanna and was busy with her. Niki rested beside a girl of Sarissa's age, Artanne. Atossa looked around and found her slave. She dragged him to his feet and gave him a quick and quite brutal

version of the sexual massage that she had given to the boy. It did not take long: he already had an erection that he had been too absorbed in the spectacle to notice.

She pushed him toward the boy, who was covered with red stripes and had tears rolling down his face, and made her wishes clear.

He was to suck the boy off. That was really very nice of her, wanting to give her victim pleasure after the terror and the pain. But Fallou had never considered doing a thing like this, not even after his capture; he looked imploringly at her and tried to resist. Impatiently, she kicked him over and began whipping him. She stood over him, keeping him down with one foot on his belly while the lashes rained down on him. He could have evaded them, or at least tried to do so, but this thought never came to him.

More in fear of Atossa's displeasure than of the pain she was giving him, he cried out his surrender. He would have to do it. He made no resistance as Atossa took him by his hair and dragged him to his knees. The onlookers cheered. He looked up and saw the boy's face, grimy, marked with tears, terrified and expectant. Bravely, he scampered forward, drew a deep breath and took the childish little thing in his mouth.

The owner squealed and swung his hips. Fallou sucked the penis cautiously and felt it grow on top of his tongue. He also saw Atossa take up position behind the boy, switch in hand. And then, the beating started anew.

Very deliberately, Atossa laid cut after cut across the boy's buttocks. Each time one of them landed, the boy jerked violently forward, ramming his member into the man that fellated him. Now he was crying out again, and the delighted screams and groans of the women kept the beat of the whipping. Hurri's bones, thought Fallou, the pain must slow him down. I'd better try to bring him as quickly as possible, that will be better for both of us. He sucked more energetically, and in between, he used the tip of his tongue on the underside of the gland, just as En-Tor's most experienced slavewomen used to do. With his hands, he held on to the balls.

He did not know how many lashes the boy had received when the penis suddenly began to jerk, and Mikrou came, ejaculating a thimbleful of salty, pungent come. The boy's cries took on another sound, and those women that had not yet had their orgasms had them now, to judge by the noise they made. Fallou swallowed convulsively, then he sucked once or twice, opened his mouth and sat back. Atossa threw down the switch.

And then she raped him. She did not bother to fether him, she just bowled him over in the hay and then she was on top of him like a hawk striking her prey. At first she held his wrists, but she had to let go of one of them in order to give a helping hand to his member, and then she took a firm grip on his ears instead. She did not ride him but half-rested on top of him, her wild-animal face inches from his. He looked into her eyes, quietly jubilant.

She did not try to restrain him when he touched first her face, then her breasts. He found her nipples and tweaked them cautiously, while the pain pleasure grew so overwhelming that his penis felt as if it had been cut open lengthwise. He pulled, and she gasped and forced his mouth open and tongued him brusquely; she did not seem to mind the lingering taste of the boy. Then she put both her hands behind his head and lifted it, pulling it close to her left breast.

For a moment, he saw it close up, the dark, tattooed nipple and aureole and the olive-coloured half-dome of the breast itself. Then he took the nipple between his lips and sucked it cautiously into his mouth. Atossa shoved herself at him, and he sucked a little bit harder and played the tip of his

tongue again, this time over his owner's nipple. She groaned with pleasure, disengaged and gave him the other breast.

He complied willingly and massaged the first breast with his fingers. Her movements were growing violent, and now she took her breasts away from him, pinned down his wrists and began kissing him instead. When she came, she cried out into his open mouth, and he cried back as her orgasm triggered his, and they came both of them together and now he did not know the difference between pain and pleasure. She had used him, that was enough.

She rested for a long time, slumped on top of him, without in any way trying to relieve her weight upon him. He liked it that way. They both breathed heavily, but neither of them moved until his shrinking organ softly left her of its own accord, and he felt something wet running down the inside of one of his thighs.

A little later, he stood by the brook cleaning himself, shivering and with chattering teeth in the cold grey light, and Atossa appeared in the doorway and called him back in a voice he had never before heard her use.

When he returned, they had taken the boy down and put him between Niki and Artanne. They seemed to take good care of him, but Fallou wondered what the experience had done to him. He was after all just a child. Atossa gestured Fallou to her side. She warmed him, and then they slept, half-waking when one or the other moved. Once, he nuzzled her face, and she responded with a drowsy kiss, a gentle one this time.

What was he to her? Not a lover; he dismissed that thought out of hand. The inequality between them was too great, greater than that between a man and a woman of his own people, greater even than that between a freeman and his slave woman. He could love her, of course, as long as he did not aspire to the standing that would entitle him to be loved by her.

He wondered to what extent she understood his feelings toward her, and cared about them. Sometimes he suspected that she understood them very well, and was amused, the way a great lady might be amused by the clumsy calf love of a page, or by the tail-wagging devotion of a dog. That was perhaps what he was: a pet.

But you can appreciate a pet, its obedience and its love, and this was perhaps what she did. For there was this new voice she used sometimes, and there were little gestures and caresses that were quite unnecessary, if she just wanted him to perform sexually, and unnecessary by definition if she just wanted him to do her bidding. So perhaps she felt differently about him than about other slaves, or even than horsewomen did feel about slaves in general.

If this was an illusion, it was at least a comforting illusion. And he also remembered how at first he had hoped that he would be Sarissa's slave, and not Atossa's; but Atossa seemed to treat him with much more consideration than her younger friend did, who was certainly amused, and even tolerantly amused at times, but always in a contemptuous fashion, and who would occasionally reveal that his feelings, his pain were of very little account to her. Atossa could be cruel; callous she was not.

Now and then, he was reminded that he was an outsider, in the Sisterhood but not of it, and with a limited understanding only of its mores. One day, for instance, the slaves were unceremoniously bundled out of the longhouses and had to huddle in the hay shed instead, with the wrappings they had managed to snatch before their expulsion.

The women then seemed to redistribute themselves, with Atossa and Timesse and Halanna and

Aryana and Pirritta and Artanne and their likes in one house and Sarissa, Hikati, Lykomaki, Ariti, Niki and so forth in the other... every pairing was dissolved.

There was singing, of which he could hear little and understand nothing, and drums and rattles, and at times women crossed the yard, from one longhouse to the other, in complete nudity; and once or twice loud screams were heard that drowned among the voices of the other sisters. This continued far into the night, and the voices grew silent without any command or invitation coming to return to the houses; the sisters were probably too exhausted to care about their slaves.

He asked the oldest of them, Kakou, about this custom, but got nothing intelligible out of him except some obscure hints about spirits and unspeakable obscenities. He wondered briefly what an unspeakable obscenity would be, considering those that were nearly everyday occurrences here. But he got nowhere.

Instead he found that the boy Mikrou had crept up to him and was huddling close to him. That was understandable in the cold and the damp; but then he recalled that though the boy had been cruelly whipped on that evening a couple of weeks ago, he had received nothing but pleasure from himself. The lad seemed to be randy, in fact. Fallou had known men who had preferred or at least used young boys, of course. This sort of thing was common among En-Tor's retainers and quite accepted along the coast too. He had never practiced this custom himself...except on that evening, of course, but that was under duress. Still, he was not really shocked.

Instead, he was stimulated. He pinned the boy down with a knee and both hands and came down half on top of him. He could not use a woman the way a woman should be used...so why not the boy instead? He held both wrists and kissed the boy, who submitted without a sound. He thrust his tongue inside while rubbing his sex against the boy's thigh, and his own thigh against the boy's penis, which he could feel erecting. He was now fully on top of Mikrou, pushing his legs apart as if he had been a girl, rubbing sex against sex, and the boy panted and was clearly aroused.

He pinched the boy's nipples, and the panting grew heavier; he pinched harder, and the subject gasped, and harder, and he whimpered; and then he pinned down the wrists again and kissed him again. He disengaged. The boy was either too randy or too scared to move.

Fallou thought later that he should have asked himself which, but he did not. He took the boy's member and massaged it gently and the boy moved his hips appreciatively. He changed his grip on the wrists and brought one of Mikrou's hands down to his own sex. The boy took the member obediently and moved the skin up and down.

They rested a while, slowly masturbating each other. Then he grabbed the boy by the hair and pushed his head down. He had sucked him off once... now the boy could damn well return the service. Mikrou did not make too many difficulties. The Dark Ladies would know if he had not done this before. He did a passable job of it, too, apart from some choking when he had to take rather too much aboard. But when he proved his competence by using the tip of his tongue on the gland, Fallou pushed the boy away. He had got another idea.

He would use the boy for a woman. He turned him over on his face, got between his legs without listening to his whispered protests, and impaled him through his anus. It was tight. He hurt, both of them hurt, and still he pushed his way in gradually, into the warm soft little body that he could hear weep softly under him, gritting his teeth to keep his orgasm back. He took a deep breath; the immediate danger was over. He pushed his hands under the boy and took his nipples again; the he began thrusting gently.

The boy seemed calmer. He seemed to respond to the nipple-teasing: perhaps he was feeling more than just pain. Down to his penis. Masturbate him. Do it while you thrust, and in the same rhythm. The boy gasped. And suddenly he came, wetly, spurting pathetically while calling out into the rainy night. Quiet...be still.

Fallou was not done yet. He started his thrusting again, slowly, very slowly. It was cruel, of course: the boy had spent whatever lust he had known and had to endure the remaining torture. Mikrou panted again, but differently. The boy whimpered while his tormentor grimly held himself under control, seemingly for ever, until the pain-pleasure became unendurable and he could not hold back anymore and he banged away like possessed on top of the sobbing boy and then he climaxed and pumped his come into his victim.

He disengaged, trying to extract himself without causing more pain. Then for a while, he rested by the boy he had used in such an inconsiderate fashion, listening to the miserable little sounds he was making. He did not know what to do to comfort him, or even to ask forgiveness; his feeble command of the language failed him completely, the words he had learnt from his mistresses were harsh words of command and obedience only.

He imagined that it would not do to just try to hold the boy. It occurred to him that whatever the women did to males, their slaves should not do it to each other. And he was completely powerless to explain his sudden insight to Mikrou. Damn it, he thought — was this the regular lot of slaves among all peoples, including his own?

If he ever returned to claim his inheritance (a thought that he had very rarely now) then he would be more compassionate to his house slaves than he had once been taught to be.

And then he had to go down to the brook of course in the miserable dark and dank and stand on the soggy ice- cold ground while he washed his sex, and no Atossa called him back in to warm his shaking body.

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#### **Chapter Four: The Ring and The Stake**

Had he been too hard on the boy? In spite of his revulsion immediately after the act, he tried to convince himself that he had not; the boy did not in fact seem to avoid him or to bear him any grudge. Very probably, he had not been a virgin. But then he remembered that slave-girl again, and thought that he had seen something of the same expression in the boy's eyes.

Being raped by a woman was a pleasant experience to a male, or could be one; he always thought of his copulations with Atossa and Sarissa and the other women as rapes. But being raped by a male would really be a different matter. After all, it had never happened to himself (except when Atossa had used the horn-penis on him, and then she had been a very different kind of male!) Perhaps he had hurt Mikrou more than he had hurt himself?

Again, he told himself that he should be more considerate in the future. If he wanted pleasure from the boy and the sodomy had been physically enjoyable while it was going on, then he should find out what was acceptable or not. And he had not liked that forlorn, deserted feeling afterwards.

There had always been a sense of belonging, even when Atossa had slept in Sarissa's company after using him, and that sense had become stronger now that his mistress occasionally showed her appreciation. Did he actually think, without really being aware of it, that he had been unfaithful? Atossa ruled him absolutely: surely she should also be the absolute ruler of his sex. Yes, he should

have sex with other partners, female or male, only when she ordered him to do it.

The weather grew colder. Snow fell at times. He was often miserable when he had to work out of doors, but he had enough to eat and the two horsewomen kept him warm at night. Then there was a storm, and immense quantities of snow came down, smothering the forest. After it, there was silence and whiteness under the blue-grey sky.

There was a bath-hut on the edge of the winter camp. After the great snowfall, a fire was made under the stones in its centre, and when they were red hot, a great throng of naked women piled in, and poured water on them, making a great cloud of steam. His mistress had brought him along, and there he sat wedged between her and Sarissa, half buried in a great heap of tattooed female flesh. He had seen all the women naked, or near-naked before, of course. He had even been used by them. Still, the situation was peculiarly arousing...perhaps it was the feeling of utter abandon in the crowded bath.

Steam billowed, half hiding the massed breasts and ornamented rumps and decorated backs, and he broke into a sweat. So did the women. Suddenly, switches were produced. Ariti whipped Halanna's back, Silini scourged Pirritta and the squealing girl was soon more red than pink and sweated profusely.

In no time, a general whipping orgy developed, the women lashing out indiscriminately at backs, buttocks, bellies; women who were lovers even whipped each other's sexes. Only the breasts were spared. This was when it dawned on him that this was not just the normal procedure in a steam-bath, but sexual foreplay... a savage caress. Then Lykomaki discovered that he had an erection and lost no time in pointing it out to the other women.

There was a howl of delight. In no time, he found himself lying face down across two or three writhing female bodies that he could scarcely identify, his wrists and ankles held immobile by unseen hands. His head was tightly clamped between two thighs that he suspected were Sarissa's; he had difficulty breathing in the damp heat and he nearly got himself in a panic.

Somebody... Atossa...? used the switch on his back. It stung him. The stimulated skin produced rivers of sweat, running in rivulets down his back, in the armpits and down the cleft between his buttocks. He gasped; women laughed and screeched and joined in the fun, using their birches on him.

Atossa called out. The whipping ceased, but only in order to give the women a chance to turn him over on his back. Bodies closed in on him, cutting off his view, hands were laid upon him, his member and his balls were squeezed, his nipples pinched. When he was securely held by the expectantly grinning women, a girl pushed forward between them. It was Niki, clutching her switch. Her eyes were half closed, her mouth half open; she knelt between his widely splayed-out legs and raised her right arm, and then she started to whip him.

She whipped his chest; it hurt, but no more than it used to do. She whipped his flanks; she beat his belly, and that hurt more; she lashed at the insides of his thighs, and finally she whipped his private parts. Half suffocated, he made incoherent sounds and fought, but the women that held him were strong. New rivers of sweat were flowing, brought forth by the sting of the switch and by his struggling. Dimly through the steam, he could see that Niki's face was contorted, that her nipples were erected and her labia swollen. She was in a fury, or an ecstasy, of sexual arousal. The little bitch, he thought. The infernal little bitch.

Throwing down the switch, she fell upon him. She crawled all over him, rubbing herself against him,

helpless to put out the raging fire within. She scratched him; she kissed him, forcing her way in and using his mouth with an aggressiveness that was amazing in such a young girl... but of course she was not an ordinary child but a young horsewoman. For a moment the slave thought, as he had briefly done at their first meeting, that she would forget her limitations and try to impale herself on him. But again, she sat on his face, and this time he understood her commands and the obscenities that she was hurling at him.

Desperately, he pushed his tongue into her. He sensed that another woman was straddling his chest; she leant briefly to one side and he glimpsed her face; it was Aryana. She was sitting behind Niki, caressing her body, kissing her neck, tickling and pinching her nipples. Niki gave a half-gasp or a half-scream, came and collapsed on top of him.

She rolled away and her place was taken by Aryana, but not until the new rider had given him six or seven of the best with her own switch. The performance was repeated, and all the time, he felt other women's hands on his body. When Aryana was finished with him, her place was taken by Sarissa. He served her too, panting and slavering away. Hands were tugging at his sex, masturbating him.

Several of the women wanted to follow her, but Atossa sang out harshly. She produced a long rawhide thong. With Sarissa's help, she tied his wrists together behind his back, then she lashed them to his balls and, holding the free end of the thong...it was still four or five feet long, she brutally jerked him to his feet and out through the door.

The winter air was a cold slap across his face and his dripping body. He reeled down the path to the brook, walking behind Atossa; she stood him on a stone and then she emptied a leather bucket full of ice-water over him. The shock nearly robbed him of his consciousness. When he could see again, Atossa was repeating the procedure on herself. She gave a hoarse cry as the water splashed all over her, from her loose hair to her feet.

He was not cold. On the contrary, he glowed. Atossa shook herself like a dog, collected herself and tugged him away. They had not to go far. She pushed him over in a large snowdrift; nearly buried in it, he was ridden at a gallop until first Atossa, then he climaxed.

It was over. Lying on top of him, she shook uncontrollably. Then, dazed, she got to her feet, made him stand up and took him down to the water again. She washed his penis and her own sex. Then she walked him to the longhouse and freed his hands, but not his balls, and they rubbed each other down as if they had been two female lovers, and got in between the furs and rested, holding each other tightly.

