

## **New Genesis**

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*some old man in somewhere u.s.a*

*say goddam it sure is hot today*

*can't go outside can't step outside your do'*

*can't even play baseball outside no mo'*

**"it's too hot" from the new genesis cd by akamardukson**

***Somewhere U.S.A.***

***Some old man...***

*So gotdamned hot, a man can't even go outside no mo'.*

*A white man will tear up every gotdamned thing.*

*Make no sense. They done messed up the whole gotdamned earth.*

*They playing baseball inside now... Football too, though they've been doing that for a while... But baseball? Got**damn!***

*Don't even snow anymo'. Aint been no such thing as a winter in three years. Just twelve months of hot. TV, say they done thinned out the ozone layer so much with their bombs and chemicals and whatever else they've*

*invented to kill somebody with, we are all going to die of skin cancer within a century.*

*It keep getting hot like it is, we all are going to die of starvation within a year cause aint nothing going to grow in all that heat and there aint going to be anybody who can stay outside long enough to plant anything anyway.*

*Cows and hogs dropping like flies in that swelt. --Gotta start raising them indoors too,--like the chickens.*

*Gotdamned shame.*

*A white man will mess up errrrvy gotdamned thing.*

*Now they working they mojo up there in space. --Couldn't just go up there to find a new home for Mankind. Nah, they gotta go up there and militarize gotdamned space. Gotta claim the gotdamned universe.*

*Europa, my ass.*

***Gotdamned!***

## Chapter one

### RICHMOND VA

*"Boy, you betta git out that 'fridgerator!"*

Damian almost dropped the carton of juice he was chugging at the sudden slap of his mom's voice. He gulped down what had already entered his throat, and set the drink back in the box. He turned sheepishly towards his mom, because he knew when he went in that fridge and turned up that carton, he was breaking a *couple* of rules.

Instead of the frown he expected to see on her face, though, she was looking at him as if he was some big ass, diamond engagement ring.

"Sorry ma."

He gave her a wary eye as he wiped his mouth and grabbed the b-ball. *Can't play outdoors anymore but they let you use the gym in the school these days.* He cut a bigger swath around her than he normally would have.

"Daameeeinnn..."

Her tripping just got weirder. He knew he was adopted, but damned, mom was sounding like his girl, called him, when they were alone and she wanted to do something nasty.

He stopped, his face and tone clearly transmitting his irritation. "*What ma?*"

*Don't no bruh want to see his Mom acting like a chicken head 'round him.*

"Guess Whaa--ott"

"*Ma, I'll see you later. I gotta ghost.*" He shook his head and started for the door again.

***"Boy, you betta bring your narrow behind back here!"***

A big grin of relief broke out all over his face, which he hid as he turned back towards her.

*Now, that's the ma, I'm talkin' 'bout, the ma, I know and love, the ma--* his gleeful thoughts were interrupted when she suddenly grabbed him and pulled him into that embrace he thought he had seen the last of when he and ma had it out over that huggykissy stuff when he was thirteen years old.

He didn't mind a kiss on the cheek or a quick hug, but he wasn't at the age of 17--damned near 18, going to have his ma burying his head all up in her bosom and everything .

Uh uhhhh.

"*Let me go, ma!*"

He squirmed his way loose and looked at her with the injured eyes of a kicked puppy. When he looked in her face, he immediately felt like he'd just done the worse thing he'd ever done in his life.

"*What's wrong, ma?.*"

She was wetting up her cheeks.

"Damian, I'm so proud of you."

He stared at her, inquisitively.

"You have always been such a joy in my life. When my Sister died giving birth to you, nobody in the family thought I should take you because my sister and I were twins and were so close. Even I had momentary doubts. But she left you to me, Damian.

She knew that she had no business getting pregnant. Neither one of us could safely carry a child to term. By her second semester, everybody knew she wasn't going to make it. She insisted that I be your guardian after your father because everybody could see he wasn't going to make it either. Lord only knows why that child let that man badger her into risking her life because *he* wanted children. But I guess they both loved each other the same because after she died your father killed himself."

"I know all this stuff, ma." *What you telling me again for?*

"You got a letter from Harvard today."

Her voice was so full of pride and joy he felt embarrassed--for *her*.

*So that's what all this is about. That rich man, honky school done tapped him as one of the few, the proud, the uppity, and mom thinks he's been anointed by god for something. He knew they were going to let him in. They and every other big time school in the Country have been hounding him since he was in the 9th grade.*

"For *real...?*" He tried to sound excited for her sake.

"Yeeeeesss!" and she was reaching for him again. This time, he allowed himself to be dunked, he even hugged her back because suddenly it occurred to him his days at home with her were about over. He had no intention of spending the remaining ones doing anything other than showing his mom how much he appreciated her for all she's done for him.

## Chapter two

### SOUTHERN AFRICA



Maguthaba

He had driven the short distance to his lab, cursing and sweating the entire way. The AC in his spanking new Lexus had fizzled out the day before like a two dollar electric tooth brush. He only had to drive a few blocks. Still, his new car was literally falling apart, inside and out, under the relentless heat.

It was coming.

The scientific community has long been aware of that, but 165 degrees, in the middle of the cool season?

Maguthaba, 6ft 6inches tall, 250 pounds, wire rimmed glasses, closely cropped black hair, sat in his office poring over the data his team had accumulated.

The entire world, scientific community has been monitoring this alarming phenomenon with the kind of gravity usually reserved for universally threatening diseases.

The data showed clear evidence that the earth was losing its protective shield from the sun. He expected a continued acceleration of that damage with each passing year but the trend of the past few weeks were so beyond even his most pessimistic projection, Maguthaba, hadn't slept in days from worry over it.

It was One hundred sixty-five degrees and climbing today. Yesterday it was one hundred and fifty, the day before-- 160 degrees... over at least 120 degrees every day for nearly a month.

He thought they had more time.

He had his team working 24/7 shifts. He had been confident that given time they will come up with some kind of solution to the looming threat facing WoMankind--if not his guys,-- other Scientists around the world, who were working just as desperately. But this sudden sustained spike...It had to be the heavy bombs the Americans dropped on Iraq. They were warned the ozone layer couldn't take anymore rents from the heat and particles those kinds of explosions sent up.

Everything has suddenly changed from alarming, to critical. All the projections and timetables, rendered meaningless.