She tied the leash to her own left wrist. He felt completely exhausted, released, clean. When she decided to use him as a mattress, lying on top of him with her arms around his neck, he felt that this had absolutely nothing to do with being used. There was only a great closeness. He did not deserve it; it was a privilege. His mistress was very good to him.

There were times when he still worried because of this carefree abandoning of himself to his savage goddess, Atossa. He had been born a freeman. This had raised him above the slave herd; slaves were of course contemptible, and he should have despised himself. He also should have sought a way to free himself, to escape. But he did not: being owned and used by his mistress, obeying her least wish, longing for signs of her gracious appreciation, seemed perfectly natural to him. He existed only in and through and for Atossa. That might be an unhealthy situation, even a dangerous one. But it bothered him only occasionally.

Instead, he dreamed. When a long time had gone by since his last ride, his early morning fantasies

explored alternative relationships between himself and different women or girls. What if... what if he returned to his own people, and to his place among them, with one, two or three captive horsewomen? What if they were his slaves, for him to use as he pleased?

He would be stern. He would bend them to his will, the way you break a filly or a wild animal. That would serve them right. He would use them as they had used him, fettered, helpless, raping them brutally. And still with consideration, respecting them; for he could not help but seeing them as they were, wild and free, and he could not completely jettison the notion that they were superior to him, and would remain so. And the writhing bodies did not long remain anonymous, either. He always found himself thinking of individual women.

He let his thoughts dwell on most of them, even on middle-aged ones like the robust Ariti or Lykomaki. He considered the young girls and especially the delights of using Aryana or perhaps Silini, Hikati's daughter and Ariti's younger sister; but curiously enough, Niki was also there. He was not clear about what he could reasonably do with her, if anything, but she always wormed herself into any scenario he could dream up. Even in real life, he stood a good chance to be the first male to enter her, of course.

But he returned always to Sarissa and Atossa. Especially Atossa. It would probably be necessary to keep them chained. He would tie Atossa's hands (or Sarissa's?) to a ring in the wall and whip her... who? Sarissa, probably. No, Atossa... until she screamed. It would be difficult to make her scream.

She was tough, she was proud. Yes, obstinate, more than any other of these self-willed, obstinate women. But a curious transposition always made the dream end with her whipping him instead, until he screamed. He did not think that he would be obstinate. He would scream freely, giving her the stimulation that aroused her so. She would be more cruel, more vicious than she had ever been before. And he had an erection, and here she was, close to him, and he moved over, edging closer, hoping that she would wake up and feel just a little bit randy, as she used to do in the morning, and hold him and perhaps order him to kiss her breasts.

Atossa was holding whispered conversations with Ariti. He wondered idly what they were up to; Atossa seemed to draw something with her fingers in the air. Ariti nodded. Then the two women giggled together like little girls that have played an unmerciful joke on somebody. Perhaps he should worry about their cabal? The joke might be on him, after all.

He was right. They came over to him and pushed him over on his back. Atossa restrained him and Ariti started to masturbate him slowly. She was really quite good; he rested on his back looking up at her and could not help admiring her. She was the most powerfully built of all the women, with strong shoulders and arms, and she had a little bit more fat on her body than the others, too, which actually looked good on her sturdy frame. It was easy to respond to her ministrations; would she use him? That would be nice.

She worked up a really good hard-on. But she did not use it, instead, she seemed to measure it with her fingers. She nodded and told Atossa that 'it' (whatever it was) should work out very nicely, and they laughed again. Then they released him. Ariti went out to her little shed.

Nothing more happened for a couple of days... nothing. Atossa caressed him mornings and nights, each time bringing him close to orgasm, but never all the way.

He felt frustrated. Was this a new stint of celibacy, intended to soften him up for more dressage? But on the evening of the third day, Ariti brought Atossa something small and bright. Atossa was delighted and showed the thing to Sarissa, who was very interested.

They got up. Ariti and Atossa went out, while Sarissa pushed away furs and hay until black earth showed. The two women returned, Ariti with a maul, Atossa with four iron stakes which Ariti hammered into the ground. So they would tie him again, and probably use him. Just about time, too.

The nagging question was, what more would they do to him?

He arranged himself in the usual manner without making any fuss, the coming ride uppermost in his mind. They tied him very securely. Then they looked at each other: Atossa nodded at Ariti, who undressed while Sarissa piled more wood on the fire. Ariti sat down by him, took his member between her hands and very slowly, she got him going.

It was very pleasant, in spite of the restraints. To be quite honest about it, he got a thrill out of the restraints, too. Ariti handled him with considerable finesse, in spite of her calloused hands. After a while, he had a very large and very hard erection. Then Atossa handed her the shiny little thing, and Ariti demonstrated and explained it to her captive, who listened and looked with rising consternation.

It was a brass ring. It was large enough so that the gland of the erected penis could be drawn through it, but it would be a very tight fit. It was very cleverly shaped to the contour of the underside of the gland itself; it would sit exactly where a male's sex is most sensitive, to pleasure and to pain. And that was indeed the point, or to be exact, the points.

All around the circumference of the ring, directed inward, there was a succession of sharp little barbs which would bite and claw mercilessly when the ride started, pulling the skin of his sex sharply back and forth. Two of the points were larger than the others. They were placed where the curve of the ring made a sharp upward bend, and they would press into his skin where it was most tender, on the underside of the member, on both sides of the little skin fold there.

Chuckling merrily, Ariti pushed the ring down over the tip of the member as far as it would go; then she pinched the gland between her thumb and her first finger, and pulled. It hurt. Not terribly, but very noticeably, and he grimaced; Ariti saw it, and she loved it and beamed at him. Gradually, a fraction of an inch at a time, she massaged the ring in place, until it was home.

Then she took a hard grip on the member and pushed down violently. That really hurt. It must have shown; Ariti was delighted. She straddled him, rubbing the underside of his penis in the cleft between her labia. The pain seemed to balance the pleasure exactly. She came down on top of him, very heavy, and kissed him; he loved that. Then she sat up, and there was a short stick in her hand.

She pushed the stick through one of his nipple-rings and turned it full circle. Still holding it, she stuck one finger through the other nipple-ring and turned that too, and then the free end of the stick went through this second ring, so that both of them were held under tension. This too was painful, not unendurable, but impossible to forget. And so she gave him a friendly smile and guided his member into her vagina and sat down hard on him.

Now he knew precisely what the ring did to him. The fact that the pain was given in exactly the same spot as the pleasure made for a most curious effect. He simply could not distinguish between them. As she rode him at a steady pace, his face stiffened into a mask; he must not come this early, Ariti might be displeased with him; but she noticed his predicament and froze.

She was perfectly immobile while he fought the orgasm back. She rested for a little while on top of him, then she withdrew and made place for Sarissa. She too rode him for a few paces, but when she had reached the breaking-point, she remained sitting, looking sarcastically down upon him. His next rider was Atossa.

Atossa behaved more like Ariti. There was a strange expression in her face when she observed her steed; was there tenderness in it? But there was no doubt about the main ingredient. It was cruel amusement. He had expected that Atossa would be his last rider, but she too reined herself in, dismounted and handed him back to Ariti.

She kissed him and took possession of him. His gaze was fixed on the powerful torso above him, but he did notice that Atossa and Sarissa fell upon each other and made love a little to one side. So they would not use him: Ariti would be the last to ride him. He liked that, she was very attractive to him, and she had of course made the ring. Ariti panted, her mouth half open in a grin that made her teeth show, but it was plain that she was very close to her climax now. She gave a hoarse cry, dug her fingers deep into his arms, and withdrew into the seclusion of her orgasm.

As soon as she had regained mastery of herself, she increased the tempo of her ride, mauling his sex ruthlessly. He cried out; she rode even faster, hurting him even more, and he too came deep inside her and he cried out, and Ariti told him of her own pleasure.

And then she rested on top of him again, and she was heavy and warm and told him, in a very friendly fashion, that Atossa's invention had been a very good one, and that she was very pleased with it, and with him. She would ask Atossa's permission to use the ring on him on all occasions in the future. Her expression when she told him this was such that he returned her gaze boldly and told her that she was welcome.

He had expected his member to be stained with blood when it at last emerged from Ariti's body, but the points had only dug into his sex, not pierced the skin. The pain and the pleasure had intensified each other until he had become quite unable to judge the level of either. It had been a very strange experience. Just now, he wanted no more of it. But, knowing himself, he admitted to himself that soon, he would want just that again.

He did not have to wait long. From now on, Atossa used the ring on him very often, and Sarissa always. The innovation caught on, and a couple of other women ordered penis rings for their own males too; and when friends borrowed Atossa's slave, they borrowed the ring with him. But he still felt that of all the horsewomen, only Atossa and Ariti really had the right to give him this kind of pain, and those two alone could awaken in him the kind of anticipation that stimulated him... the anticipation he felt when he knew that someone he liked and desired very much would torture him sexually.

The winter was short. The snow melted and new vegetation sprouted from the damp earth. The horsewomen stayed put until the ground was firm enough to carry the carts; then they broke camp and moved out into the plains again.

The old routines were resumed. Hunting parties went out; at first, they killed only for the immediate needs of the Sisterhood, but it was good to have plenty of meat again. Even the males could eat their fill. Atossa's slave at least had never gone hungry, but red meat was better than both gruel and pemmican. Slowly, the weather got warmer, and the women discarded their trousers and jackets and cloaks, and the slaves their rags.

The grasslands were green, not brown and ochre and red as the slave had seen them last. Life was good. The new intimacy between Atossa and her slave deepened. He saw even the ring as a symbol of it: it seemed quite natural that if a horsewoman felt affection for a male, then considerate sexual torture was her way of demonstrating it. But at least in Atossa's case, it was not the only way.

There was a different mood to her games with him before using him; and after he had served her

and given her his pain and his service, she would rest by him, holding him and telling him of her pleasure, especially the pleasure that his suffering had given her. He did not grudge her that. It was her right, after all. Her behaviour was curiously reminiscent of that of a strict but loving husband. All right, then he would be a loving and submissive wife.

It was simply too idyllic to last. One evening, a patrol returned to camp with a male prisoner. They explained that they had surprised an illicit hunting party that had dared enter their territory. It was of course generally understood that the inner grasslands belonged to the horsewomen, and that you went there with their permission, or with an army. But some people would never learn, young bloods perhaps who had bragged a bit too thoughtlessly, carried away by drink at a feast. Now the reckoning was coming.

The women had not bothered to bring the captive home slowly on foot, as Atossa and Sarissa had done once. They had simply slung him, bound hand and foot, across the back of a loose-horse, though that horse would have to be ritually cleansed later in a special ceremony; if he had actually defiled it by riding it, they would have killed it.

Now they dumped him in the middle of the camp, close by the stake.

The Sisterhood gathered around the victim, very excited, in a cacophony of voices. The agenda of the discussion was the same as when Atossa and Sarissa had brought in their captive, but it was clear that the outcome would be entirely different this time. The prisoner was not regarded as especially useful or desirable; he was a smallish, swarthy, ungainly fellow with an unpleasant face, and nobody spoke in favour of him. They would kill him. There could be no doubt about how they would kill him — unpleasantly, or entertainingly, depending on your point of view.

Fallou did not care for the coming show and tried to keep away, inventing some unnecessary chore that would keep him busy on the outskirts of the camp. But it was immediately made clear to him that his attendance was required, as was that of the other slaves. They had better see what horsewomen did to males who did not please them. He was dragged along and deposited on the periphery of the excited crowd, but with a good view. Other women tied the captive to the pole, face out. The show could begin.

First they whipped him. They did it two at a time, using large, heavy rawhide whips, to the accompaniment of his screaming. They all got in a few lashes, or rather more than a few, depending on their various degrees of enthusiasm...Hikati and Timesse, Lykomaki and old Ekebbe, Ariti and Pirritta, Niki and Aryana and the others, while the screaming got ever shriller. And Atossa and Sarissa, of course. But the most cruel of the women, those that did not limit themselves to a dozen or half a dozen lashes but hogged both the whip and the victim, were the old hags, but also the really young girls. This last discovery was really shocking.

All his experiences, both at home and in En-Tor's house and among the horsewomen, should have taught him that children and young people in general can be more ruthless in their passion, more inconsiderate and cruel, than those with more experience of life, and with personal knowledge of pain and suffering. Still, he felt that especially Niki behaved in a bestial, even devilish way.

This was something different and more evil than her childish cruelty to him, different even than the thornvine torture...for now she was ready to maim, and to kill. But all the girls joined in, even children so small that they could not wield the heavy whips but had to use smaller child-whips, toy-whips. He shuddered.

But this was only the beginning. While the last, panting whip-wielders rested, Pirritta and Aryana

fetches torches, burning branches from the campfire. While the other women gave air to their contempt of the man, to their disgust with his behaviour and transgression, with his looks and even with his maleness itself, the two girls proceeded to burn his sex.

They pushed their torches against it repeatedly until it was all black, with soot but perhaps even charred by the fire, and the screams were hoarse animal screams now; but they had become the solo part in a chorus of howls and insults. The prisoner was still trying to evade the pain, but to no avail of course. His struggling only served to excite his torturers even more.

Ariti came up to him. She was holding two tongs, large ones that she used for iron work. To the cheering of the bystanders, she gripped one nipple with each tong, and tore them out with one tremendous pull. Ariti, of all people... The victim's voice broke and was silent. But the Dark Ladies did not extend their compassion to him; he was still conscious.

They used a horse to pull his balls and male member off his body. Then they flayed him, cutting strips out of his hide and pulling it off, again with Ariti's tongs. He was completely silent now, but for a moment, the slave caught his eyes. He wished he had not. They were the eyes of what was no longer a human being, but a breathing corpse.

He was no longer alive; but neither could he die. And this was when Atossa went up to him. She spoke to him in a voice the slave had never heard before, and hoped that he would never hear again, and only the eyes revealed that the victim heard. Then she drew her knife, set its point below his left collarbone, and pushed it slowly into his body until at last it reached his heart and he was truly dead.

This last moment Fallou never saw. He was on his face on the ground, shaking uncontrollably, and the women closest to him were too absorbed by the spectacle of the death of their victim to care or even notice. Neither did he see how the cadaver was dragged out of the camp. He stayed where he was, clutching the grass, and he was back where he was caught by Atossa and Sarissa, on that little rise far out in the grasslands more than half a year ago. He had thought that he had learnt to know these women, or at least Atossa; he had not.

His two owners came and fetched him and brought him to their tent. They sat talking far into the night, sometimes laughing in a dry, unpleasant fashion. They ignored him completely, and he was grateful for that. Two days later, when Atossa wanted him to serve her sexually, he was impotent. Sarissa taunted him, suggesting that they should get rid of him as they had of the victim of a couple of nights ago. Was she serious?

Atossa spoke harshly to her, and she was silent. Atossa seemed to understand him. She contented herself with holding him and speaking softly to him, soothing him with her hands on his face, even cooing like a mother. He lost control of himself completely and burst out weeping. She comforted him, and Sarissa seemed to change her mind suddenly and helped her, pressing himself against his shaking shoulders and buttocks while Atossa was embracing him face to face. So perhaps Sarissa had not been contemptuous after all, just thoughtless.

Atossa continued to hold him while his sobbing subsided. She continued to talk to him, trying to explain. What he had seen was a punishment meted out to a culpable enemy, a transgressor. His body had been dragged away by its feet, behind a horse, to a place where his friends would find it, and perhaps learn from his fate.

The women's triumph and joy was righteous. But this would never happen to him, to Atossa's and Sarissa's slave: they would never permit it, and no other horsewoman would demand it. He belonged with the Sisterhood, as property, certainly, but as valuable, even cherished property. Yes, Atossa and

Sarissa, and the other women too, Ariti and Lykomaki and Hikati even, did cherish him.

Had he not understood that?

She was still holding him when he fell asleep. Unlike the two previous nights, his sleep was not disturbed by dreams of being in the dead man's place. He woke up with his mistress' hand around his member, and with the beginning of an erection which she tended carefully. But she did not use him until nightfall, and by then, he was in working order again.

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Chapter Five: Rites of Passage

They continued their slow and deliberate voyage across the grasslands. In a green field near a stream, flowing abundantly in this season, they camped and feasted with women of several other sisterhoods, women with names that were often the same as those that he knew, but with tattoos and hairstyles and equipment that were all subtly different.

They eyed him coolly and commented on his advantages, sometimes complimenting Atossa on her pleasant slave, but they too had slaves of course. Some of them seemed to treat their males much more harshly than the women of his own Sisterhood did, sometimes even keeping them chained by their balls or, in two cases, by rings through the little skin folds beneath the glands of their penises. These two slaves were boys as young as Mikrou or even younger. One adult male had a ring through his nose. One or two bore whipping scars.

Slaves were traded, too. One sisterhood seemed to have a surplus to sell, but only Aryana bought one, an attractive boy with an open, trustful face, slightly younger than herself. The price was correspondingly high, six horses. One or two women actually asked Atossa the price of her slave, but she just laughed the offers away. Her slave was not for sale. Fallou warmed to her; it was nice to hear that you were appreciated.

There were games, horse races and foot races, archery and wrestling. Sarissa won the archery contest, leading away the prize horse, and Atossa beat all comers at wrestling until a giantess of a woman, nearly black of skin, managed to subdue her after a mighty struggle. After the match, they both went down to the brook to wash off the dust and sweat, and then Atossa followed the victor to her tent, amid much laughter and jesting.

Sarissa, who seemed to be torn between merriment and jealousy, explained that this was the victor's prize: to possess any one of the women she had got the better of, and this time Atossa had been chosen. For a moment of horror, Fallou thought that Atossa would be a slave herself, and that he would be separated from her for ever, but Sarissa reassured him: this was for one night only, and it was even regarded as an honour.

There was henceforth to be a bond of mutual obligation between these two women. But yes, there was actually one group, the Red Sisters, that took and kept and used female slaves. They scorned males completely. But these women were enemies, foes of all right womanhood, and he should not wish to see them!

If he ever did, they would kill him, and then they would eat his flesh.

There was much talking and some singing around the campfires that evening, but Atossa was not there, of course. When Fallou was alone with Ariti for a moment... his attraction to her had at last overcome the revulsion he had felt for some time after that scene by the stake...he asked her what

would be done to Atossa. She looked pensively at him, hesitated but told him at last that she would be treated like a male. But it would not be proper, even for a Sister, to ask her afterwards what had been done to her. He had no further questions.

Immediately after this jamboree, it was clear that Pirritta, the un-tattooed young one, was to be singled out for special attention. She was repeatedly secluded in a tent with the old women. She went out with a hunting party one day and returned proudly with the carcass of a bush-cat that still had her short hunting-spear through its body. The teeth and claws were added to her necklace, secret charms and preparations were made from other parts of the animal.

Then something strange was done to the girl: she was buried alive, tightly bound in a pit in the ground, lined with hay and furs but completely covered with sods, resting on dry branches. Around the covered pit sat the hags, chanting and chanting for one day and one night, until at sunrise on the second day the girl was resurrected and her child-name was taken away from her.

After a merciful time of rest, she spent the next night in a small leather tent with two of the oldest women, one of them being Hikati, the chiefess and resident witch. Strange herbs were burnt, and their smoke inhaled, and Atossa explained to her slave that spirits appeared out of the dark to guide the Nameless One along her passage to womanhood, and to fortify her for her coming ordeal.

She told the slave, in a forthright but compassionate manner, that he had been designated to play a part in this ceremony. She let him know what it was, and for a moment, he was horrified. They were sitting, cross-legged, opposite each other, and he felt all blood leave his face, but then he gathered all his courage and returned Atossa's burning stare and spoke to her.

He would not only submit willingly to the treatment that awaited him, though his attitude would of course not make the slightest difference, but he would ask to be given all that was given to the Nameless One, provided only that it would be given to him by Atossa herself.

She sat silent for a while, gazing inscrutably at him. Then she told him that she would ask Hikati for this favour. She left him trembling with fear and excitement.

Evening came, and they marched away a short distance, an hour's walk or so, and came to the Passage-place. It was a small rise of the ground, crowned with four great upright stones, like fingers against the dark sky, groping for the moon. It reeked of holiness.

Fires were made. The women arranged themselves in a rough circle, all of them in company with their lovers and their males. Atossa however left Sarissa and Fallou standing outside the circle and joined the older women, the leaders of the ceremony. Fallou saw that the stones had been erected in pairs, and each pair was joined by a stout crosstree, making two great gates... and then he recognised them for what they were, two gallows.

He felt a lump in his throat, the tongue seemed to grow in his dry mouth and his heart thumped. He was scared. His decision of the previous night seemed foolish, even preposterous. Why ask for more of this outrageous treatment than necessary? Would his courage and devotion be appreciated, would it even be recognised?

And then Sarissa whispered in his ear, and he knew.

Atossa had been impressed. And yes, she had secured permission to be his executioner. He was still scared, but now he felt surer of himself. Sarissa was holding him in a tight grip, and the feeling was

somehow reassuring.

The Nameless One, who had also been kept waiting outside the circle, was now ceremoniously led in among the chanting women. The firelight that flickered on the four great monoliths shone bright red on her naked body; she seemed half dazed but walked erect and without hesitation. She joined in the singing. Sarissa took Fallou firmly by his arm and led him forward, until he stood between two of the stones, under the ominous crosstree. He saw that two heavy ropes hung from it, and he knew what they were for.

Sarissa called out softly, and three of the women came forward to help her. The slave's wrists were secured to the ropes with soft leather straps; the helpers took the loose ends and pulled the ropes until his arms were raised high above his head. For a moment, he thought of Mikrou. But Sarissa hugged him briefly and kissed him, and whispered again, and then she joined her comrades and helped them to hoist him aloft.

It did not hurt...not yet. His arms seemed to be pulled halfway out of their sockets, his wrists would begin to smart by and by (though he doubted that he would notice it) and his breathing was slightly strained. But the most immediate sensation was one of helplessness. With his feet twelve inches above the ground, what could he do to protect himself? Lying on one's back, tied hand and foot in preparation for the rape, should be just as bad. It was not.

He remembered that he had once been told that peoples far to the south hanged criminals and sacrificial victims by their arms, not by their necks. They were just left to hang until they were dead. He knew that this would not happen to him, but the thought was still unnerving. He squirmed, just in order to remind himself that he was still alive.

Sarissa looked up at him; her face was set in a mask of determination and he sensed that inwardly, she had already left him to the fate that awaited him. She had given him what encouragement she could, now she would just be one of the several participators in the rite. He felt his heart thump against his ribs.

The chanting ceased abruptly. The Nameless One had already been prepared for her own suspension, and Hikati asked her if she was ready for the ordeal. Yes, she was: her voice was quite steady. How many, to prove her worth as a horsewoman and a brave? Thin but clear, her voice rang out: four dozen.

A collective breath was drawn. Atossa had of course told Fallou about the ceremony, and what he could expect for himself...exactly what the Nameless One demanded. But this was more than the usual ration. He felt his heart sink. And then the women could hardly wait to see the subject properly suspended before they turned to the slave. And Atossa rose and came forward, and she was holding a whip. She spoke to him.

He understood that these were ritual words, necessary words, but they still hurt. He was a male, and by definition a slave. Women were real people, but males were half-human only, little monsters that existed only to serve their mistresses. Women were hunters, warriors, braves. Males were timid, fearing for their skin, fearing pain. The whip would prove it; his screaming and begging for mercy would prove it.

Atossa raised her whip. But she did not yet swing it; for across the circle stood another woman, a young brave, Silini, daughter of Hikati. And she too spoke, to the Nameless One who was now also suspended opposite the slave, between the other two monoliths.

She spoke of pride and fortitude, the marks of the true horsewoman. The Nameless One had

promised that she would take four dozen lashes on her naked skin, without succumbing to fear or pain, without debasing herself. Her courageous silence would prove, together with the sacrificial slave's screams, that woman was superior to man, that she was born a fighter and a ruler and he a slave. And the Dark Ladies, ever waiting outside the light of the fires, would receive and accept this offering, hallowing the name that the Nameless One would receive.

And so the ordeal began. Atossa swung her whip at last, and it made a dull sound, unlike any other, when the lash connected with the hide of the slave; and then Silini followed. Both subjects, the male and the female, jerked violently, dancing in air, their faces contorted with pain. But both were silent. The only sound, apart from the gasps of the subjects, the heavy breathing of the two executioners and the cracking of the whips, came from the onlookers who murmured in a chorus, counting the lashes: one, two, three...

He had never been whipped before. He had been caned as a boy, beaten as a man, but never whipped. He had seen men being whipped, though, as a punishment, and women, both for infractions of the arbitrary rules that wives and daughters and slave women had to obey, and for nothing but the amusement and the cruel pleasure of their husbands or owners.

They had all screamed, sometimes even before the whipping had begun, always before it had progressed very far. But he had always understood that they had screamed more from fear than from pain. He did fear the pain, but he did not fear for his life: he would receive no more than the young girl opposite him. And she was expected to survive, and hunt, and fight, and rule men.

The pain was severe, however. Every lash burned like a branding-iron laid across his naked skin. He danced his pain-dance, clenched his fists and jaws, but he would not scream. He would show them. The pain increased as that of every new lash was added to that from the previous ones; still he conceded the women only gasps, no scream. He would show them that a male could be as courageous as a horsewoman.

For a moment he closed his eyes, but he opened them again at once: his only comfort was that it was Atossa who was doing this to him, and he wanted to see her, to see her face and her eyes, and be seen by her. His love of her was as important as his pride in carrying him through this ordeal. He caught a glimpse of the girl opposite; she too danced the whip-dance...and she too was silent. But their condition was not the same. He was expected to scream, but would not; she was expected not to, and must not. Thus, her ordeal was greater than his.

After the first dozen, the whip-wielders changed their positions and started to flog the backs of their subjects. That was worse: now he could not see Atossa anymore. He saw only the Nameless One, the girl who had been the fair-skinned Pirritta and who was now just a body, striped by whip-marks but animated by a soul that had to prove its mettle.

He tried to concentrate on what he saw. He had often looked at her with cupidity, thinking how fine it would be to possess this young body, and always immediately how desirable it would be to be possessed by this straight and beautiful young soul. Now they were two contestants, and she had to defeat him. But he would show them.

After the second dozen, the third began. Atossa started anew with his shoulders, working down his back inch by inch. The buttocks had been less agonizing. But the pain was not increasing anymore, it had reached a plateau, a maximum. He felt as if he was being burned alive, but he was not consumed by the fire. The pain was unendurable, but he endured it and he was still silent.

Atossa finished with his buttocks for the second time. There was a new pause while she returned to

her original position. For the first time, he heard that the women were murmuring excitedly between them. Fine... he was showing them! He was really proving that a male could be as brave as a woman. But his courage wavered when he saw Atossa and her whip again.

She stared at him as in a trance, or a passion of anger; and she raised her whip and started on the last dozen. The body of the Nameless One was disfigured by the red welts that crisscrossed her chest and belly. How terrible it must be, in spite of all the preparation, for a young girl, a child really, to suffer thus.

And it struck him like lightning that he simply had to scream. If not, the girl would have to ask for more, and more, until he broke down, or she broke down, and if she did, then she would be disgraced. And if she did not, then she would still have suffered unnecessarily, because of his willfulness.

She did not deserve that. She had never wronged him. He wanted to be her friend, not her enemy, both because it would be bad to have enemies among his rulers and because he wanted her, or wanted to be desired by her. He had to scream before the four dozen were all given.

Only half conscious, he counted one, two. These hit, the first above, the second below his nipples (which Atossa had not touched; she was a virtuoso with the whip). Then he released his grip on himself and did what he should have done all the time...screamed, howled his agony and his terror and despair, and his love and his compassion with the girl opposite. He continued even when Atossa had laid the last cut across his pubic bone and lowered her right arm. It was a relief, a release to do it. He screamed until he was unable to continue for lack of air.

It was over. Atossa stood like a statue in front of him, but with stooping shoulders and hanging head. What did she think, what did she feel? But the Nameless One was lowered to the ground, and released, and supported, and cheered like a victor by the women. She was led to the nearest fire, and they gathered around her, touching her, and there was a cry: four dozen! four dozen! And Hikati looked on while Silini held and kissed the girl she had whipped so cruelly, for her own good and for that of the Sisterhood, and then Hikati gave her a new name, Ginesse. And the women cheered, because she had vindicated them.

But not for long. Their eyes went to Atossa and her slave, and Atossa was still shaken by what had happened to her. And she raised her head and straightened her shoulders and screamed out, into the darkness, for the Dark Ladies to hear: five! five dozen!

Her sisters were clearly horrified. They thronged around her, begging her to retract her promise. But she would not: three dozen was what a girl asked for when her time came, and that was what she herself had asked for, and been given, when she made her Passage. Pirritta's four had been a challenge, a way of asserting herself and gaining esteem.

Now her own slave had taken three dozen — even more than that — in silence. Had they not counted them? Did they not know that her slave was brave, a woman's equal in courage? Now she would have to prove superior to him, for a woman must not be inferior to her own slave. Five dozen! Would they deny her that?

They would not. They did murmur and mutter, and indicate that they found Atossa's pride excessive, but it was also clear that they admired it. Or rather, they would if she could take it. And so, while Ginesse rested, warmed by a heavy cloak and caressed and congratulated by her friends, Atossa took her place. And Ariti had consented to swing the whip.

Sarissa had offered to do it, but Atossa would not hear of it: for not only were they lovers (which

Silini and Ginesse also were) and bound by holy oaths, it would also hurt her soul (and this she did not deny). Ariti was a dear friend, but not her lover.

The slave was not released. He remained suspended, his body one single dull ache that had spread, as he had known it would eventually, to his arms. He had the best view of Atossa's coming agony of any one present. He watched as she was swung from the crosstree and as Ariti, the friendly and cruel Ariti, prepared to whip her.

This was his second whipping on that night. For he suffered with Atossa, feeling the sting and the bite, the searing pain of the red iron, jerking and shuddering as each lash struck his mistress. And Atossa danced, her face a rigid mask of pain. A red reflection of the nearest fire, a hot coal in her dark face, revealed that she was looking at him, at her slave who had unwittingly caused this horror.

For a horror it was, and it seemed to go on for ever. First the usual dozen in front; with exquisite skill, the smith spared her friend's breasts. And then one dozen across her back, two dozen, three dozen; and now Ariti hesitated before each cut, placing it in her mind before she put it in place on Atossa's back. And still Atossa was silent. Now she was not looking at her slave anymore...she threw her head back, staring at the black sky and only the sky could see the expression on her face.

Four dozen; and Ariti, looking pained, came around for the last twelve. These were dealt out quickly, so as not to let Atossa suffer too long. And then she hung motionless, as if dead, until she could be lowered and set free. Then, she walked up to her slave, pushed the supporting hands away and asked for the whip. She looked up at him. She spoke.

Yes, she was proud of him. But he did understand what he had unwittingly done to his rightful owner and mistress, did he not? He did understand why she had to do what she had done? All right, then he would also understand why she had to do what she would do now, to him. He nodded dumb assent, and she seemed to understand him. She raised the whip and dealt him three mighty blows across his chest and belly, and he screamed at once. A great sigh was heard from the dark throng of waiting horsewomen.

And then they released him. He saw that Atossa was greeted by Sarissa, her lover, and her kiss was returned; and by her daughter Halanna who came rushing up to her, looking as if she had been in a great anguish. And then Ariti who hugged Atossa cautiously and kissed her and whispered long with her, and what they told each other he never learnt.

And when Atossa had been bedded down by the fire, next to Ginesse, then Sarissa and Ariti, and Lykomaki and Aryana and even little Niki (who was too excited to sit still for long, however) came to comfort Fallou and reassure him. They told him not to be afraid. Atossa had been so clever with the whip that his skin was unbroken, and she was not angry with him. He had not known what he had done, being ignorant of what the Nameless One would ask for, and of the consequences of his own silence.

He too was allowed to rest. His closest friends (yes, they were friends) sat around him, talking softly. He did understand that Atossa had to reassert her authority over him, did he not? And they were all very impressed; he was certainly courageous and they would think him very nearly the equal of a brave. But he was still their slave, and they would still do with him as they pleased, and they expected him to obey them without question; he did understand that, too, did he not? Yes, he did.

He looked at their eager, sincere faces, and felt their gentle hands touch him where the whip had spared him, including his nipples and his sex and then up at the stars which had come out, and then he closed his eyes and let his soul drift away.

He was not required to do any work for the next three days. Instead he rested in the tent, or under a shady tree during the day, wrapped in a large woollen cover with Atossa. She would not speak of their respective ordeals. She had made herself clear already, had she not? But the other women were right, she was not angry with him.

On the contrary, her pride of him was mingled with an even greater pride of herself, for no woman of this Sisterhood had endured five dozen in anybody's memory. Now they all knew her for what she was, the bravest of the brave. And this was all because of his silly conceitedness! She kissed him, and then she actually took his sex and masturbated him and she told him to fondle her breasts and play with her nipples. He was capable of that much work, eh?

And the pain, his pain and her pain, would go away, and her wounds would heal (yes, her skin had broken under the whip in two places, in spite of Ariti's skill) but the pride would remain, and the esteem of her fellow horsewomen. When she was rested, she would use him more ruthlessly than ever, now that she knew that he could take it.