The first thing he had to do is affirm his decision with the entire world body of scientists. A joint communicable has to be released. All the governments, of the world must do what no one really wants to. They all have to issue nationwide alerts and inform their people--tell them what precautions to take--not tomorrow but today!

Maguthaba, reached for the phone on his desk. Just as his hand grasped it, a light--bursting through the full length picture window of his high-rise office, which faced the street overlooking the city, struck him full force--like some kind of scalar weapon. The last thing that he remembered before he passed out, was the terrifying blackness before his wide open eyes as he tried numbly and foolishly, to see what had hit him.

### Chapter three



ATLANTA GEORGIA

Center of Disease Control

It only lasted for a second.

But in that brief passage of time, some 500,000,000 people from all over the world died instantaneously. They were all fair-skinned people who were caught outside during a sudden burst of undiluted UV rays.

An estimated one billion people had cancer, instantly introduced into their bodies and an estimated half billion were blinded.

Nearly every person on earth was harmed in some degree. The phenomenon will happen again--and again. Each time will last longer and do more damage than the time before. If no solution is found to this threat, the species of man and woman will perish off the face of the earth.



## Chapter four



Lonetta(Damian's mom)

Doctor told me I had cancer today. Say it's the worse kind you can get...that kind that just spreads all up inside you like a gasoline fire. Say he didn't have the resources or time to give to a case like mine. I know that we going through a crisis and everything but he could have used some kind of tact.

Gave me the number of some Rootswoman... Talkin' 'bout she could make my passage more comfortable. Aint no Doctor but a Negro is that foolish.

I'm a Christian. I don't know where he gets off trying to get me involved in that voodoo mess.

I aint had no cancer two months ago and the TV say it was white-skinned people who got that mess from the breach. Doctor says I got it because I'm light-skinned and I was outside when that mess happened.

Lord have mercy! What is my baby going to do?

I'm all the parent he got. I gotta stop crying before he gets home.

--But I aint been able to stop all day.

That boy is going to school in Boston in a few months. Praise the Lord. Them schools been after that child like they done lost their minds. Phone never stops ringing... coming over here trying to bribe somebody. I told them Damian is going to Harvard but they still keep calling and begging, worrying somebody to death.

People from Harvard, done sent body guards over here. Two big old, bull necked Dummies hanging round my house like some kind of mafia. If everything wasn't so tore up and crazy, I wouldn't stand for that mess. It's more like they shot-gunning my son than wooing him.

I don't know how long I can keep Damian from just skipping school altogether. He's already got all kinds of companies offering him jobs.

Tickle me to death; boy out there yesterday in all that heat about to fight them big ol' men. Talkin' 'bout; get out from the front of his house.

I gotta get Damian in Boston before he gets fed up with me and them schools.

--Talked to Sheree again yesterday. She promised she'll look after my son for me. That's why I want him to go to Harvard. It'll be the best thing for him and Sheree.

I guess I'll wait until Damian gets settled in school to tell Sheree the bad news about my illness. I don't want that heffa feeling sorry for me.

When she finds out what I've been blessed to raise these 18 years, she's gonna know if I drop dead tomorrow, aint nobody gotta feel sorry for me. I might not have traveled the world or lived in luxury but the Lord has blessed me like nobody's business and I know Sheree is gonna see when she gets to know Damian, that her life aint been no ways better than mine.

I'm tired.

Damian always wanted to go to the University of Richmond, so he could be close to home. But that boy don't belong in no school but the best. That's why I can't tell him about my illness yet. I wouldn't be able to get his narrow behind out the house then. That boy is something else 'bout his mama. But he don't belong to me. My sister had him and his Race owns him.

Some big people have been after that boy since he was fourteen years old, but my son belongs to his people. I've never told him nothing like that. But I never felt I had to. Damian is always telling me stuff like Jesus is black... always talking 'bout Egyptians, and people lying 'bout history.

I know he think I don't hear him, and to tell the truth, for a long time I hated to hear that stuff. I didn't believe none of it. I thought Damian was being what they called Afro- centric just out of rebellion. I know that boy don't lie though, and he don't pretend. He's definitely smart enough to know what he's talking about.

Lord, I'm so tired.

Maybe Jesus *is* black. I don't know. I've never pictured him like that.

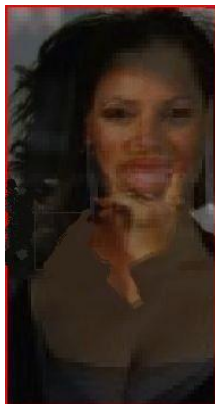
But some things make you wonder.

Like how everything is dying now all at once. Lord knows aint no Black People did enough damage to this world to threaten the existence of nothing. Damian said the black people been on this earth a million years. In all that time we aint killed nothing. Now the trees, fish, animals, people, air, and everything else is dying off for good.

Why can't Christ be black?

My son is black and he's the best thing in this life that I know.

## Chapter five



SHEREE

I've always known that gal loved me. It doesn't matter how much we dislike each other at times or how long we go without speaking; Lonetta and I will always love each other.

I don't know if she knew it or not, but she might have saved my job. This school is fanatical about recruiting my Godson and people were whispering that I might be a hindrance to Damian deciding to come here because his mother and I are on the outs. How the hell they know so much about my business I can only guess. The way these people have been acting since the Ozone breach, they wouldn't have had to worry about renewing my tenure. I was sick and tired of them before. After that breach there was no way in hell I was going to be able to stand it around here.

Lonetta says he's coming for sure; that he's already on the plane.

And that's the *only* reason I'm going to accept a new contract to teach here. Even so, I'm going to have it written in there that I only stay as long as my Godson does. I'd be surprised if Damian makes it past a single semester. That boy is just too smart for the bullshit they try to put over around this place. They just want to use him anyway. McCloud would literally drop dead if he loses Damian to another school or some high paying commercial job. I like that old man, and I

fully understand why he's so desperate to recruit Damian, but Einstein better get a grip because that child is only eighteen and I'm not going let them burden that boy with the weight of the world. McCloud seems to think Damian is the answer to the whole Ozone breach problem but the entire world scientific community is working on that situation and Damian is not Jesus.

Lonetta sounded sooo tired over the phone. I feel in my bones something is wrong but of course like always, she takes all the heart out of somebody for wanting to go see her with her Pollyanna bullshit. That's why I haven't been back there. That Gal got a way of making you feel that you're never welcome even if she do talk that come to see me spiel. That thing, don't want anybody to come to see her.