He would not forget to whom he belonged, would he? Stammering, he tried to explain that he was more than ever her slave, and she rested listening with her eyes nearly closed, purring like a cat. After some time, she asked him if his erection had helped. At first, thinking of the hard-on he was presently enjoying, he did not understand what she meant. The one he had when the whipping began, stupid. Was he serious... had he not noticed it? She laughed tolerantly at him.

On the second day, she used him several times, mounting him and taking him into herself, but without riding him to the finish. Instead she rested on top of him, motionless until he could not hold his erection any longer, and even beyond that stage. His body was still aching, as her body must be too, but he did not complain. What she did served as proof of the sincerity of her words. On the third day, she copulated with him and rode him to orgasm, and this time she used the ring.

After the ride, she talked. She told him about the things that she would do to him in the near future, what she would have Ariti do to him. He would be treated more harshly than any other slave of this sisterhood, more cruelly. But she would do this because of her regard for him, and because he was braver than any other slave she had ever known or heard about, and clearly demanded a stern regime. And he told her, as he had done on that evening of the rite of passage, that he accepted whatever she would do, and that it would not diminish the love that he felt for her.

Not until then did he remember that he had never before dared declare openly his feelings toward her. A slave should keep his emotions to himself, except when he was punished of course, or tortured for the pleasure of his owner, who would then find satisfaction in his show of distress. But Atossa was not displeased. Instead she conceded that she held him in higher regard than was common with mistresses and slaves. And that, he presumed, was the nearest thing to a declaration of love on her part.

On the fourth day, he got up and worked. As he was labouring at turning the hand mill, grinding cornmeal, Silini and Ginesse walked by, stopped and looked at him. Both his and Ginesse's body were still marked with the purplish stripes from the whipping. But she was proud and merry, and she and Silini cocked their heads together and whispered and giggled. They behaved like lovers.

They were of course lovers, and it was perhaps a special favour that one had been given permission to whip the other. Silini spoke first to him. She wanted to borrow him. He indicated his submission, but she would have to ask Atossa's permission first. She departed; Ginesse made him stand in front

of her while she scrutinised and felt his welts. Silini returned after a while, brandishing the pain-ring as proof of Atossa's consent.

In the tent that belonged to Ginesse's mother Timesse, who was out hunting, they pushed him over and played with him. Silini gave her friend a thorough demonstration of male anatomy and its use. Ginesse was made to toy with the nipple-rings, caress the slave's balls and squeeze and pinch his erect member. She was fascinated, but hesitant. Perhaps she should leave the male sex alone until she had received her tattoos?

All right, if she felt that way, so Silini used him instead, tying him to the four stakes, pulling his gland through the ring and then mounting him and riding him very roughly, as if she wanted to impress Ginesse with her imperiousness and her disregard of the slave's comfort. She kept herself firmly under control, and as he was still tired and had been used by Atossa the previous evening, she enjoyed a long ride.

While the pain of the ring and the ache in his member rose and slowly drowned him and robbed him of his own self-control, he was still able to drink the sight of Silini moving rhythmically above him. She had lovely breasts, small and conical but so firm that they pointed out and up even when she was on her back, and with strange, long nipples that reminded him of almonds, and then his orgasm came and he was no longer a subject being used but one with his rider.

And then he was made to serve Ginesse too, lying between her thighs, kissing and licking her sex, caressing her breasts and nipples while he pushed his tongue as far into her vagina as he could. She was very pleased with him. Yes, he was well versed in the art of satisfying a woman now.

Atossa had been a good teacher.

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## **Chapter Six: Body Decoration**

Ariti was very busy. The rings had been a great hit with the women of the other sisterhoods, and many of them had ordered the genuine article, made by her. Women arrived on horseback to fetch them and to pay in shells or even with a horse. So Aryana had to wait for some time before her new slave Ippou could be fitted out properly, and with the extras that the girl had dreamt up. But when Ariti could give her attention to him, Atossa brought Fallou to watch the show.

A leather sheet had been spread on the ground; on it was Ippou on his back, tied down to the customary four stakes, and he was clearly very scared. Aryana was already busy with him. She was on top of him, kissing and pinching, and he was obviously not immune to the treatment. Slowly, his flaccid member rose and became a nice erection, which all the women present... Ariti and Atossa and Sarissa and Lykomaki, and soon Silini and Ginesse too and even little Niki, ever greedy for pain games, and of course Aryana herself... commented on favourably.

Aryana did not seem to want to use it, however. She just sat astride him, rubbing her leather-clad crotch against his sex, massaging his nipples in preparation for the bloodletting. His eyes never left her face. He had been given more time to get acquainted to his owner before the piercing than Atossa's slave had got: did this mean that he was less or more afraid of her than Fallou had been of his captors? It was impossible to tell.

It was obvious, however, that Ippou was fascinated with Aryana, who had of course a superb body and who was also the only woman of the Sisterhood who a male unaccustomed to horsewomen and their appearance and their peculiar allures would have found beautiful.

Now she was sitting very erect with his stiff, purplish penis in his hands. Ariti approached, holding two skewers. Ippou glanced at them, horrified; but surely he could not have been ignorant of what awaited him? Ariti smiled at him and sat down opposite Aryana and facing her, two large muscular thighs gripping the slave's head.

He certainly had a view, the young Aryana and the rough but attractive blacksmith were both busy with him now, but it was an open question whether he enjoyed it as he should have done. He looked at Aryana with mute appeal painted in his face, but she just gave him a savage animal grin. She was enjoying herself hugely.

And then Ariti leant over him, casting her shadow over him, and took a little plier from her girdle. For a short but horrible moment, Fallou remembered what Ariti had done to the captive at the stake. But mutilation was not on the agenda, of course. She had put one of the skewers in her mouth in order to get one hand free for the plier. With it, she took a firm grip on Ippou's left nipple and pulled it violently outward.

His face was contorted with pain and fear, but he was still silent. With her other hand, Ariti put the point of her skewer to the base of the nipple where it joined the aureole, and pushed.

A spasm ran through Ippou's body. The sound that he made was a grunt that was also a gasp but not quite a scream; and he came, and a jet of sperm spurted from his rod, between Aryana's palms, landing between her breasts. She cried out angrily; and the boy went limp with a sob while a white little stream ran down his owner's belly and a trickle of red blood found its way across his chest. His sobbing continued while Ariti took the other skewer from her mouth, moving the plier to her other hand.

When she repeated the procedure with his right nipple, he screamed in what all the women deemed was a very satisfactory fashion. And then Aryana leant over him and slapped his face twice, once on each cheek, before getting to her feet and leaving them in order to wash herself.

Fallou recalled his own orgasm when he had been pierced. But that time, he had been ridden by Sarissa, and he had come inside her. So he had not reflected much on it. But this young fellow, who seemed normal enough and was freshly captured, had climaxed without benefit of a female sex, seemingly from pain alone. Was that possible? Would he too lose control of himself if he was suitably excited and then given violent pain in precisely the right place? Was this a property of the male sex in general? And what about women. Oh well, being hung from a gallows and whipped until the tattoos scarcely hid the stripes did not work, obviously.

He had observed the proceedings so intently that he did not notice until now that Atossa, who was sitting behind him with her arms around him, was pinching his own nipples and that he had an erection of his own. She was breathing heavily. She leant forward and whispered in his ear that she wanted to use him, but that the show was not over yet. And then she moved her hands to his sex. Oh my, he was really excited; did he remember what she and Sarissa had done to him once, that night in the windbreak far out in the grasslands? Yes, this was perhaps why he was having this hard-on.

Would she use the ring when riding him, please? He heard her chuckle.

Aryana returned. Ariti had wiped most of the come off Ippou's swollen but soft penis and fetched a new skewer. While Aryana looked on excitedly, she pierced the skin-fold on the underside of the slave's member, immediately below the gland, just where the pain-ring hurt the most. But the boy did not scream this time, he just made a miserable little sound.

The onlookers were delighted, however. And then Ariti finished the piercing by pushing a curved

skewer through a pinched fold of skin beneath the boy's testicle-bag. She leant forward, kissed him fondly and told him that he had been a good horse after all and that his owner would surely forgive his misdemeanour. Maybe he understood what she said, or at least that she wished him well. By the way, could she have the use of him now and then when the wounds had healed and all the hardware was in place?

Aryana complimented her on the job, and she would be happy to oblige her.

And on this pleasant note ended the piercing session, and Atossa dragged Fallou away to her tent with unseemly haste and mounted him, telling him in a very friendly fashion that she would like to give him horrible pain in the future, because she loved him. And Sarissa hissed, what about me? what about me? until Atossa laughed and promised that she would make love to her too, but she simply had to rest for a while!

Hakki was the Sisterhood's tattoo artist. She was a good-looking woman...she was Aryana's mother, after all...but this specialty was her claim to distinction. Now she was attending to the decoration of Ginesse's skin, so essential to the girl's standing as a full horsewoman. Several women were there to witness the procedure, and the subject's comportment during it, and Timesse, her mother, presided over them. And just as during the passage-rite, the slaves were present in order to learn about the courage of a horsewoman.

Ginesse rested on a leather sheet, seemingly completely relaxed, her head on Silini's lap. Hakki laid out the design in vegetable dye with a small brush. It would soon fade away, of course, being a guide only to the permanent tattoos, and Hakki painted no more than she could cover in a week's work or so. Then she brought out her gear, needles with handles and larger multi-pointed tools for lines and fills. Crouching over her living canvas, she set to work.

Ginesse was silent, as befitted a horsewoman. Her hands, open, rested at her sides, her legs were slightly parted. Only the thin lines between her eyebrows and at the corners of her mouth spoke of the pain she was experiencing. It was certainly less acute than under the whip, but it was more drawn-out. When Hakki felt that the left breast was too inflamed and red for further work, she moved over to the right one, and then to the belly and the mound, which had been shaved for the occasion. By now, Fallou knew from his own experience that these women were tattooed even on their outer labia; he hoped that he would be present to see this done too.

Ginesse did not get a rest until Hakki needed one. Then the woman stroked the girl's cheek, smiled at her and assured her that she appreciated her good behaviour, which would surely increase her reputation. And Silini leant forward and kissed her. After a meal and a short pause, the treatment continued. Would Ginesse like a really good nipple job? She would indeed. Silini smiled proudly: Ginesse was her girl.

These sessions were repeated, day after day, while ever-new square inches of Ginesse's smooth skin were covered by the expanding design. Shoulders and buttocks, brow and cheeks, thighs and belly blossomed with the time-honoured patterns and symbols that designated the girl a member of this tribe, this sisterhood and this moeity.

Slowly their totem animals took shape on her cruelly maltreated hide, branding her with her identity, her duties and her rights as clearly and permanently as with a red hot iron. And Ginesse endured it, even when the holy signs that guaranteed her future fertility and the perpetuation of her lineage were drawn with the needle, first on the insides of her thighs and then on her very sex. Silini sat patiently with Ginesse's head on her lap or between her thighs, watching over her and giving her strength. Day after day, week after week, Ginesse suffered the sting of the needles and the slow

ache without a murmur.

Ippou wore first the skewers, then the customary studs for nearly twenty days before returning for a new session with Ariti. This was not to be a particularly painful one, but he looked pale and nervous nevertheless. Perhaps Aryana had managed to tell him what awaited him, in spite of the language barrier. This time too, Atossa had brought Fallou to the show.

A large collection of ironmongery was laid out in front of the portable forge. Niki, always eager for cruelty, was working the bellows. The first item was an iron collar. It was a light one, and mercifully covered with leather, but still a cruel thing to wear.

There seemed to be an articulation somewhere under the leather; Ariti opened the collar, adjusted it and locked it permanently with a red-hot rivet which she carefully hammered flat on the anvil while the boy knelt before it, as in prayer. A chain hung down from the collar, ending with a large ring that swung in the vicinity of Ippou's pubic bone.

The nipple rings were quite ordinary, except that they were joined by a chain. Ippou submitted to the chaining meekly, glancing only occasionally at the hardware. Instead his eyes were glued to Ariti when she was busy with him, and to Aryana in between. His owner stood by the forge, smiling benignly at him while repeatedly drawing the lash of a long horsewhip between her fingers.

Now he had to lie down on his back. Ariti examined his sex carefully, then she grunted approvingly. He was ready. He had in fact a half-erection that revealed that the treatment he was undergoing had its exciting side. Ariti began by pushing a ring through the hole made on the underside of his testicle-bag and then riveting the ring shut.

Ippou's penis was now very large and just as stiff as when Aryana had been holding it before the piercing. Ariti stood up, straightening her back and stretching like a cat, her arms high above her head. She smiled first at Aryana, then at Ippou, telling him that he was a good slave and that it was a pleasure to work on him. Then she knelt by his side again.

Through the hole in his penis she threaded a ring, the same size as the ones she had put in place already. But a foot-long chain dangled from it, ending in another ring. Atossa grew excited and squeezed Fallou's member. He too was fascinated. What would it be like to wear such a brutal chain while you were being used? Ariti finished the job with the customary rivet.

Then Aryana too knelt, and she wrapped strips of pelt around her slave's ankles, tying each one in place with leather laces. Ariti followed them with leg-irons. One of them, the left one, was trailing a chain, about one- and-a half foot in length, the other had just a ring.

Aryana thanked Ariti profusely, promising her the use of Ippou whenever she wanted. Then she turned the boy over on his face and tied his elbows together. This done, she rolled him over on his back again. Ariti handled her a padlock, the size of a small child's fist.

Padlocks were expensive things of course, made by clever locksmiths in the towns along the coast and traded against horses or even more valuable things, such as slaves. The horsewomen used them for locking the coffers with their most precious belongings. Aryana bent down, threaded the yoke of the lock first through the bag ring and then through the penis-ring before locking it shut. The boy's member had softened a little while his legs were being chained, but she still had some difficulty in bending it.

With a second lock, she secured the loose end of the ankle-chain to the other leg-iron, hobbling her slave. The keys were on a soft leather strap which she hung around her neck, and now they dangled

between her conical girlish breasts like a strange ornament. She stepped back and enjoyed the effect; then she turned to Ariti, embracing her.

The smith returned the embrace and they kissed. Might they not use Ippou together, asked Aryana, enjoying him in each other's company? Ariti agreed. She told Niki to quench the fire of the forge, and then the two women walked their man-horse to Ariti's tent, Aryana holding his neck-chain and Ariti the penis chain.

Atossa took her own slave by his arm and led him home. She did not use his member, but she put him between her thighs, ordering him to kiss her sex slowly and to cease licking immediately when she told him that she was too close to an orgasm. While he ran his tongue lovingly between her labia, she told him how much she had liked what Aryana and Ariti had done to the boy. She would not be able to chain Fallou's penis of course, that would have made the use of the pain-ring impossible, but she had other plans for him, and he would look very handsome in the irons she was going to make him wear.

Ginesse's intermittent agony continued for nearly two months. When it was over, she showed off her marks of womanhood to her sisters with fierce pride. Even the slaves were required to admire the work, which they willingly did. Ginesse was especially anxious that Fallou should scrutinize and appreciate the beauty and the magic of her tattoos, and though he was definitely more interested in the girl than in her decoration, he obliged her willingly. Look, were not her nipples splendid? He must touch them...he would not see them properly unless he did. And he did touch them, and more, and she disengaged with obvious regret.

Silini was standing close to them. Now she produced the ring from her girdle, and she nodded confirmation; Atossa had consented to let them have him again. This time they did not go to the tent, but outside the encampment, to a place where green grass grew in a little hollow in the ground. Only a few grazing horses were near.

Silini spoke earnestly to him. Would he lie down on his back and let Ginesse use him, without being tied down? Would he good and obedient and helpful? He assured her that he was often used in this fashion by Atossa nowadays, and that it would be a pleasure to be used by Ginesse, just as pleasant as it had been to serve Silini. And the ring? Never mind the ring, he was used to it and would take it in his stride.

"Very good," said Silini. This was to be Ginesse's first attempt to take a slave inside herself, and if he did his best for her, they would think well of him and commend him to Atossa.

He could scarcely believe what he heard. Virgins were hard to come by in the grasslands, and had been a rarity in En-Tor's household too, they did not stay that way very long. Even before their initiation, most girls of the Sisterhood had used males, more or less surreptitiously. He looked at Ginesse and thought that he could discern a blush, or was it the evening sun? He reassured her. She could do as she pleased with him, and he would do his best to help her.

He laid himself to rest on his back. Ginesse knelt by his side and investigated him with her fingers. The nipple-rings were interesting. Her hands continued on, down to his sex; he breathed deeply and tried to contain the shivers that ran through him when Ginesse's soft fingertips travelled along his flanks. She acquainted herself thoroughly with his balls and then with his penis, and she giggled, half with delight and half with fear, when she felt it rise under her touch.

She asked Silini if it really did not hurt when this thing entered one's body for the first time? "Well," said the older girl, "some women said it did, others that it did not." Anyway, it was the necessary

prelude to the following delights, and she could vouch for the suitability of this particular specimen.