She and I used to be like the two sides of a nickel. After her twin died we were like one side of a coin--we were so close.

Lonetta could have gone to college and I know that me going overseas on scholarship was why she started changing towards me. She could have had a life like mine but she chose to take in her sister's child. Put her whole life into a kid that wasn't even hers. Never did get out the neighborhood.

I got out though; traveled the world. I know that's why she really don't want me coming back. She's ashamed that she never got anywhere in life. Maybe in the beginning I was at fault for putting those feelings in her. I truly hated that child coming between us--taking attention away from me. Ruining plans that Lonetta and I made from the time we were little girls. Lonetta knew we'd promise to do life together. She betrayed me for a stranger, and I know I let her know how I felt. How could I not? She hurt me terribly.

But I truly did get over it. I don't think Lonetta accepts that to this day. Too much water under the bridge I guess.

Despite all the hurt, I only blamed Damian for about 2 hours. That's how much time passed after he was born before I held him and looked

into his adorable face. I know damned well Lonetta knew from the beginning it wasn't about Damian but about she and I only, with him simply caught up in the middle.

I've always loved that child. To follow his academic notoriety that began almost from his first year of school has been a true source of happiness to me. I suspect that that's another reason that Lonetta kept trying to make it about Damian long after she knew it wasn't. She knew Damian was something special that she had and I didn't. She simply didn't want me to share in that.

She made me his godmother, though. That's something. But I never really got to experience as much with Damian as I would have liked.

Now I get my chance. *Thanks Letta.* And I am so happy.

This kid has already written a highly respected paper on nature and environment; wrote it when he was just 15 years old.

That's why McCloud and all these schools are after him so.

Hopefully, Damian will be a bridge for me and Letta to get close again. She isn't getting any younger and neither am I.

*Letta I miss you gal*

Thanks for trusting me with your son.

I know this is your way of showing me something that so much pain and hurt over so long a time would have never allowed either one of us to say any other way.

I know now that I can go back home again.

*I'll be seeing you Letta.*

## Chapter six



McCloud

We got him. *Thank God!*

It must be more to that kid than what I'd already thought. With all the attention and money being thrown at him; the kid still hangs in there and keeps his word.

He'll arrive tomorrow and I'm going to be the first thing that he sees when he steps off that plane.

Time is of the essence and I just don't know how much more, my crew and I have.

We should have been aggressively recruiting Blacks long before this but goddammit, who would have thought the goddamned government would use those bombs in Iraq, after the entire world Community warned them that they would be dooming our species?

Ten people...Ten goddamned people out of 7 billion makes this kind of decision for us all?

--Leaves you wondering if it's worth it trying to do anything.

We can invent. We can progress. If we wanted it enough, we can go as far in this universe as we can dream but what the hell is the point? One or two more breaches and the light-skinned people of this world are over. I suspect since myself, and my entire team were outside, at the worse possibly place, during the breach, most, if not all of us, are already poisoned by radiation.

Nobody wants to find out because what purpose will it serve but to sap us even more of our will to carry on our work?

The Blacks have more time--especially those who were not outside during the breach. But even their days are numbered.

The deterioration of the ozone is irreversible. We've long known that. But if it had never been breached, there might have been a way to send up another form of mist to bolster the earth's shield from undiluted UV rays. We might have bought ourselves centuries or even a couple of millenniums--enough time to colonize other planets. But now, there is a hole in the ozone and the window of an environmental solution has been permanently closed. Years of work and research rendered useless. Now we have to focus entirely on finding a biological solution. We have to find a cure for skin cancer and a way to prevent it.

The people are eventually going to be limited strictly to life indoors. We could build more underground cities but we have run out of time for even that to be a solution but for a fraction of WoMankind. Even this is no permanent solution and once the sun breaks through the ozone for good, man will never be able to resurface again--even in enclosed structures. We will never be able to cool our ships long enough to get a live crew out of the earth's atmosphere.

Maybe this is the promised hell that the biblical Prophets promised us if we didn't change our evil ways. Maybe by "hell" they meant an entire goddamned earth destroyed by our own greed and selfishness.

I'm not going to survive long enough to find an answer but this kid Damian...I've read the young man's book; pure genius. If there is an answer this kid will find it. And it is my intention to do everything I can to help him along the path before I go.

Nothing comes before this kid.

Nothing!



## Chapter seven



Damian

I wish Ma had let me go to school at U of R.

I talked to Mr. McCloud and he's an alright dude. I understand what he's about, and I appreciate that he's not trying to front about what I am to him. Like every other decent Scientist in my field, I plan to dedicate my life to solving the breach problem.

But at the moment my main concern is ma. She looked bad when I left home and there isn't anybody there to look after her. If she hadn't started crying so hard, there's no way that I'd be a thousand miles away from her right now. I could do lab work at U of R.

Ma has always been determined as hell to send me to Boston. I guess it's because my godmother is a Professor here.

I swear if mama don't start sounding better my ass is going home. I just got here three days ago but I'm going back to Richmond this weekend to check up on ma. She sounded like a hundred years old last night.

Light-skinned people like her are falling off like crazy.

Some parts of the Country are still struggling to get all the bodies buried.

Mr. McCloud is right about what's my responsibility but that old dude don't know anything *but* that, if he thinks I'm not going to be at my ma's side if she's dying.

Professor Fontaine--my godmother--says if I decide to transfer schools, she'll resign and leave with me. She's coming with me this weekend, too. We'll decide then what we're going to do.

Until three days ago I haven't seen Sheree--she insists that I call her that-- in years. Already she's living up to what she calls the "honor" ma has bestowed upon her. She's even invited me to move in with her but I don't know. Mr. McCloud has already rented me a nice place to stay.

I haven't seen that many melanin chicks around here but the ones I have peeped are off the beaufukking scale. If I stay in Boston I'm going to have to have me some privacy.

--Must be something in the water up here because my godmother is like, whoa, too. She and ma are the same age but they don't look like they've been eating the same kinds of food. She looks like ma's little Sister. Smells like something made to beautify heaven. She's always up under me too; like she don't have a life or something. Fine as she is, I still haven't seen a man looking like he might be getting into her yet.

Man, this place is Trump. Wonder what it's costing the School? I know they have got to be breaking some rules putting me up in a joint like this. Then again, I guess after what happened with the ozone breach, a lot of rules are being broken.

I hope Sheree don't come over here again tonight. My girl and I are over and lonely as I feel, I don't need anything looking and smelling like her around me right now.

Plus, the way she's always lighting up when she sees me, I'm starting to get ideas no Kat should be getting about any kind of mom of his.

I'll be glad when Friday gets here. I'm lonely, bored and worried as hell.

I guess I'll carry my ass to bed.

But first I'm going to call Ma one more time.

## Chapter eight



### **Chandra(Rootswoman)**

*her name is Chandra and all the people say  
that she's a black magic woman better stay away  
"hernameis" from the new genesis cd by akamardukson*

Di sistren should fe come ti I-wombman sooner.

Mi Breddah sey him told she to call mi numba a week ago. But she neva did.  
So him send mi ti di po Sistren.

So many pass dat weh dese days weh dey nuh haf to. Dem nuh ovastan. T'is  
nuh voodoo ti know de herbal art. Mi grandmaddah teach I-wombman de  
healin' roots weh mi jus a likkle gurl.

All de hospitals an di Doctas turn di black people weh fe tek care of de  
white people. Mi breddah nuh turn di sistren weh fi she race. He just nuh  
hav di time and resources fi one so sick.

Mi granddmaddah seh nuff ti I-wombman "Chile di day gwan com weh di  
rootwoman gwan be all di black people haf weh dey fall sick."

Mi Breddah went ti college ti be a Docta, fi mi faddah seh nuf:

"One foot inna old an one inna new."

Mi grandmaddah and mi faddah wan fe all dem trildren to be healers but weh mi ask dem why mi bruddah gwan ti school an mi haf ti learn at home, dem jus seh:

"Nuh weh betta or baddah than di udda an we people gwan need both fi lang. Yuh breddah fi dem who cyan afford to pey an Yuh fi dem who nuh haf much.

Mi Bredda told mi he neva seen di cancer eat up inyone up so fast. Nuhting I could do fi di po sistren.

Mi gi she di herb ti hep her pass more peacefully. Wish di po Sistren had nuh gwan thru all dat pain fo mi hep she.

## Chapter nine



Sheree

*look at me*

*look at me boy"lookatme" from the New Genesis CD*

I thought that boy was going to die.

Lonetta was just wrong for what she did.

I knew she was sick and so did Damian. But she should have told us how little time the Doctor gave her to live.

Nobody ever truly conceives that they are going to die and I understand that Lonetta might have wanted Damian to get settled in at school and everything before she told him. She probably thought that she had at least that much time. Still--the look on Damian's face when they told him his mother was dead, was the most heartbreaking thing I've ever seen. And believe me; I've seen a lot of sad things in my life.

The truly remarkable thing was how he recovered almost as soon as he crumbled. At first it looked like he was going to be a basketcase and then-- in an instant, he went from falling down on his knees in grief, to standing up so tall and kingly, for a moment I didn't even recognize him. He looked like he was thirty instead of 18.

He wiped his eyes and I never saw another tear. We spent two weeks in Virginia making arrangements for the burial. Damian handled everything-- and I mean *everything*--including the eulogy and the burial. That eulogy...

Lordy, people were dragging away from that cemetery, afterwards, like they had been up for two weeks without rest or sleep. I mean they were *just drained*.

It was crazy.

The first part of that dedication had everybody crying as if everything that has happened since the breach was bottled up inside and we've been waiting for that moment to just let it all go. Some people cried themselves sick. People were puking and getting stomach spasms.

Then, when I thought I was dead on my feet from emotion, that boy started talking about what a good woman Lonetta was, and people were shouting and stomping their feet. By the time he finished, I swear it was like Jesus had come back. Everybody was just euphoric--laughing, singing and just...happy.

I will never forget it as long as I live. Something happened out there. I don't know what it was. I've been an Atheist for 25 years but that day I saw Damian transform all those people with nothing but the naked force of his own soul projection. He wasn't promising them anything, giving them anything or saving them from anything.

Yet, he had people forgetting who, what and where they were; had them rising above the limitations of their own minds, bodies and souls. It was so beautiful and powerful.

Suddenly I'm believing in Jesus again for the first time since I was a teenager.

*Letta, I know you will never understand.*

*But will you forgive me if I tell you that what occurred that night happened because I felt like Mary Magdalene, must have felt in the constant presence of a man who could change water to wine and heal the sick with a touch?"*

## Damian



I knew Ma was sick. I just didn't know that she was *that* sick. Damn! One day I notice how tired she sounded; two weeks later they tell me my mama's dead.

It didn't come as a complete surprise, though. I've been following how the breach affected different people. I've also done some preliminary research on how certain circumstances and surroundings contributed to the harm that was done to people by the breaches.

Ma's damned near white. She was outside in the open at the very moment the sun burst through the ozone.

I didn't want to accept it, but I knew I was going to lose her. I guess that's why after the initial shock, I decided not to get too bent up over ma's death. She wouldn't have wanted me wallowing in self-pity. Ma always acted like she thought I was the next best thing to the, Almighty. Now she's gone. But so are millions of other innocent, beautiful people like her.

The only thing that I can do for ma, now, is try to live up to some of that faith she always had in me--that I would do something great in the world. I don't know if I can do even little things to help people and make a difference, but I'm damn sure going to try my best to do *something* with ma looking down at me from up there.

I don't know what got into me yesterday though, at ma's funeral...up there preaching like some jackleg biblethumper. All I intended to do was give a brief speech from the heart about how much ma meant to me. Next thing I know I was in another zone--words pouring out of my mouth that I never meant to say.

The real crazy thing was how the people's reaction to my words affected me. It's hard to explain, but the more I talked--the more they reacted--the more I began to lose the sense of whom and where I was. It was like the people and I were merging into one being.

Dawg, I was really into those people and I have never in my life felt such unity with people. That has got to be what it felt like back in the day when everybody spoke one language. I had those people crying like babies and they had me glowing like the sun. I felt so much like I wanted to do something, give something...I don't know...I wanted to gather those people up and just protect them from everything. I felt like dying, because I had reached the pinnacle of emotional experience. I know now it isn't that hard to be a Martyr when you've got people sending you that kind of energy. When people are that open and vulnerable, you just want to give them everything you've got. That's why I started joking and trying to get them to get those tears out of their hearts. I couldn't stand the thought of them feeling sorrow.