Ginesse laughed and rubbed her crotch against the male's thigh and then she sat down on him. She took his wrists and raised his hands to her breasts, and he cupped them in his palms and tickled her nipples, setting her barbaric patterns in motion; she drew her breath sharply. He made her lean over him and he kissed first the right nipple, then the left one. She took his nipple-rings and tugged at them. Was that nice? More? He begged her to stop it, it was dangerously exciting.

Silini handed her the pain-ring. Ginesse slipped it over the tip of his penis, pinched and pulled. She glanced at him and saw him grimace. "Wasn't it pleasant?" He told her that it was, and he was dead serious. He was now very excited; surely Ginesse would devour him now.

Instead, Silini gave her a small leather scourge, seven thongs attached to a carved handle. She grabbed Fallou's wrists and pulled them up above his head. She told him not to struggle while Ginesse enjoyed herself. Ginesse gave him six lashes, alternately across the right and the left side of his chest, clearly aiming at his nipples. He felt the sting of the leather and gasped, but he did not try to dodge the lashes. Ginesse squeezed his penis encouragingly, dealt him six more lashes that landed on his belly, and then she rose, standing on her knees straddling him. She gave his sex a hard caress, raised her right arm and slowly and deliberately, she whipped his member.

He grunted. That hurt; but he did not try to evade the scourge or even protect himself. The girl would surely not harm the property of another woman. One, two, three. He felt his face contort. Four, five, six.

And then Ginesse threw the scourge aside and fell over him, squealing with delight, kissing and pinching and scratching. It was lovely, lovely. Silini had been quite right, whipping a male was wonderful. And then she sat up, took his member in both hands, put its tip to the entrance of her vagina and lowered herself carefully, eating it with her sex.

She was tight. Now it was her turn to groan, but she persisted. When the gland was inside her and she continued on her way down to a full sitting position, grimacing — she too was obviously feeling pain — the skin of his penis was pulled along ruthlessly, and he felt the points of the ring dig into his tender membranes and he whimpered. That pleased her. She continued but had to stop while one full inch of his rod was still outside her. She wriggled and started to ride him. The pain increased.

Please, could he have her breasts? Silini frowned, but Ginesse did not find the request impertinent. He took both nipples between thumbs and forefingers, gently twisting and pulling them. The girl leant over him and thrust her breasts at him: he took one in his mouth without releasing his grip on the other. Ginesse gave a gurgling cry and mauled his sex savagely, and herself too in the process. She came, and fell over him while he too came and pumped his come into her, unable to contain himself any longer.

She rested on top of him, panting. When she had regained her breath, she asked Silini if she thought that Timesse would buy her a male of her own? Silini laughed. Timesse was too stingy even to get one for herself. She thought however that Hikati would give her a slave next year, not to be bested by Hakki, and then they would share him between them, just as Atossa and Sarissa shared this one.

Until then, she would have to make do with a borrowed male now and then. Perhaps Aryana would let them have the use of Ippou. The sight of him, in all those chains, was really very exciting. And by the way, what was wrong with making love with girls, and especially with Silini, daughter of Hikati?

They sent him down to the brook to wash himself. Then he must return to them. He obeyed. After the ablution, he walked back to the little hollow, still wearing the ring on his now flaccid and

hanging member. The girls were holding each other when he returned, but they separated and ordered him down between them. Did he think that he might be able to give a repeat performance after a while? If he was given some help, perhaps? He told them that it just might be possible, and Silini patted his cheek.

Holding his sex in her hand, she rested close to him, talking. She spoke of his courage under the whip. Had it helped to have seen Ginesse being whipped too? She, Silini, had found it very thrilling to give the girl she loved so many lashes. It had made her quite wet. Yes, he had admired Ginesse, but he had mostly thought of Atossa. Silini nodded gravely, yes, it was proper to think of your owner, and she would be the most natural person to think of too, considering the circumstances. Had Atossa also been excited?

He did not know. Well, she would ask her. She thought that it would be a fine thing to string him up and give him forty lashes. Would he restrain himself as well as that time, before breaking into screaming? He did not think so, he had been so eager to prove his valour and worth in Atossa's eyes. No, he would scream willingly for Silini. She bent over him and kissed his cheek. She suspected that he was on his way to a new hard-on. She would read a dependable incantation over the thing. She was good at that sort of thing, well versed in witchcraft.

Besides being the chiefess, her mother Hikati was also the witch of this sisterhood, two functions that often went together. As usual, her daughter was following in her footsteps. Chiefesses Gynarkae were elected, but witchery was a gift that was usually inherited, though it might occasionally be found in someone who was not of a witch-lineage.

In a way, Hikati's older daughter Ariti had also inherited the gift, for there was magic in the smith's craft too. Silini had been apprenticed to her mother, and she intimated that she was already well advanced in the art and that she had actually already spoken with powerful spirits. She was not afraid of spirits, well, not much!

As well as he could, he told her of his admiration of her and of Ginesse. She looked at him in a quizzical fashion and pointed out that the opinion of a slave was seldom sought. But she liked him, and it was good that he liked her...it might help to get him going again! Spells usually did not work unless you made an effort yourself. Anyway, whatever it was, it was working.

She came down beside him and started working on him. She also wanted him to caress and kiss her. They nuzzled each other's necks and ears and cheeks; and he found her mouth and ran his tongue along her lips, and she accepted it and opened her mouth and they kissed, tongues playing hide and seek in each other's mouths. With Atossa, this was a rare treat, an unusual game with dangerous overtones of equality between the sexes, and he enjoyed it hugely while it lasted, which was not long.

Silini took a firm grip on his ears and set him to work on her breasts. Someone else, Ginesse, of course, was squeezing his penis, her hand between his thighs, and he was feeling the pain of the ring again. Obviously, he was having a new hard-on. Silini rolled over on her back; she pushed him down, thrusting his head in between her thighs, and he licked and tongued her willingly, while Ginesse, working from a position behind him, continued her good works. The closeness of the panting and lubricating Silini, and the help from Ginesse who had already given him such pain and such pleasure, combined to make him randy again, in a less hot and impetuous but more determined way than he had been when Ginesse rode him.

Silini took him by his hair and dragged him up on top of her. She got a hand in under him, grasped his member and guided it to its target. He was amazed...was he actually supposed to use her, not the

other way around? But Silini told him, between her gasps of pleasure, that he must keep working, whatever happened to him; and what was going to happen to him was something that Atossa had given her consent to in advance. He looked over his shoulder and saw Ginesse standing over him, and she had unwound the whip from her waist and she was making ready to use it on him.

The following experience was most curious. Silini was squirming, crawling, jerking away under him, panting, scratching his back, screaming, hurling at him a mixture of obscenities and blood-curdling threats (or were they promises?) while Ginesse whipped his buttocks in perfect time with his thrusting hips. He screamed back at Silini, but wordlessly, only to express the hurt he felt.

At first, the whip bit him terribly, then the acute pain changed gradually into a dull ache. Because of his previous orgasm, he was slow to come. Indeed, he felt that he would continue thrusting for ever and that the whipping and the torture of the infernal ring would never end. Silini, however, arched her body and cried out already after six or eight lashes; and still she told him, and Ginesse, to continue.

Not until she had climaxed for a second time did she take pity on him. She made him lift his shoulders and chest off her, supporting himself on his elbows, so that she could reach his nipples. She gripped the rings, pulling and twisting, and at last he came, pumping what was left of his come into her, while Ginesse loyally continued her work behind him. He screamed and fell over Silini, who put her arms around his neck and switched instantly from threats to endearments.

Ginesse too threw herself down beside them and caressed the buttocks she had flagellated so thoroughly. The two girls were enthusiastic about his performance, his willingness and his obedience. Silini would tell Atossa how good he had been. They were as tender and protective as they had been cruel just a moment earlier. How absurd, thought Fallou, but only for a moment. Just now, it was simply too good. Better not scrutinize the gift horse too thoroughly.

He was allowed to stay on top of Silini until his wet and limp member slipped out of her of its own accord. The girls went down to the brook to wash themselves, and to watch him do the same.

Then they walked him back to Atossa's tent. And his right owner looked at his striped rump and laughed, and that night she too showed him great tenderness, but in a way that he could only describe as motherly, or even sisterly. She made no demands on him, but permitted him to sleep by her side when he had told her all that the two girls had done to him. And Sarissa joined them, so that he woke up between his two mistresses the next morning.

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A few days later, they took him to Ariti again. There was a tingling feeling of anticipation inside him, mostly between his legs: he was very fond of her and she had always treated him well when she had him on loan from Atossa. But he was also a little bit scared. Whenever Atossa and Sarissa and the smith cooked something up, a male had to pay for it...

They made him kneel by the anvil. He was relieved to find that there was to be no piercing this time. But suspicious looking objects were heating up in the forge, which was tended by Sarissa; for once, Niki was absent from the show.

First on was a collar, similar to that worn already by Ippou, but with a chain that was somewhat shorter. He was very obedient and still while Ariti fitted the collar to his neck and hammered the hot rivet flat. Then he was told to rise.

Close by the forge an old tree trunk rested on the ground, propped up at both ends by stones that

kept it a few inches above it. The three women grabbed him and pushed him down on his back on top of it and along it. Atossa and Sarissa held him while Ariti tied him to the log with rawhide ropes, around and around, very tightly, until he could not move a muscle. This was when he began to suspect that all would not be a bed of roses.

A soaking wet stripe of coarse cloth was wound around the base of his testicle-bag. Sarissa fetched a large hammer and pushed it up his crotch, hard against his perineum, supporting it against the log. Now Ariti produced an incandescent stripe of iron from the forge, and, manipulating it with two tongs, she dexterously fitted it around the wet cloth and hammer-welded it shut while water sizzled and small wisps of steam rose.

There was a smell of burnt wool. Then she nodded, and Atossa threw a small bucket of water over the slave's sex, and there was more hissing and more steam. The women stood up and looked pleased. Then Ariti removed the protective wrapping and he felt the metal directly against his scrotum, still hot but not enough to sear him.

Sarissa and Atossa were fondling and kissing each other excitedly, but Ariti stood close by him, looking at him. She smiled at him and told him that he was very handsome. Please, girls, could she borrow him already this evening? Atossa looked at Sarissa, who laughed aloud, and said, of course, provided that he was fit to be used after what they were going to do to him.

And then they proceeded to do it. Ariti bent over the forge and took something that had been buried among the coals so that only a handle had been visible. It was a small branding iron. Atossa appeared, a small tong in her hand. With it, she gripped the skin at the tip of his penis and pulled. Horrified, he understood at last what was to happen to him, and he cried out, incoherently but eloquently. The women found this very funny.

Ariti pressed the iron against his member, counting aloud while she held it down, loud enough to be heard above his screaming, and when she lifted it, he bore the indelible brand of the Sisterhood on the part of him that the Sisters found the most delightful.

His lungs were empty and he was only able to hiccup disconsolately while tears streamed down his cheeks. They were in no hurry to release him, which was perhaps just as well. He also got until sundown to recuperate;

Atossa demanded no work from him but allowed him to rest. The pain in his branded member continued nearly unabated, however. His penis would continue to hurt for several days, that he knew. After the evening meal, Ariti arrived in order to fetch him, as part of the payment for work well done. He looked at her and found that in spite of what she had done to him, she was still very attractive to him and he longed to be possessed by her.

He felt no shame: he would serve her by Atossa's command and would not dream of doing it behind her back. Thus he trailed Ariti to her tent, quiet and submissive. Halanna was with Ariti. She offered to visit a friend, but Ariti wanted her to stay. She took no part in the proceedings, however. Halanna was in fact the only woman in camp who had never used Fallou; was there perhaps a prohibition against a daughter using her mother's slave?

Halanna was certainly not indifferent to males...Fallou knew that she had been served by Ippou several times.

Ariti was very friendly that night. She alternately sat on his face, hugged him and talked. Atossa had been very right about the ball-band. There was a smaller ring attached to it, and his owners would lead him by it during the marches. The branding was also a rare treat. It was a pity that you could

not brand the underside of the penis, only the top side. Otherwise, you might damage the urether, and then the slave would be unable to pee unless they cut off his cock!

The horror came back to him. When he had pushed it away, he thanked Ariti for being so considerate. She did not mind the irony but went along with it, assuring him that nobody would want to ruin such a nice chattel as he was, and then she kissed him wetly and rode his face again. And the collar? She would demonstrate the use of it tomorrow morning.

And morning came, and she led him out to the log, and with a large clincher and a sledgehammer, she nailed his chain to it, and he had to stay there until the evening, when Atossa came to fetch him and pried him loose with a crowbar. Had he noticed that there were tethering-stones around all campsites, large stones for the horses, with iron rings in them? She had found a new use for them.

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Chapter Seven: Niki

Niki had got an idea into her head. It was a very persistent and fascinating one, and she was constantly pestering both her mother Lykomaki and Hikati about it. She wanted to make her passage to womanhood already the next spring, when the horde came to the holy place. She was a big girl now, did they not understand that?

She had indeed changed since that day nearly a year ago, when Fallou first had met her and when she had made him serve her in Atossa's tent. She had grown. Her body had become somewhat less childish, she was actually looking as if she would grow breasts...though she had certainly not done so yet. Her manner was steadier too, with a longer attention span, but she still gave proof of that engagingly spontaneous cruelty that had always characterized her. But she would still be quite immature in five or six months time. Normally, she would have to wait for one more year, or even two.

But clearly the spectacle of Ginesse's initiation, and of the unheard-of ordeal that she had passed, and of the unusual spectacle afforded first by the flagellation of Fallou and then by that of Atossa, had fired her imagination. Ariti was also heard to suggest that Niki was man-crazy and that the prospect of more access to the males, and that of even having a slave of her own, was her real motivation. Perhaps she actually longed to taste the whip herself! The more cruel a woman was, the less averse she was, usually, to the thought of experiencing sexual pain.

Several of the sisters protested: the idea was abhorrent to them. Sex pain was for males exclusively. But some, Hikati and Atossa among them, agreed. Atossa called Sarissa as a witness. She did find rough treatment stimulating, did she not...if given by her, Atossa? Sarissa sat like carved out of wood until she at last laughed and admitted it.

After that scene at the Passage-place, she had often had fantasies about being whipped by Atossa or even by Ariti; or, as she expressed it, the Dark Ladies had sent her the thought. (Ariti seemed pleasantly surprised and beamed a smile at her.) Then, two or three other women came out and agreed with her. And Atossa herself said, as to herself, that the memory of what Ariti had done to her made her horny. She pointed out that some males too were stimulated by pain, Fallou for instance, or Ippou... did they remember him coming when he was pierced by the forge?

Those males were perhaps the most dangerous, those that had to be watched most carefully! They might be woman whippers in disguise! The other women relieved their embarrassment by laughing, and those that sat next to Fallou, they were Timesse and Silini pinched him playfully and accused him of being a dirty old male. "He should be hung by his thumbs and caned for it," said Timesse. But

Silini whispered in his ear that she might be open to suggestions, if only to find out what she should punish him for.

The older women, however, were still turning a deaf ear to Niki's pleading. Then one day, when the grass was already yellowing between the spring and the small rains, a rider came to the camp.

She was female, but not a Sister. She bore no tattoos, but her face, the rest of her was wrapped in a black hooded cloak, looked stiff and unnatural, like a mask, and she seemed to have neither eyelashes nor eyebrows. Fallou caught a glimpse of her, and felt a cold shiver running down his spine. There was *buruk*, spirit power, in her. That power takes little notice of humans and their wishes, for it is really not of their world. Even witches have but little of it. The dogs, which had barked at the strange horse as they always did, scurried away whining, with their tails between their legs.

Great deference was shown. The stranger was offered salt and meat, but only Hikati, Ariti, Atossa and some of the older women dared approach her. Even Silini kept her distance. The visitor was invited to Hikati's tent, and some of the women of the camp were brought to her, first of them the two women that had given birth in the past year, and their daughters. Ginesse and Silini were also called to the tent, and then Niki and Lykomaki. These two stayed long in the tent, and when they returned, they both looked dazed. Word spread that the strange woman had told Hikati and Lykomaki to grant the girl's request for an early Passage.

She seemed to have found some desirable quality in her, for she had intimated that some day, she would take her to a place the women called Tarrati and from where women of *buruk* like she were supposed to come. It seemed to be a terrible place. Still, the women spoke as if Niki would be greatly honoured if she were to be admitted to it.

Then the two new slaves were ordered before the stranger's face. She sat by the fire, in the place of honour opposite the tent door, her face shining ghostly white in the gloom. Her cloak surrounded her with a greater darkness, but a foot and an ankle revealed that she wore boots of the same kind as the horsewomen's. She spoke the language of the plains, but with an odd accent.