There were only about 80 people out there yesterday and they had me wanting to go heads up with Godzilla on their behalf. I used to look at this world and every time I heard one of those Jacklegs talking about how Jesus loves me, I always felt like kicking them in the teeth because I hate for somebody to lie to me in the face of all evidence. I know people are going to lie, and it don't bother me much except when they insult my intelligence with it. I haven't seen any evidence of any loving Jesus in this world or any love period, except for what individuals have for each other.

After yesterday...I know there *is* love.



Those lying Jacklegs are telling the truth despite themselves. Jesus has got to be ate up with love. There's no way he could have absorbed all that feeling and emotion from so many people all these years and not be crazy in love. Even if they're crying to the wrong Christ, the real one knows what's meant for him.

You know what it's like when you're crazy in love? Yesterday I wanted to crush every thing that ever gave those people at my ma's funeral a single moment of pain.

There is going to be some major ass-whipping going on when Jesus comes back. He's going to be hunting high and low, and he's going to be digging under goddamned worms. For the first time in my life I know that nobody is getting away with a single crime against a WoManbeing, because I know now how Jesus feels.

Sheree left for Boston this morning. Guess she's feeling bad because she spent last night in my old room, in my old bed, beside young ass me.

I had never needed touch like I needed it last night. Sheree may feel we did something wrong. I'm not even playing that ridiculous record. I'm a grown damned man. I understand there's an issue between her and ma that might be affecting her but I've got no regrets. I never would have come on to her but that's only because I didn't have the guts to do what I wanted to do.

## **The return home(Sheree)**

*When they returned from the funeral, Damian insisted that she stay in the guest room. It was her first time back in Lonetta's home since Damian was seven years old. Her idea that Letta had something to be ashamed of regarding how she lived was sorely misplaced. The house was simply the classiest and most beautifully decorated home she had ever entered. Letta had taste--expensive taste at that.*

*While changing clothes, for bed, she heard Damian in the bathroom brushing his teeth. Something dark, entrancing and compelling came over her. She'd been overcome by sudden lust plenty of times, but never like this. It was late and she knew Damian had to be feeling as tired as she did just a minute ago. She grew breathless from the thought of crawling into bed but sleep was the last thing on her mind.*

*Damian finished brushing his teeth. He was coming to her room...probably to say goodnight. This was her chance.*

**"Come here, Damian."**

*She said those words and even the shame she felt at the way her voice trembled with excitement, did not deter her from the selfish thing she was about to do.*

Something in the tone that beckoned him sent blood rushing to every major organ in Damian's body. He was afraid of this. He wanted it but was still scared. He tried to rush off to bed because he was feeling the heat between he and Sheree, all the way home, from the church. Sheree was his godmother, and a university Professor. He'd had one girlfriend in his life. And Sheree was no girl.

As he approached her, he noticed that out of her usual type wear she looked inches shorter and years younger. She wasn't dressed for bed but

she wasn't exactly dressed for a night out on the town, either. She was wearing a pink, lacy, see-through blouse and no bra. He had never seen her out of some type of pants. Her sheer little skirt came with the blouse.

She stood there searching his face--looking so tiny as to be a whole different person. Damian stared back at her for what seemed a long time-- too long. He couldn't decide what to do or say, so he lowered his eyes and stood there feeling as dumb as he knew he looked.

"Look at me, Damian."

*God! What am I doing? Even as She questioned her lack of good judgment in her mind, her hands cupped her breasts in offering before slowly caressing their way down the length of her body as far as she could reach. She felt guilty, but more than anything else she felt like she was engulfed in flames that gave her no room for any other consideration but addressing their growing intensity*

"Before you can make good love to a woman, Damian, you must know a woman's body...every inch of it."

She was all predator now. There was nothing else about her, at that moment, but the accomplished seductress that she had long been.

She stared Damian in the eyes as she paused with her slow caresses, to linger between her legs.

Damian's already hard penis lurched. There were things he wanted to do. Things he would have already been doing with another female but something about the woman before him was holding him back. Once again, he averted his eyes; this time because he knew the lust they mirrored couldn't have been a pretty sight.

"Look at me, Damian."

She was careful to keep her tone insistent but not angry or demanding.

"There's nothing wrong with letting your Lover see how much you desire her. If two people are going to do something as intimate as sexual intercourse, how much sense does it make to hide from each other?"

Intercourse... *Intercourse...? Damian's brain kept repeating. We're going to...*

"Let me see how much you want it, baby."

Sheree's voice lowered. She watched him intently. She purred. There was something she had to see in his eyes. She saw it in his groin but she had to see him want her not only physically but emotionally or she could not go on. She wanted him to want this as much as she did.

She dropped the little skirt and widened her stance. Butt naked. Finally in his eyes she saw what she was searching for.

"Come on, Damian." She took him by the hand.

"Show me your room."

## Chapter ten

### Damian



Sheree and I decided to stay in Boston; mainly because Mr. McCloud is such a genuinely nice and sincere old Kat. Also a little delusional, but that's just my worthless opinion.

Says he wants me to head his scientific team. How crazy is that? I know things have changed in the world with the breach and everything but there is no way they've changed *that* much... An eighteen year old black kid, walking into a lab of long time collaborators; white collaborators-- and becoming their boss. I just can't see it and I told the old man that...but since he's been so good to me, I promised to show up tomorrow just so he can see for himself, what anyone else--who didn't have his head of white hair so full of worries--would already know.

I don't know why he has to insist on putting me in charge of the lab. I'm more than willing to start where I'm supposed to and work my way up. I don't care about titles at this point in my career. I just want the space and equipment to start trying to find solutions.

--Stubborn old Einstein-looking, mule. He must have his reasons though. There's no way, a man that smart is going to be stirring up any unnecessary disruptions among his team without a good reason. It could be, he thinks I'm going to be the last one standing--which is probably true if all the others on his team are light-skinned people. I haven't officially met any of them yet, although I think I've seen a couple of them talking to Mr. McCloud.

He told me there were eight of them, said they've all been together for over ten years--some of them far longer.

The old guy is just begging for disappointment. Some people just have to experience a kick in the head before they can envision a mule's back end rearing up that high.

Boss or peon, I just want to get to work so I can help the scientific community with the breach problem--and get my mind off Sheree.