Fallou and Ippou were curtly told to kneel before her; they did not dare move a finger while she tested their rings and irons with her gloved hands, tugging and twisting. Neither of them felt the least stimulated by the procedure. Fallou felt a cold draft of horror across his back even when the strange lady inspected and handled his branded member. Then she laughed and smiled a stiff smile. This was the right way to treat males. Did their owners keep them under strict discipline?

Atossa told her that she kept a stern regime, and that Fallou seemed to accept this; his will was completely bent to her wishes. Aryana too was breaking in her man- steed in an appropriate manner. The strange woman nodded, indicating satisfaction. Then the two slaves were ordered out to the cooking-pits to fetch food, the best that the Sisterhood could offer.

The leading sisters ate with their guest, who then requested the use of Hikati's tent for the rest of the night, and of Ippou to serve her. Hikati moved over to Ariti. Ippou obeyed orders, white of face and trembling. Aryana seemed to doubt that she would have him back alive, but Timesse reassured her. Whatever else the black women did, they did not eat males.

Fallou tried to make Atossa tell him what she knew of the terrible visitor. She was not unwilling to speak. The black women were said by some to be incarnations of spirits, Dark Ladies that had briefly taken on human substance in order to meet living women and males face to face, and body to body.

But Atossa thought that they were women of flesh and blood, born and mortal like other females.

Their power came from Tarrati: there *buruk* resided in other beings, and they had put the horsewomen into this world and they wished to know how they fared. Thus, they sent these emissaries out in the plains to visit the Sisterhoods. Did they wish the horsewomen well?

Atossa said that she thought so, though they never intervened directly in their affairs. Where was Tarrati? Atossa would not tell, or perhaps she did not know. Were these superior beings gods, or goddesses? Atossa was certain that they were female, but what else they were, she did not know. She would not even give them a proper name.

They were sometimes called the Deathless Ones, but that was an averting-name only. Their real name no one must speak, even if she knew it. But she doubted that even Hikati did that. All the while, Sarissa listened in silence. She and Atossa did not make love, neither did they use Fallou sexually that night, although his branded member had healed well.

In the morning, Ippou returned to the living, pale and silent. Aryana threw herself at him, obviously relieved to have him back. She bombarded him with questions, but he could not tell her what had been done to him, or what he had been made to do. The visitor had breakfast alone with Hikati. Then she rode away, without much in the way of a farewell or of well-wishing. The women stared long after her, and the forenoon in the camp was unusually quiet. But Niki went about with an expression of half bliss, half fear: her ambition would be satisfied, and not only the glory but also the horror would be hers to experience.

Now when Niki was slated for passage within a few month's time, it was difficult to deny her male service. She let it be known that she wanted Ippou, but he was still having nightmares and nearly daily attacks of uncontrollable terror, with much shivering and weeping, and Aryana, unexpectedly protective, but who says a woman cannot be both cruel and nurturing, especially a horsewoman? Did not want to have him upset again and managed to make her decision stick. She was probably right; a session with Niki would have been a trial.

So the choice fell on Fallou instead. It was not Niki herself however but her mother who came to Atossa's tent, sat down and asserted her daughter's privilege. It was certainly a privilege shared by every woman of the Sisterhood, and one impossible to deny her. Atossa nodded gravely. Did she want him at once, and with the ring? But the time was not right yet; the subject of these negotiations was not told why. He would have to wait a few days. And he waited, wondering all the time what would happen to him.

Meanwhile, the grasslands were slowly turning ochre again, between the spring and the summer rains, and the game was on the move. The women too were moving camp; the spectacle that had become so familiar, the commotion and the excitement, repeated itself. When the carts had been loaded, Atossa summoned her slave.

He stood in front of her while she attached the ball- rope to him. This time, the rawhide strap had a small lengthwise slit at the end. First, Atossa threaded this end through the small ring that dangled from Fallou's ball-iron, then the other end of the lariat went through the slit and the whole length of the rope was pulled through. Atossa gave the lariat a couple of brisk jerks, and he felt the tug of the iron ring. He now expected to have his elbows tied, but to his amazement, they were left free. Atossa mounted her horse, and off they went.

During the march, it slowly dawned upon him that he was about as helpless as he had been with his arms immobilized. The way in which Atossa had attached the lariat meant that there was no knot that he might untie. To free himself, he would have to jerk the rope away from her. Such a tug of war, with an armed savage woman with a horse to help her, he could not win. So he was happy to

find that he was again an animal on a leash, with no possibility of flight to trouble his mind. At the same time, it was a great relief to have one's arms free.

And so they marched along, Atossa leading and Sarissa riding guard...or keeping company. Again and again, she came up by him, leant over and stroked his cheek. Being led across the plains by his sex, this reenactment of his capture, had become a familiar ritual that reinforced the bond between him and the two women, the bond that the rawhide rope now symbolized.

One evening, Sarissa whiled away the time before the sleep by cutting two straps out of a piece of rawhide. They were a little more than one and a half hand long and one finger across, except near the ends, where they were nicely tapered. With the point of her knife, Sarissa cut a slit lengthwise at the broad end and tied the tapered end into a knot. And then she ordered Fallou to her side, and she pulled each strap through one of his nipple-rings and fastened them in the same fashion as the ball-rope.

Now he had two convenient handles attached to his nipples. Atossa's merry laughter pealed out across the campsite and attracted curious horsewomen. They too laughed and came forward in order to tease the slave by tugging playfully at the tabs.

This, they agreed, was less cruel than the chain that dangled between Ippou's nipples, but more practical. And by the Nether Gods, the man had an erection! Did he want more nipple-pulling? Fallou, who until then had stood demurely in front of them with downcast eyes, raised them and said, yes, the more the better, within limits of course.

This piece of cheek brought down even more mirth. Atossa, still laughing, ordered him to raise his arms above his shoulders and gave him three not too hard lashes across his buttocks with her riding-whip. A male should be submissive and respectful in front of ladies. He took it without flinching, and the giggling of his admirers was interspersed with sounds of appreciation.

Fallou suspected that they envied his mistress. Serves them right, he thought. Serves them right for not being Atossa.

The land grew greener during the next day's march. Near the evening, they came to a pleasant little meadow near a brook that still had some live water, and Hikati decided that they should pitch their tents and stay here for a while. Rings of blackened stones marked the place as a campsite, but there was no pole in its centre.

This night, Fallou was bedded down comfortably with his owners, but none of them made any move to use him. This might have boded evil, but they were after all busy making love to each other. He would have to be patient for a while. Was it not enough to be near them—for a while, at least?

Early the next morning, he heard the sound of Ariti's hammer. She worked all day, but he did not go near her place. Indeed, he gave little thought to the matter. For he had nearly forgotten Niki's claim to his body, and he was startled to remember it suddenly when Lykomaki appeared as her own daughter's emissary to fetch him. And she wanted to borrow the ring too, of course. Atossa put him on his leash and handed him over to Lykomaki, but not until she had hugged him and told him to be good and make her proud. And off they marched.

He was led to Lykomaki's tent. Inside it, a nasty surprise awaited him. It was a log, just like the one upon which he had been tied when he got his ball-ring and was branded, and to which he had been chained the whole next day. No, not quite. For it was graced by what was undoubtedly the fruit of

Ariti's labour, an iron bracket, bent in a right angle. One end of it had been hammered into the wood. The other, horizontal part pointed along the log.

While Niki jumped up and down with childish glee, Lykomaki brought out her whip and told him, first to sit on the log, one leg on each side, facing the bracket, and then to lie down on his back. The whip was of course perfectly unnecessary. He knew that he would have to obey, or risk Atossa's wrath and punishment. There was a rustling sound, and sunlight fell briefly into the dusk of the tent. Ariti had arrived. She came forward to pat his cheek and exhort him to be his usual brave self, then she stepped back to watch the show.

Lykomaki spoke again. Now he must move down, impaling himself on the bracket. She cracked her whip in a threatening fashion. He would have to perform. Fallou was stiff with horror but remembered that the iron rod ended in a merciful little ball. Good old Ariti.

Bracing himself with his hands, he inched down until he felt the cold metal touch his anus. The ball seemed huge, but he told himself that this was just his imagination. It was no larger than the horn-member, and the rod itself was much thinner. He hunched and managed to get the thing inside his body. It hurt. A sudden cramp contracted his sphincter, and he felt himself blanch. Lykomaki clicked her tongue encouragingly, Ariti cackled in her corner and Niki screamed enthusiastically at him, telling him very explicitly to continue.

He tried to get a grip on himself and get done with it. The sooner, the better. Inching himself down the log like a worm on a twig, he felt the accursed rod enter him gradually. The cramps returned but subsided, giving way to another feeling that was similar to the one he had experienced when Atossa rammed the raping-tool into him, but still different. For then he had been completely passive, and the horn-member had moved.

Now the rod was completely immobile, and he was moving on it like bait on a hook. The new feeling, terrifying and still not entirely unpleasant, rose and engulfed his lower body, but not enough to make him forget the searing pain from his anus. And the metal remained cold, cold and unyielding.

Finally, a new sensation came from the ball. His exertions brought him no further. Both Lykomaki and Ariti bent over him to ascertain the fact. Yes, it had touched the bottom of his hole. Lykomaki was pleased enough to actually smile at him. Even Niki was silent; but she was breathing heavily, and her eyes shone.

And then Ariti produced a clamp, made out of a heavy strip of iron, and fitted it across his throat. It was wide enough to accommodate his ordinary collar, but clearly not large enough to let him escape. And with two large nails, she hammered it down on the log and he was unable to free himself from the iron rod that impaled him. Even though his arms and legs were free, he would never be able to extricate himself. He would stay impaled as long as Niki and Lykomaki pleased. And glancing down, he found that he had a half-erection.

His limbs did not remain free, however. Lykomaki grasped his wrists and pulled his arms up over his head unceremoniously; Ariti was there again, tying them to a clincher he had not noticed. His ankles were tied too, so that his legs were on both sides of the log. He would not have been more helpless if his very flesh had been nailed to the wood.

How long would he have to remain in this condition? Until the women had lost interest in playing games with him, no doubt. And he did not know what games they intended to play... except that he presumed that Niki would use him sexually. But if he knew Niki and her mother right (or Ariti, for that matter) that would come as the last act of a long and creative series of games. It was reassuring

that Ariti was present, however. Ariti was a steady and sober old girl and would not let him come to real harm.

Niki was beside herself with delight. When Ariti stepped back, the girl came up to him and stood by the log, looking down on her captive with a light in her eyes that he had already learned to recognize and fear. Her chest heaved and her mouth was half open. She decided however not to waste time and effort on mere words. Instead, she grasped Fallou's nipple straps and pulled. She pulled until his aureoles were just the tops of inch-high cones of skin and flesh, and only the fear of encouraging the child unduly kept him from groaning.

Niki released the pull, and then she pulled again, and again, each time a little harder, until Lykomaki actually spoke out and Niki let go and stood panting by the log, thinking of her next move. Decent of the old hag. But they should not of course want to damage a slave who was after all somebody else's property. For the moment, Fallou had completely forgotten that Lykomaki had been decent to him in her rough way and given him pleasure more than once.

Niki now turned her attention to the prisoner's sex. His legs were so far apart that she could seat herself on the log between them while attending to him. Fallou tried to concentrate on what the girl was doing, and not to think of what she might do. But at first, the little she-devil was surprisingly gentle. She seemed more intent on exploring his anatomy than torturing it. A word of guidance or two came from Ariti (good old Ariti).

It was soon obvious that Niki actually wanted to give him a hard-on. She could of course immediately see what worked and what did not. Holding his balls in one hand and massaging his rod with the other, she had soon produced a perfectly satisfactory erection. Now, there was no point to hiding one's reaction. He allowed himself to breathe heavily and to make little sounds of satisfaction. And Niki took her eyes from her work and quite unexpectedly, she gave Fallou a brilliant smile which seemed completely devoid of any overtones of cruelty. But he knew better.

Surely he knew better. Had he not seen her in action before? He allowed himself a short moment of curiosity about his ability to derive sexual stimulation out of fear and helplessness, and even pain. That erection had come very rapidly. But that was perhaps just as well: it pleased his tormentors and it might just conceivably shorten his suffering and bring him pleasure, even.

Now, Niki was satisfied with her handiwork. She stepped back and bent down momentarily; when she straightened again, she had a many-tailed scourge in her hand. She asked Ariti to help keep the slave going, and Ariti came and squatted down by his side, reaching out to caress his member. Decent old girl; he wished that he had been alone with her, it would have been pleasant, even hooked and nailed to a tree trunk like this. No, especially like this.

But Niki stood straddling him, facing him, and she raised her right arm, and she started to whip his chest systematically with the scourge. The pleasure Ariti was giving him mixed with pain now, more and more of it. Niki struck out, alternatively forehanded and backhanded, hitting him right and left, and she did not spare his nipples.

He grimaced. Soon he could not contain himself any more, and panted, and gasped, until his gasps began to sound like screams. He had better scream, he knew that. When horsewomen were in the mood that Niki was in just now, then they loved to see signs of terror, and to hear the sounds of pain. Giving them what they wanted was — or might at least be — a way of pleasing them and of bringing relief nearer. But all the time, he kept feeling horny, and this was really amazing.

And then Niki wanted his sex, and Ariti let go of it, and Niki backed off a step or two to make room

for herself. Fallou's worst fears were coming true. Niki began whipping his belly, and the rod that was lying exposed and helpless on it, and his ball bag and the insides of his thighs, and he thought, praise be the Upper and the Nether Gods that she is using such a light scourge, that stings and burns but does not bruise. But it did sting; and the utter absurd cruelty of it made him break down completely and he screamed, not because it was proper or expedient but because he had to, and he screamed louder and more desperately than he had done since he had been hung and whipped on that night, on the Passage-place on the hill of the fires.

Niki had worked herself into an ecstasy, and she was yelling obscene abuse at him at the top of her voice. You man-worm! You dog, you dog-shit, you worthless offal, you silly breastless prick-bearer, you male! And then she told him what she would really like to do to him: whip every last patch of his skin, cut him to pieces slowly, crush his stones with Ariti's tongs, cut his member to pieces... and then nail his living remains to the log. Finally, it was Ariti who put an end to the performance.

Niki stood, flushed, her tongue hanging out, and looked at her victim for a moment. Then she threw the scourge away, knelt and began ministering to him, taking his now flaccid penis between her palms and making soothing sounds, as if she actually felt compassion.

Fallou gasped and hiccupped, trying to regain this breath. At last he got a grip on himself and reassessed the situation. If Niki really meant what she had said, then she must be insane (or, as his people expressed it, the Nightly Ones must have taken her reason away from her). But she had only been giving free reins to her fantasies, of course. At least he hoped so. More than ever, he was grateful that he was not left alone with this child-devil.

Strangely enough, his virility returned to him. How could this vicious little brat, quite immature as yet, have this effect on him? Or was it the situation, did he actually derive pleasure from it? He tried to forget his burning skin and enjoy the treatment. It did not continue for long, however. Niki darted away to a dark corner of the tent, and when she returned after a moment, she was holding the sex-ring.

So she was ready for the grand finale, at last. She pushed the ring in place, very roughly and after quite a bit of experimenting. He grimaced and she saw it and wrenched his member savagely and taunted him: that did hurt, did it not? Served him right, feeling pain where males got all their pleasure! That was not true, thought Fallou.

He got pleasure from his nipples and his ass-hole too, even now. And there was that other pleasure, that came not from outside but from inside, and which he felt whenever Atossa handled him, or even when he just thought of Atossa. She had often done this to him, chastising his member before using it, and before she gave him the other, physical pleasure, and relief. And so he thought of her.

Whatever was done to him, it was because Atossa wanted it to happen. Whatever he suffered, he suffered it for her. When Niki was giving him pain, then Atossa was guiding her hand...Atossa was the ultimate, the real pain-giver and pleasure-dispenser. And his thought, when Niki gave the ring a last tug, was that he loved Atossa.

Now Niki was massaging him again. Again, he responded, and his member was hard as a stick, and every movement of Niki's hands hurt. And Niki spread her legs wide, standing across the log and the man on it, and without releasing her grip, she started ramming herself down on his member, impaling herself on it.

She was extremely tight. The pain of the ring increased, but mostly because she was pulling the skin of his penis violently downward, for she had scarcely got even the gland inside her yet. He

whimpered, and soon he screamed. Still, she was clearly hurting herself nearly as badly as she was hurting him. Gasping and contorting her face, she thrust and thrust and thrust, savagely, in a rage of cruelty to him and to herself.

Her mouth was ajar and hoarse rasping sounds came from it, audible only in the intervals between the slave's screams. Her eyes bulged. Fallou saw this only dimly, for he was tightly enclosed in the shell that pain and terror had created around him, but she seemed to be having a fit.