Now I know why I never saw anybody who looked like they might have been close to Sheree in the love shack department. That's because I was looking for dawgs when I should have been looking for kitty-kats. I see plenty of shack buddies now. And she's showing me more and more every day, what she prefers. I wish she had'na deviated from her preferred path with me, though. I'm trying hard to accept her explanation and let it go. But it's like I've been shot through the heart or something. Acting like those dudes I used to laugh at, and scorn in the movies. Can't eat, can't sleep...All these fine, young melanin chicks up here just throwing the trim at me and I'm moping around like Sheree's got a magnet in hers with my dick's name on it.

But it's not just the sex. She whipped it on me alright. Can't no young chick know moves Sheree got, yet.

But as much as the sex, it's the way she smells, the way she laughs, the sound of her voice, the way she walks...everything about her has got me hooked. Since she's one of a kind, I don't know how I'm going to get over her, but I will...I have to. There's just too many things that I have to concentrate on, to have my mind so full of Sheree all the time.

Maybe, hopefully, things will work on in McCloud's Lab but I'm already weighing other options. I don't have any more stress to put into McCloud's stubbornness than I do in Sheree's rejection.

## Chapter eleven

Sheree



Why o' why did I fuck that boy? And that's what I did. I fucked him; Pure selfishness on my part. I should have given more consideration to what was going to happen to Damian's feelings afterward... and I don't know why I didn't. I love that boy, and I knew I wasn't going to carry on any love affair with a man, much less my 18 year old godson.

Then again, I never dreamed he would develop an infatuation with me. He's so handsome and charismatic--I see the way all these young, beautiful girls act around him. Why would he need a romantic relationship with an old woman like me?

Goddammit! Life doesn't throw anything but rotten eggs anymore. It's like some evil god has decided to go all out before the ride is over. At least I hope that one day soon it will be over because the world has become too much a parody of hell to stomach for much longer. It's sooo hot and even the slightest relief from constant pain that you try to grab always blows up into a bigger source of pain and stress. I had all these lovers but if I wasn't so lonely and empty, I would never have fucked Damian. They gave me nothing--just sucked out of me what little force of life I did have inside me.

I'm through taking and I'm through giving. From now on I'm an Island and I don't give a goddamned if I can be one or not. I'm through hurting people and I'm through letting people hurt me. The only way to end it is to close up. I'm here for Damian--to support my Letta's baby and his work--but It's *all* I have to give anymore.

## Chapter twelve



The phone on Damian's nightstand sounded so loud, he halfway marveled that the walls weren't shaking and that the picture hanging above his head-- the one of dread-locked Jesus-- hadn't fallen down and knocked him a lump. Maybe it sounded so loud because it's been so long since its rung in the still of the night...not that it woke him up. He hadn't fallen into a real sleep in over a month.

He let it rang a few times longer than it had to. If it's Sheree calling, he couldn't let her know how anxious and desperate he was to hear from her. On the sixth ring he picked the phone up. It was McCloud--a blue-haired, ancient, bent, yellow-toothed, four-eyed, lab coat looking like a Picasso doodle wearing, pain in the ass...calling him at three o'clock in the fucking morning, when he was fantasizing and praying about beauty, fragrance, femininity, breasts, black hair, white teeth, soft, full lips.

That old man was really starting to become an object of resentment in his life.

"Hallo...Damian, Damian...You there son...Hallo..."

Damian didn't know whether to spit or speak. *What the hell is he calling me at three o'clock in the morning for?*

"Yes sir, it's Damian." *What you want pops?*



"Oh, Damian...glad to reach you, son. I'm just calling to remind you that--"

Damian didn't hear anymore. He lightly sat the phone down on the night stand, laid down, turned and pulled up the covers. *That old man just did not have to call me in the middle of the night to remind me of anything.*

The next time Damian heard the phone, it was demanding to be hung up. He cradled it and peered at the clock. He had plenty of time to get ready but he got up and turned on the shower anyway. He wouldn't want to be two seconds late and give Mr. McCloud a heart attack.

He stepped outside his apartment door and felt like he was under some giant kid's magnifying glass. The sun was directly above him, beaming down so hard, he broke out into a pouring sweat and could have sworn he smelt meat burning--his meat. He raced back into his penthouse apartment--the pad that was so modern he might as well have been living on another planet when he was inside. He had absolutely no idea it was so hot outdoors. He felt terrified. The breach problem had just taken a turn for the worse. The phone was ringing. He found his darkest pair of sunglasses, grabbed his wide brim hat and dashed out the door. He wasn't late but he knew who was calling and suddenly the old man's presence, voice, or splotchy lab coat became the most important and most comforting thing that he could think of.

He had to see Mr. McCloud.

## Chapter thirteen

"Hurry it up, *man*!"

Maguthaba's hefty Assistant, looked at him with eyes that would have made a hound dog look happy.

As Maguthaba urged him onward, the mind was willing, but the flesh finally sat down on the curb and drenched itself in sweat. His shoulders were so slumped and resigned; Maguthaba knew it was pointless to goad the man any further.

Maguthaba sighed and wiped his forehead. It was only 50 meters from the car to the lab but the guy just couldn't make it. He tried. Maguthaba just wished he had tried 5 meters harder because, now, he was going to have to get the poor fellow out of the sun before he drowned in his bodily excrements. The only way to do that--it was very clear--was to carry, drag, roll, pull, or some other exerting, herculean thing that grew more painful to ponder the closer that he approached the heaving mass of flesh.

It nearly killed them both but he finally managed to get his old friend to the cool safety of the Lab. Then he looked outside and saw the heat bouncing off the hood of his car. He saw the asphalt in the parking lot boiling and buckling like the beginning of a major earthquake and thought: why did he bother.

He, his friend, and the WoMan, race has just run out of time.

## Chapter fourteen



Chandra

Chandra looked around at all the people crowded into the little "emergency room" her father and brother had built for her and thought about how most of the same people had scorned and ridiculed her for so long. Some even called her evil and a witch. It never angered her because she knew most of them just didn't believe anybody could help them, medically, but a doctor in a big building, wearing a white coat--and most preferably a white skin.

Even the old people, who knew the skills of a herb-woman and actually preferred such care, avoided her. She was certain that shunning had more to do with her looks than her healing skills. She looked about thirteen years old until she was pushing thirty.

People recognize there is racial discrimination or weight discrimination and discrimination of a hundred different kinds but--in her opinion--unless they are adults trying to do things an adult has to do while still looking like a grade school kid, they know absolutely nothing about the word.