And then Niki stayed herself. She straddled him, still grasping his sex but with scarcely two inches of it inside her, and she seemed completely oblivious of her surroundings, even of the male that she had impaled herself on. And then she howled with despair and pulled herself loose, clutching her crotch with both hands, and rushed away and Fallou could hear her wailing from the sleeping-place in the darkest part of the tent. He realized that she had failed. She had thought it all up, she had staged the show, she had intended to take out all her pent-up resentment and cruelty on him and crown it by raping him...and she had failed. The wailing was that of a lost soul.

Lykomaki moved over to her daughter and tried to comfort her. But Ariti came up to the log and stood, looking down at him. A ghost of a smile seemed to hover around her. She bent down and patted his cheek. Had it been bad? Was he in great pain? She did not leave him but remained where she was, gazing at him. The sparse light from the door fell across her from the side, sculpting her shoulders, breasts and belly into a female landscape that managed to arouse him again, in spite of the pain and the horrors that he had experienced.

She spoke gently to him, "A little bit of sex would be nice now, would it not?" Perhaps she should mount and use him. That hook would presumably feel lovely inside him when Ariti was riding him at a brisk trot! She stood with her hands on her broad hips, her breasts thrust out and her feet apart, and she was fearsome and still lovely, and he said, yes please, do. "On the other hand," she continued, "it might do you good to remain where you are, nailed to the log, until the morning. A good night's rest and all that."

But Niki's sobbing and hiccuping continued, and Lykomaki spoke to Ariti, who went over to her, and they whispered together for a while. Then Ariti returned to Fallou and looked at him thoughtfully. She leant over him, and another whispered conversation was held. Fallou nodded consent and assured Ariti of his good will and his obedience; Ariti freed his arms and feet, then she fetched a crowbar and pried his neck loose. Moving like an inchworm, Fallou slowly disengaged from the hook. He paused when only the ball remained inside him. Then a last movement and a grimace of pain, and he was free.

Ariti steadied him when he got to his feet. He staggered over to Niki, fell to his knees in front of her and offered his services. She looked at him with large, red-rimmed eyes but was silent; Ariti however ordered him curtly to get on with it. He came down beside her, he spoke softly to her. She should not despair. She would grow up a great and fearsome horsewoman, a master of men, and men would fear her and delight in serving her. He too would serve her willingly, if it pleased her.

He kissed her nearest nipple and tickled the other. She would go to Tarrati and become a sorceress, and she would learn how to rule and use males; and surely she would be given males to use, young boys at first, but in a couple of years she would ride grown men with ease. She squirmed and drew a deep breath and he kissed the other nipple, sucking it cautiously. He would lie on the log again when she returned, and she could do as she pleased with him, if Atossa permitted it.

He returned to the first nipple and probed her crotch; she spread her legs willingly and he slid a finger down her slit. She moved her hips in response. His finger entered between her labia, and they

were wet; he took her nipple between his lips and sucked again, a little harder. She groaned. His finger played around her vagina. She whimpered a little, but when he desisted, she told him in a thick voice to continue.

He raised himself on an elbow, looking down at her. He saw a child that had hurt herself...no, who had been hurt by the demon inside her...and he had no time to put a name to his own feeling at that moment. Instead, he rested himself between her legs and put his face to her sex. He kissed her. He used his tongue between her labia, he entered gingerly into her vagina. He made her raise her knees a bit, and sliding his arms up under her thighs, he reached her nipples and grasped them. Now he went seriously to work, serving her as he used to serve his regular mistresses, and she began moving her hips rhythmically while her hands found his hair and grasped it and pulled. He was relieved.

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## **Chapter Eight: Finale and Coda**

They brought Hikati back to the camp unconscious, lashed to the back of her horse with her own lasso. The older women came to her tent, and Ariti and Silini joined them; the rest of the Sisterhood gathered outside, whispering between them. Ariti came out briefly and told them that the chiefess had cried out suddenly during the hunt, clutched her chest and fallen off her steed. Clearly, the thread on her loom had run out, for only rarely could an evil spirit touch a great sorceress such as Hikati.

The horsewomen nodded agreement, and some of them began drifting away, but a few remained sitting outside the tent until nightfall. Nobody had any time for the males.

Both Atossa and Sarissa were very muted this evening, and Fallou deemed it wise to keep completely silent. Late in the night, Ariti entered, her face rigid with emotion, took Atossa aside and spoke to her in such a low voice that he could not hear what she was saying, but Atossa seemed to put a question to Ariti, she received an affirmative nod and fell silent for a while. Then she spoke to Ariti again, they embraced and Hikati's elder daughter left.

Fallou woke up in the hour before first light, when the spirit of man and woman is at low ebb, and the Nameless Ones walk the earth. He imagined at first that he had heard the scream of a distant bush-cat, then fear struck him and he thought, banshi... until it was clear that the wailing was human. The death-song had begun, and the old gynarki was dead.

Fallou did regret her passing, for she had once made the decision that he would live, and not go to the killing-pole, and she had always treated him as gently as could be expected of a horsewoman when she was using him; but there was also a vague foreboding in his heart. Death walked among them. Would she be satisfied with Hikati's old hide and leave them alone?

His two owners rose and went out; he followed them discreetly at a distance. Women were already gathering around the tent of the chiefess, carrying torches, and Atossa and Sarissa bent down, smeared their faces with dirt and joined in the chorus. But when the sisters saw them, they fell silent and looked at each other; and a voice was heard, "Atossa! Atossa gynarki!" The other women raised their torches high and took up the cry, "Atossa gynarki! Atossa shall be our woman-ruler!"

Atossa gestured acceptance and embraced all the women as they thronged around her, old and young, and more of them arriving every moment. The grey streak at the horizon that no one had noticed grew red and was seen by all. A new day was coming, and Atossa was chiefess of the Sisterhood, Sarissa was the gynarki's companion and Fallou too had probably risen in rank... if any

such thing could be said to exist among beings as lowly as man-slaves. Ariti and Silini emerged from the tent and joined them, very solemn, and were also embraced and kissed by Atossa. She entered the tent and was gone; Fallou suddenly felt the cold of the morning air and shivered, and Sarissa took him by his arm and led him home.

Hikati was decked out in her best finery and carried to the top of a small hill, just a long arrow-shot away from the camp. She was laid out on a platform built out of sods and covered with furs and fine patterned drapes, and the sisters gathered again in the cool of the evening to see her off to the Ever-flowing Springs. Fires were lit, torches were raised on poles to light the ceremony. The death-song was chanted again, rising and falling under a sky bright with stars.

Fallou sat with the other males outside the circle of women. Old Kakou, Hikati's own male, waited apart from the others, and close by him sat two of the women, Timesse and Ipparki. Fallou wondered what would become of Kakou now. A dead woman's companion usually inherited her slave or slaves, while the rest of her belongings went to her daughters, but Hikati had no widow. Kakou looked queer; his eyes gazed blindly into space and he was rocking slowly to and fro. But now the singing ceased, and Silini approached the platform, leading the gelding that had carried Hikati.

The animal was uneasy, flicking his ears back and forth, and his eyes were red with the light of the torches. Ariti stood in front of the bier, a large sledgehammer in her hands; she sang an incantation while the sisters rose expectantly. The hammer swung and struck, and the horse dropped like a grotesque, articulated toy and the women screamed approval in unison. Blood was gathered in a bowl and brought to Atossa; she stood up, removed boots, breech-clout and all and smeared herself with it, head to foot.

Again, the crowd roared. Two or three women started butchering the carcass of the horse; it would follow its mistress and serve her, as it had in life, but it would not need its body, only its spirit; anyway, horse-meat was a delicacy which could be had only after great sacrifices to the gods, and should not be left to rot. When the choice cuts had been sent to the communal pot, lower down on the hillside, the rest of the carcass was arranged below the platform. But the head was cut off and raised above it, on Hikati's own lance.

A hush fell. The waiting women glanced around expectantly. Then, Ipparki and Timesse appeared in the firelight, leading Kakou between them.

Not until now did it dawn upon Fallou that the man was drugged. He did not seem to see where he was going; his will, what little of it that remained after long years of slavery, had been taken away from him and his eyes were wide open but unseeing. The two women steered him to the foot end of the platform; there they threw him to the ground. Eager hands grasped him, turned him on his back and held him, arms above his head. Suddenly, a completely naked woman stood by his feet, looking down on him. It was Sarissa, looking like a painted demon in the firelight. A murmur was heard. She knelt and sat down on Kakou's hips.

She seemed to do something to him. By raising himself a little, Fallou managed to see what it was. She was caressing him, stroking him, and Fallou heard faintly above the sounds of the waiting crowd that she was soothing him with words. Kakou moved his head a little from side to side, but made no sound.

She was holding his member, working it, making it grow between her palms. Now, Fallou saw more than heard Kakou groan. Sarissa was in no hurry, but worked up a good erection; the onlookers commented favourably on it. Hikati would be pleased. Then Sarissa raised herself a little over the helpless body below and, guiding the member with her hands, she took it into herself and sat down

on it, using him.

She rode him slowly at first, leaning over him, supporting her hands on his shoulders. She praised him loudly: he gave pleasure, he was good. He had served his mistress well and she would be well served by him again. All the while, she observed him closely. Kakou threw his head right and left and his body began to heave. Suddenly, Sarissa shifted her hands to his throat. Her fingers closed around it, she pressed and moved her hips violently, and not until then did Fallou understand what he saw. It was a human sacrifice: Sarissa was strangling Kakou while she raped him.

Kakou's eyes bulged, his face contorted, his tongue hung out of his gaping mouth and his body rose in a great arch under his rider, and in the moment of his death, he came inside her.

Fallou fell to the ground while the women screamed insanely. It had happened again. One of the women he belonged to had killed ritually. The night rocked and rotated around him and as from a great distance, he heard the sisters raise the death chant again. A hand touched him, and he recoiled in terror. But a voice spoke kindly to him, and it was Ginesse; and she raised him to his feet and held him and reassured him. Hikati and old woman Death had got their due and were satisfied.

She led him slowly down the hillside, both of them stumbling in the dark, following the singing women down to the cooking-fire and the pot. There she sat him down and waited, her arm around his neck. He could not keep himself from shaking, and was ashamed. His own people had after all done this sort of thing not too many generations ago. The custom had fallen into disuse, but he suspected that peace and rising prices of slaves, not better manners, had brought this about.

Ginesse was still holding him when Sarissa appeared in front of them. He froze. Sarissa knelt down in front of him, took his hands and spoke to him. Now Kakou had followed Hikati to the Springs, just as the horse had done, to serve her until they both faded away and were carried along by the night-wind. H

ikati would be pleased to have him; he would be much better off with her than in the world above, worked by all and comforted by none, living out his miserable years until his thread reached its end or until somebody took pity on him and clubbed him... would he not? He would be young again, and Hikati would be young, and they would never know hunger or thirst in the dry season, for surely the Springs flowed without end. She insisted until he calmed down and felt the tension and the fear gradually leave him.

She leaned closer: what had been done was done only when a great sorceress died. He would not be required to follow Atossa on her last ride, unless he asked for it; Sarissa would be his sole owner then, if she lived, or else she would have committed him to some other woman who would care for him. Ariti would be pleased to take him on, that she knew for certain. She knew that he liked Ariti...no, she was not displeased, she loved Ariti herself, but not as much as Atossa, of course. Ariti was very popular among the sisters.

Sarissa's presence would be required during the ceremonial feasting, and Atossa's, too. And Ariti and Silini would have to be there, as next of kin. But would Ginesse take Fallou down to Atossa's tent and comfort him? They would save some nice pieces of boiled meat for her return, the feasting would continue until daybreak anyway.

And Ginesse undertook this mission of mercy and led Fallou away to the camp, with a torch to light them. Inside the tent, she put the torch carefully away in the fire basket and put Fallou on the bed. She held him. She spoke to him; she insisted that he must agree that what Sarissa had said was true, and that the right thing had been done; and he was too exhausted and emotionally spent to gainsay

her. Yes, the customs of the Sisterhood and of the Grasslands had been honoured. Ginesse kissed him and rolled him over on his back.

For a fleeting moment, the image of Kakou flitted through his mind, but he banished it. She came down on top of him, held his wrists and pushed his legs apart with her knees, so that he would lie under her the way the unfree women, the horseless and weapon-less women did when men used them; she raised her hips a little and moved his member with one hand so that she would not hurt it. It came to lie between her thighs.

Then she rested, silently, while he savoured the warmth and the heaviness of her body. She was not fully grown, of course, and he found himself wishing that she would have been heavier, robbing him of more of his will and stilling his disquiet better by pinning him down more decisively. But Ginesse was good; and soon he caught himself thinking of the grassy little hollow near where the horses grazed.

Ginesse let go of his wrists and suffered him to put his arms around her neck. She rubbed her face against his. The memory of what he and Ginesse and Silini had done worked its magic on him, and he was calm. But Ginesse felt his member stiffen and rise before he did, and she must have recalled their game too; for she parted her thighs a little, permitting his penis to come up and be held in her crotch, caught in the little space between it and the smooth insides of her thighs. She made a reassuring sound and squirmed on top of him; she too was pleased with the memory.

After a while, she broke her silence. He had been a good and obedient slave that time, when Silini had helped her. The thought of it made her horny. Would he be capable of serving her tonight?

Yes, he thought so; and stammering, he tried to convey to her his feelings toward her and Silini, and what a pleasant memory they had given him. Aha, said Ginesse, which had he liked best, the fucking or the whipping? Boldly he said, both. She laughed at him. All right, he would have both again. She wanted him to lie on top of her and use her (these were her actual words) the way he had done with Silini. No one was looking, so she would not lose standing among women, and he would keep silent about it. He assured her of his loyalty. But first the whipping. It was a pity that he could not be whipped while he was using her, the way she herself had done that time, but never mind. She would do it before the copulation.

So she rose and rolled him over on his face and uncoiled the whip she wore around her waist. The remains of the torch were still giving off a little light. She stood above him, with one foot on the small of his back, and then she gave him six lashes, but they were not as hard as she could have made them. And then she threw herself at him and he mounted her and was a man again, and he entered her and possessed her, working steadily in and out while she writhed under him and made curious little sounds that he had never heard a horsewoman make before. Briefly, he wondered if she was a pervert, and then he asked himself what that word meant, here among these women.

He held himself back until he heard and felt her let go. After the orgasm, he remained as he was for quite some time, and Ginesse did not seem to object. The memory of the pleasure and the aching of his rump filled him. Then he rolled away, and Ginesse remained with him until he went to sleep. Later that night, he woke up and she was gone, but now he was calm. He listened for a while to the distant sounds of the carousing women, and then he slept again.

When morning came, it was Sarissa who was sleeping by him, her arm across him. He did not move for fear of disturbing her. Only briefly did he feel queasy when, close to his face, he saw her right hand. Finally, a full bladder and an aching member forced him to disengage himself and rise, but Sarissa did not move. He found Atossa on Sarissa's other side. Both of them slept the whole morning

away.

But on the crest of the hill, Hikati and Kakou and the horse waited for the carrion birds to pick their bones clean and release their spirits for the ride to the Springs, and he could already see the first of the black dots circling high above when he returned to the tent.

Being a chieftess made no great difference to Atossa. She had always been a very respected member of the Sisterhood, not least after her ordeal in the Passage- place, and of course a chieftess had no power to command and coerce other women. Her new role meant simply that her advice was asked more often, and that common decisions were referred to her when there was no general agreement.

She led the communal hunts, of course, but hunting was done in small groups of two or three at this time of the year. Everybody knew when it was time to move camp, and where it would be moved.

Fallou did his chores as usual, and had not expected otherwise. Ginesse came by now and then, smiled and patted him, but did never comment on that night in Atossa's tent. But Silini and Ariti went about smeared all over with ashes, looking like ghosts, and no sexual intercourse with them was permitted. This taboo would be in force for three cycles of the moon. Gradually, his relations with Sarissa returned to what they had been: he honoured, feared and obeyed her, but no horror surrounded her anymore. She was a normal horsewoman, just like any other, except that she owned him. The women were savage, but fully human, dangerous, but not completely unpredictable. He understood them.

Having no witch was a problem, of course. Silini had been apprenticed to her mother, but was not fully qualified yet. There were still things to learn and ceremonies to observe. It was agreed that this autumn, Silini would ride to the camp of a great sorceress further east and ask to be accepted as her pupil for the winter; that would probably be enough, and next summer, she would be able to preside, with Atossa, over Niki's rites of passage.

Ginesse was devastated, "Could she not accompany her lover?" But this idea was not received favourably by the women, and Atossa vetoed it. They would be three women short that way, and that was too much. Aryana spoke up, "Ginesse could move in with her, share her tent until they went into winter quarters, and share her furs and Ippou then. Silini would not mind, would she?" Silini looked long at Ginesse, sighed and accepted the arrangement. She must do her duty to the sisters, as the mores of the horsewomen demanded, and it would be very exciting to meet the famous old witch, of course.