At least she has recently started growing some into her age--and rather nicely--if she must say so herself. She still didn't look twenty-six but she did think she now, looked at least eight-teen.

Most of the people were suffering a heat related illness. Those were easy enough to remedy for the short term but she didn't have to be a scientist to know that something was terribly wrong with the earth, and that in the long run there was no herb or medicine in her cabinet or in any *hospital's* cabinet that was going to save these people.

## Chapter fifteen



*i got a friend*

*looks like my enemy*

**"Iceman friend" from the New Genesis CD**

Damian pulled his black, 1998 T-bird into the parking lot at the back of McCloud's Lab. Before he stepped out of the car the old man was hobbling toward him with a pronounced limp that Damian had never noticed before. The little thin lips flattened and the spotted teeth beamed a big welcome.

Typical scientific genius, Damian thought. Too busy and occupied to comb his hair or brush his damned teeth.

"Damian...Come, come...I want to introduce you to your team."

*I'm coming pops...Damn.*

Damian picked up his pace. When he wanted to, the old man moved like he was on motorized wheels. Before he knew it, Damian was walking into a room of what he instantly saw, felt, sensed, were some very unhappy Campers. Or maybe it was the utterly disgusted voice that smacked him in the face that told him that there was no joy in McCloud's lab.

"Oh you *can't* be serious."

The accent was English or maybe Afrikaner. Damian felt so verbally assaulted; he had to play the man's words over in his mind twice to believe he hadn't just been cussed at.

And then they were all talking at once, each raising the tone of incredibleness in their expressions of discontent like a high stakes poker game.

What was happening was exactly what Damian expected. He looked over at McCloud and felt sorry for the old man as he stood there red-faced and speechless. But he had squared things with McCloud by showing up. He will take one of the other opportunities offered him with a crystal clear conscience. He wasn't mad. He understood the people in the room completely. He probably would have felt the same way, himself. No hard feelings he thought. That was, until a high, but piercing little voice chimed out loud enough for Sheree and the entire campus to hear.

"A fucking, *boy!*" the voice shrilled, in an incredulous tone that couldn't have been topped if they had kept trying to one-up one another for the next 50 years.

They had a right to their anger. And they had a right to let McCloud know he was wrong--which even Damian felt he was-- but they had no grounds to assault him so vehemently. This was McCloud's idea. He was about to leave and bless them on the way out but now his eyes sought out the owner of that dog whistle voice. He spotted a very well-proportioned young woman standing in the midst of the disgruntled scientists like a top heavy Napoleon Bonaparte. He had never seen bigger tits in his life and for a moment he got lost in the miracle of the spectacle; forgot all about being insulted.

"Truly two of the nine wonders of the world, they are."

"What--?"

Damian turned to see a very, *very* tall red-haired Viking grinning down at him.

He grinned back sheepishly.

"Don't be embarrassed. You didn't drool, and that my friend puts you in a category of cool that has only been attained by the gay professor that

teaches calculus in the next wing. You sir, are even more superior to he because you are obviously not immune to miracles. There was no drool but the eyes did not fail to bulge as is right and proper in such a--shall I say--wondrous first encounter."

Damian burst out laughing just as McCloud finally found his lost voice.

"Everybody be *quiet!*" the old man thundered.

The room fell silent.

"Damian...son forgive me...I thought I had prepared them."

Damian looked at the old man, who he was growing to like more all the time. He wasn't blaming McCloud and he tried to convey that with his eyes. In fact, he wasn't even angry. He was just anxious to be on his way.

"I thank you for being so kind to me sir, and offering me such a great opportunity."

Damian was moving towards the door before he was finished speaking. Slow talking McCloud will never catch him with a plea before he was halfway down the hall and he knew it. But when he reached out for freedom, instead of cold, hard doorknob, his hand landed on long, tall, Viking skin. The comical Bill Walton had leaned over without moving his feet and gotten between Damian and the exit.

"Before you go, I think you are due a few more apologies."

*Did it look like I needed anymore apologies?* "That's ok, I'll just be on my---"

"Nooo...Damian...son, please don't leave! This is your lab!" Damian was jolted by the panicked tone of McCloud's voice. He could see he wasn't the only one in the room disturbed by such naked desperation. People were losing it all around. He wanted out.

Damian lowered his hand and sighed deeply.

"Sir, I don't think it's fair or proper--"

"Damian...son, we don't have time for fair and proper...or for catering to bruised egos." McCloud looked around the room fiercely--like the alpha male wolf daring another contender to step up and go for it.

"Welcome...," McCloud demanded of the people in the room, "the new lead scientist of McCloud's research group...and *your* new boss."

"Be goddamned if he's *my* new boss," the big breasted woman muttered too low for anybody as far away as McCloud was from her possibly to hear. The old man's head whipped around like a cobra strike.

"You say something, Ada?"

"No...sir." Ada looked down at the floor.

McCloud started tapping his old scuffed up, weather worn shoe, getting louder with each contact with the floor. The toe taps started to tense the air like a time bomb, counting down the last ten seconds before the big boom.

As much as they hated it, people started to move.

"Welcome, sir." The Englishman or Afrikaner, stepped forward and extended a hand to Damian. "I'm Rhoady Smith." Damian shook it and he couldn't tell if it was inadvertent or not when the man turned and wiped the hand he just shook, on his lab coat.

"Welcome to the Lab, Marson." This was a bull-necked, stocky man who looked like a slightly undersized Mike Ditka. His name was also Mike-- "Mike Steinson." He grabbed Damian's hand and for a second squeezed like the two of them was engaged in some kind of arm wrestling match. He let go and stepped back smirking like he had just proven something.

A tall, light haired woman, who was wearing a skirt so short, Damian was sure that if she turned around, he could see where her ass ended and her legs began even when she was standing up straight. An amusing thing was, her tiny, customized lab coat was even shorter than her skirt. Damian didn't

hear but one female voice during the brouhaha, so he wasn't sure if she had joined in the noise against him or not. She extended her hand towards him like she expected him to kiss it.

"Welcome aboard, sir. I'm Jenna Duchanes, and I look forward to working with you. "

Damian had learned things about older women that left him nearly uninterested in younger ones. He knew they didn't play coy when they wanted something. Like Sheree, the woman was a well preserved older woman; slim and tight. She grabbed his hand like women take hold of a penis--running her palm lightly down from his wrist to his fingertips.