So the life of the Sisterhood resumed its normal course.

The daily work was done, the territory was scoured for game, the time-honoured trails were followed. What else could a horsewoman do, or the horsewoman's slave? Fallou did his chores, served his two owners and their friends and trudged across the plains, towed by his balls by Atossa or Sarissa.

One day, when they wanted to hunt together on the march, they handed him over to Ariti for safekeeping. And Ariti accepted the job merrily, and while she was putting him on his leash, she told him that she had rescued and saved the arse-bracket and the neck-band, and she had plenty of nails, too!

When they were in winter camp, she would bring out the hardware and hook and nail him to a log and ride and use him, and then leave him as he was, impaled and helpless, perhaps for a day and a night and another day, and use him again, and again. Would not that be terrible? Yes it would, said he, and he feared her and he longed to be used by her, and it showed. She kissed him and then she

paid out the rope and mounted her pony.

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The storm broke without warning. Most of the women were out of camp, hunting together. One of the scouts — it was Ipparki — galloped in, screaming at the top of her voice that the Red Sisters were on the rampage, and approaching. An infernal noise broke out, women ran in all directions and the males tried to make themselves invisible. The women had scarcely time to arm themselves, find their horses and form up before a ragged line of yelling riders appeared over the crest of the nearest ridge, waving lances.

They were too many. Atossa screamed a command, for in battle all would instinctively follow and obey her, arrows flew and two or three gaps appeared in the line of the raiders. But still too many remained, and there was clearly nothing to do except to roll with the punch.

The defenders swung out on the flanks, and the two battle lines dissolved in a series of individual duels. Fallou stood as transfixed. Then he saw one of the attackers and Aryana coming toward him with a noise like thunder, screeching and exchanging blows with lance-butt and club. The sight tore him out of his trance, and he dived under a cart. The horses flashed past but something big hit the ground with a thud. He raised his head cautiously.

It was the red woman. She was quite and unmistakably dead, her temple crushed by a blow of Aryana's club. She was on her back, her unseeing eyes looking into the sun. She was a sight: her head was shaved, and it, like most of her completely naked body, was painted with red in strange patterns. She was not tattooed. Her chin had fallen, making her look amazed at her own sudden demise, perhaps? Fallou could see that her teeth were filed. In the distance, the screaming, the neighing of terrified horses and the sound of hoofs died away.

Fallou looked around. The only living thing to be seen was the dead woman's horse. It must have been trained to remain with its rider, he thought, for its normal behaviour would surely have been to follow the other galloping animals. It was a nice roan mare, with simple tack, but a fine spotted fur was strapped across her back and a bow in its case and a full quiver hung by her side, with a large water-skin opposite. The only thing on the dead woman's body was a knife, the sheath hanging by a thong around her neck.

Without thinking, Fallou walked up to the horse. She shied a little at first, then she calmed down and let him catch its single rein and tie it to a cartwheel. There was still nobody near. Fallou looked at the dead woman again and tried to remember what he had heard about her kind and their habits. They were not nice. They kept female slaves, not males: captured males were tortured to death and then eaten.

Once, when Atossa had tied him on his back, which she still did occasionally, she had wanted to spin out the foreplay, and she had told him horror-stories about these terrible women. They used to crush the testicles of their captives, like this. Atossa had demonstrated the method with two flat cloth-beating sticks tied together at one end. She had not squeezed hard, just a little, and he had not been seriously alarmed, knowing Atossa and her ways.

He felt completely safe with her, apart from the likelihood that she would inflict pain on him, and that he accepted as a matter of course. But the thought of what these strange women did had been terrifying; he knew that for a male, this was the ultimate pain, and that it would be intensified by the horror of knowing that he was being emasculated. He did not want this to happen to him.

He looked at the horse. Something within him made a decision. He must save himself. In a sudden

hurry, he rushed into Atossa's empty tent and found a bag of pemmican. He returned, took the dead woman's knife, mounted the horse and trotted away, scanning the horizon suspiciously. Still without thinking, at least consciously, he chose a direction that would take him to the coast.

He rode with many pauses, keeping a sharp lookout and avoiding high ground. He did not want to meet these she-devils again. He saw nobody. But as he rode, he became conscious of his rings and his neck-iron and the dangling chain again, in a new way; he had of course not been on horseback since he left En-Tor's repulsive entourage. The experience made him think of his life among the horsewomen, and of the women themselves. That time had been a part of his life, and he had belonged among them.

What had become of them? Aryana had killed the woman whose horse he was now riding, but what had happened to Atossa and Sarissa? Were they dead on the ground, or wounded, or even worse, captives? And the rest of them, the sturdy and merry Ariti, Ginesse who had been good to him and who was bound to him by a common, unique memory, Silini with her hopes and ambitions, the frank and erect Halanna, Atossa's daughter... he even caught himself hoping that Niki was safe and sound. She was a terrible brat, probably utterly rotten, and still he recoiled from the thought of her body limp and dead in the grass, mangled by hooves, smeared with blood. Would she ever make her Passage? Would she ever go to Tarrati?

He tried to think of his home instead, the white city by the sea, the dark and cool house where he had been born in one of the high-ceilinged dark-panelled rooms. Wryly, he thought that he was back were it all began, as if more than a year of his life had simply vanished. He was on his way again. But then he felt the rings anew, and his mind returned, against his will, to the women he knew and had lived with, and been used by, and feared and loved, and his sorrow and his feeling of loss were unreasonable, perhaps, but he could not drive them away. In a sense, he would never be free again.

He found a water-hole, watered the horse and drank his fill, in spite of the evil taste of the bitter water. He had to save his own supply as long as possible. Then he rode on slowly until the sun sank below the horizon like a red hot iron ball and both the sky and the grasslands turned purple in the gathering dusk. At last he paused and let his steed graze.

He did not light a fire, but he chewed some pemmican. It grew darker, but he was finding his night-eyes and he could see a little. There was a rock outcrop close by; perhaps he should find out if anybody was bold enough use fire this night? He climbed it with great caution; it would not do to break a leg.

His heart stopped. Some distance away — it was difficult to judge how far — a fire burned on the top of a hill. Whose fire? He weighed the situation for a long time, but without conscious thought. Then he climbed down, armed himself with the bow and the quiver and started a long, stealthy approach, leading the horse. After half an hour or so, he felt it getting wind of something, and did not dare bring it along further for fear that it might betray him by a sudden whinnying. The people around the fire might well be deadly enemies. He tied the horse and continued alone, worrying about sentinels, but found none.

He had arrived at the foot of the hill. Horses moved in the dark, but made no sound. He could see but one human being, though there must be several around the fire. She had been tied to the broken trunk of a dead tree. Was she one of the Red Sisters? Then her captors would be his own horsewomen. Should he then steal away and try to keep his new-won freedom? Or was she one of his own.

Very cautiously, he crept forward on all fours. Somebody rose in front of him, near the fire, a black

silhouette, impossible to identify. The captive woman started to sing, and he recognised words, words of hate and defiance. So she was a woman of his own Sisterhood. His hair stood on end, and he recognised her. It was Atossa.

He must save her. Forgetful of his resolve to regain his freedom, he continued his advance, crawling on his belly so as not to catch the light of the fire. He hoped to the Nether Gods that his rings would not snag.

In front of him, the song rose to a savage crescendo. He raised his head, the enemy woman was standing in front of Atossa. With one hand, she grasped one nipple and pulled, with the other she plunged a narrow, shining object into and through her aureole, piercing it. He shivered with the memory, but Atossa did not scream, nor did her song of defiance falter.

The enemy woman pierced the other breast. Fallou was now so close that he could see that there were two other women around the fire; both sat up now, their eyes fixed on Atossa. A little closer... it was an unfamiliar bow, and he was out of practice. And then his hand touched human skin, and a woman gasped and whispered: who's there? and he recognised Sarissa's voice. He bade her to keep silent and got his knife out; he could feel that she had been brutally tied with rawhide straps, crisscrossing her body, digging deep into her flesh. Her arms were bound behind her back; he freed them, handed her the knife and took store of the scene in front of him.

Nobody had taken alarm. The standing woman returned to the fire, but her eyes were blinded by the light and she did not see what had happened. She bent down, took a firebrand and returned to Atossa. He must act. He rose on one knee, drew the bow and shot her in the back. He heard the sound of the arrow hitting and she toppled, coughing. Atossa fell suddenly silent.

Where were the other two enemy women? One of them sprang to her feet, screaming with rage, a bow in her hands and looking for her unseen adversary. He loosed two arrows in quick succession and she froze, dropped her weapon and fell to her knees, then down on all fours before rolling over on the ground. A sound and a movement to one side caught his attention: the third woman was rushing him, a knife in her hand. There was time for one arrow only, and she ducked and was over him.

He got one knee up, blocked her knife-arm and managed to get a hold on her wrist. But her other hand caught his throat, and he could not remove it. She was strong, and she thought of death only. She grew dim in front of his eyes and he thought, Kakou; and then she collapsed all of a sudden on top of him, blood gushing from her mouth. He pushed her away.

Sarissa stood over them, knife in hand, and the blade was red to the hilt. He was weak with the shock, and his legs failed him, though he was repeating the name Atossa, Atossa, over and over. But Sarissa cut Atossa loose, put her on the ground and reached out to remove the two skewers from her breasts. Atossa shook her head and said hoarsely, "Don't. They will bleed too much... let the wounds heal." Sarissa hesitated, but obeyed.

Instead, she pulled out a little box, and she treated the wounds with salve, just as Atossa had done that time ages ago, under the shady tree where her horse grazed.

Atossa made no sound. Fallou managed to rise and he stumbled over to her. Sarissa was peering attentively into the night.

There was nobody there. She checked that their foes were safely dead, then she collected two bows and a supply of arrows, knives, cloaks, water-skins and a lance. There was dried meat too, but Sarissa would not touch it. She told Fallou to stand guard and disappeared in the dark, returning

with two horses; Fallou had told her that he had a mount of his own. They managed to get Atossa up on a horse, wrapped in the cloak of one of the dead enemies, and departed at a cautious walk, Fallou collecting his animal on the way. The place was decidedly unhealthy. They left the fire burning so as not to alarm someone who might be watching from afar.

They rode in silence for several hours, the horses stumbling occasionally in the gloom. The moon rose and improved the visibility, but did scarcely increase the danger; it was not possible to see very far. With the moon nearly overhead, they found a deep little canyon with fresh grass and low trees, and a sound of running water. Here they should camp for the rest of the night, said Sarissa, breaking her silence for the first time. Atossa nodded agreement but seemed content to leave the decision to her lover. She seemed dazed by her close escape.

They made no fire, but rested very close to each other, rolled up in their cloaks. Hesitantly, they began to sort out the events of the day. What were the losses? Nobody was certain. Ariti and Silini had got away, it seemed, and maybe Ginesse. Lykomaki was definitely dead: she had been seen going down in a swarm of enemies, her head bashed in while she was knifing one of them between her ribs, and leaving one other dead on the ground.

Hakki had fled, doubled over the back of her horse and with an arrow in her shoulder, but nobody knew if she was dead or alive. The fight had continued after Sarissa had been struck down with the shaft of a lance and Atossa had stayed to protect her, and they had been taken captive after killing one adversary and wounding another badly. What had become of the others?

Nobody knew, but the attackers seemed to have had their hands full. And the males? They might well be both dead and eaten. Fallou felt sick; little Mikrou and the frank and guiltless Ippou deserved to live. It occurred to him that each human being is an endless source of possibilities, of future choices, deeds, words and songs, and that the loss of a life, even that of a slave, makes the world of men poorer...and the world of women, too.

Silence fell again. It was late in the night. Sarissa told Fallou to sleep by Atossa and keep her warm; she would stand guard over them herself. Fallou made her promise to wake him up after a couple of hours so that he might relieve her. The last thing he saw was Sarissa's black shape against the stars.

The moon was going down when he took the last watch of the night. Nothing disturbing had happened. After a while, the sun rose; the horses shook themselves and began to graze. Sarissa opened her eyes, stretched and scrambled up to the rim of the canyon in order to check the surroundings.

Fallou followed her with his eyes, then he brought out the pemmican. He found Atossa looking at him, gave her to eat and assured her that this was no cannibal abomination, but her own make. She grinned at him and ate; he was relieved to find her in such good shape. When she sat up, the coarse red cloak fell away and Fallou could see the outrage that had been committed on her breasts. She followed his gaze and said: 'So now I am pierced too. Do you think I would look as good in rings as you do?' He did not know what to make of the expression on her face.

Later in the morning, they moved up to a little hillock above the rim of the canyon. There were some large boulders there, and two or three low bushes, so that they could keep a lookout without being seen. Both Sarissa and Atossa agreed that they should not travel before nightfall. They would then try to return to the camp in a roundabout way, if the enemies were gone, see what other sisters had got away and try to pick up the pieces. Perhaps the Sisterhood could recover from the blow. If not, they would call on the friendship and the oaths of the Scithi Sisterhood further to the south and join them; later on, they might be able to establish themselves as an independent sisterhood again.

Then they both looked at Fallou. Atossa made a false start, shook her head and said: 'Fallou, you saved us. It would not be right to deny you your freedom. Go your own way, and may the Guardian Ladies watch over you. But remember us, and do not forget that I loved you.' And her savage face contorted, and she was silent.

She had torn the lid off a sealed jar. Fallou was in a mental turmoil; all his emotions and his thoughts of the previous day and night flashed past in a jumble. Then they suddenly arranged themselves in the important and the unimportant, without his conscious help, and he stuttered and was incoherent, but managed to put over his conviction: He would not willingly abandon them. He loved them. He wished to share the danger with them, serve them and adore them. The two women listened without gainsaying him.

Then Atossa said, "But Fallou, you know that you cannot be our slave any more. I would be happy to keep you, and I would regard you as a friend and lover, and so would Sarissa too, I am sure. But you also know that any male amongst us horsewomen must be treated as a slave, whoever he may be.

"Would you accept that, even if you knew of our love of you? Would you accept being walked on a leash after my horse? Would you accept to cook and clean and gather food, and to serve the other women when they want you? I know that you like Ariti and Silini and Ginesse — may the Ladies have saved them... but the old women, and those that think that you are just a contemptible man-slave? Would you do that?"

And he answered, yes, yes, and yes. He would not shame them by behaving in a manner improper to a slave. He just wanted to continue to belong to them.

The women were silent for a while. Then Sarissa said, we may not be able to return. There may be too many of the abominable women around. Then we may not even be able to get to the Scithi camp, and we will die.

Fallou followed a sudden impulse. Then they should follow him to the sea, and his city. He was of a highly regarded and prosperous family; Atossa and Sarissa would be his guests, and he would continue to love and honour them. Atossa laughed, but not contemptuously. Were horsewomen not regarded as she-savages by his people? Would they be tolerated as anything but his, Fallou's, slaves? He insisted that whatever others thought of them, he would continue to love them; he did scarcely notice that Atossa had extended her hand and taken a grip on his member, and that it responded. "Yes," said she, "but would he not be obliged to treat them the way slave women were treated?"

Now it was Sarissa's turn to laugh. That would serve them right! The boot would be on the other foot! They would have to obey him, or else... Atossa joined in the argument, a curious glint in her eye. Horsewomen were an obstinate breed. He would probably have to chain them, and give them a good whipping now and then, to make them behave.

Yes, he would whip them, and then he would perhaps fether them on his bed, by their wrists and ankles the way they had done with him, and use them. Maybe that would be a good thing. Perhaps they needed chastising. And now that Atossa had been pierced, she should of course wear rings, too. And what should be done to Sarissa? Rings and a chain, like Ippou's? (And may the Ladies have saved him, too.)

They fell silent and watched him. Suddenly, he became aware of Atossa's caress and of his own erection. Atossa opened her cloak and rolled over on her back without releasing him. She parted her legs. He should use her right now, and she would find out what it was like to be a slave woman and a concubine. That might help her to make her decision. Now, what was he waiting for? He would

please support himself on his elbows, so as not to press down on her lacerated breasts, but she would have loved to feel his full weight.

After all, they had not fattened him unduly, had they? Yes, now she felt that being his slave would be an acceptable fate. He was no wimp but a man a woman could be proud to belong to, and to serve. She would probably be a difficult slave to manage, and need lots of caning and whipping, but he knew that she could take that. And Sarissa was just the same. But he would let them remain together, and make love often to each other, would he not?

He swore that he would be the most considerate, though stern, slave-owner of all time. In a peculiar enclosure out of time, and space, he worked in and out of her body, gazing down on her grotesque, beautiful face, and he knew that she was serious. They would not be parted. They belonged to each other, utterly and for ever. Whatever path lay before them, they would ride it together.

*The End*