A short, skinny, Woody Allen type approached Damian in a manner that was clearly more intended to interrupt something than to welcome Damian. Nearly pushing the blond woman off balance, he croaked his greeting and stepped back quickly; said his name was Timothy Littlepage.

The tall Viking introduced himself as Steve Gunthor; gave Damian a look that could have been a picture in the dictionary next to the word "sincerity" as he loudly welcomed him as, "Boss."

After two other men obeyed McCloud's demand, the only other woman in the room stepped forward. Damian was already calling her the "Pipsqueak" in his mind. She didn't extend her hand but she did manage to grunt out a greeting even though it was only a welcome by definition of the words-- in intent and expression the woman had cussed him out again. She never mentioned her name.

Damian laughed and grinned at Mr. McCloud, who smiled back in obvious relief, his eyes urging Damian to take charge.

Damian looked around the room--still undecided until his glance fell on Steve. The big oaf was going through a series of facial contortions that would have rivaled the best of Jim Carrey. The 7 footer managed somehow to make himself look like a 3 foot tall, sad-eyed 6 year old one second and



an excited puppy, the next. He was wriggling his massive reared in a pretty good imitation of a tail wagging hound.

Damian wasn't the only one who erupted with laughter.

"You know you ought to take *that* out on the road." Damian wiped his eyes and shook his head.

The big clown straightened up and laughed. Damian had seen plenty of people laugh before but this guy *laughed*. His eyes narrowed into slits. His teeth looked like they popped out of his mouth and started clattering independently from his face. His whole body morphed into a definition of the word laugh. His guffaws cackled like Zeus or Thor or something else from up high.

Damian watched in bemused fascination. *What he said just wasn't that funny. Richard Pryor never said anything that funny.*

If the intention of all that clowning was to convince him to accept the position, it worked. Damian knew he had a least one potential friend in the lab. As anxious as he was to settle in some place and get to work, one person in this crew who didn't despise him was enough.

"Alright," he said, "we all know what happened this morning. Let's get to work."

A series of 'yes-sirs' followed his command--more than one of them even sounding sincere.

"Damian...son..., "McCloud beckoned Damian over to a table where he sat looking intently into a microscope.

"Let me show you something."

## Chapter sixteen



**Janet**

"You know, you really need to check yourself, Sheree."

Tears filled the woman's eyes as she stood there clutching a bottle of white wine.

"I told you not to come over here, Janet." Sheree stood in front of the strikingly beautiful woman and blocked her from entering her home farther than the door threshold.

"But *why*...? We haven't gotten together in over two weeks. I miss you so much."

"You were with Manny two days ago. I know, because for some reason he felt compelled to call me and tell me about it." Sheree sighed. "I don't have to explain anything to you. We're not married and we've never been exclusive."

"What's wrong, baby?" The woman shifted left. Sheree side stepped with her.

"What's wrong... is you coming over here when I asked you *not* to. Besides there being an advisory out against venturing outside today, you are just wrong to come over here thinking you can sweet-talk me like I'm some kind of young thing ready to get high and naked at the drop of a dime. You know me better than that. When I said no, I meant no...Go home Janet."

The woman visibly deflated. "Will you at least let me stay here until it cools down some? It's so hot out there I almost fainted walking the few feet from my car to your door."

Sheree stood unmoved for a long moment and then stepped aside. "You can stay but I'll be upstairs. If you need anything get it yourself. Don't put one foot on those stair steps or I swear I'm going to kick you out of here Jan...I mean it"

"I won't. I promise...I love you Sheree."

"Drink your wine, Janet."

"Well, I do."

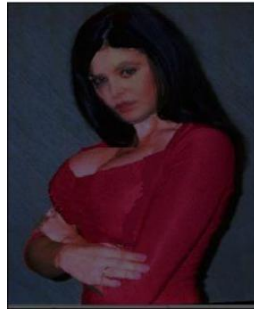
"I know. Just drink your wine, baby."

"Sheree?"

Sheree paused at the bottom of the stairs.

"How's Damian?"

## Chapter seventeen



*you tell me to take a shower*

*as if it should really matter*

**"My loving arms" from the New Genesis CD**

He needed to shave; starting to look like some kind of hobo...or nutty Professor.

There was an answer in what Mr. McCloud, showed him three weeks ago in that Petri dish. All he could think about since then was perfecting McCloud's discovery while he still had the time. Haven't even given much thought to Sheree lately at all, even though she's been blowing his answering machine up with calls. He needed to see her, if for nothing else but the sake of common decency but he has been utterly unable to drag himself from the lab; sleeping on a cot next to his workstation, ordering pizza, starrng at that Petri dish from sunup to sundown.

Woody, or the little guy he playfully called, Woody, died from cancer three days ago. Two others of his crew are on their death beds.

McCloud, Steve, Ada, the Englishman and Mike seemed to be doing fine but he's losing everyone else. Jenna--the tall blond headed woman will probably be the next to succumb. He only slept with her a few times but he grew very fond of her and her utter impartiality in how she distributed her charms; her long, beautiful legs, legs she never hesitated to expose right up to the apex to him every chance she got--legs that she still refused to cover up even though they now resembled Olive Oil's more than Betty Gable's.

He had spent the last few days scouring the Universities and big businesses, trying to find some melaninated scientists to join his team. So far he found two who had some qualifications in the field. Both promised to give his offer serious consideration. But they were miles behind every member of his team in the breach research and would need considerable drilling to catch up. He needed them but he knew even if they decided to join his team, they were going to be a while in adding anything useful to the research.

There was a man in Southern Africa, named Maguthaba. It was a name he kept coming across every time he read a research paper or journal on the subject of the breach. The man seemed to be more respected in the field, than even McCloud.

From what he read, the entire scientific community had turned not to Harvard and McCloud but to the University of Zimbabwe and Maguthaba as their last and best hope.

He wondered if Maguthaba knew of McCloud's discovery and if McCloud knew everything that the African scientist knew. It was strange that McCloud never mentioned Maguthaba to him.

He resisted the thought that McCloud could have been enmeshed in some kind of ridiculous professional rivalry with professor Maguthaba. Then again, why haven't the two most knowledgeable people in the world on the

breach situation gotten together at this point where WoMankind was teetering on the brink of extinction?

He will ask McCloud to explain but first he had to get in contact with Mr. Maguthaba.

"You really do need to shave." Damian looked around and saw the Pipsqueak standing in the doorway with her left hand on her hip, "And a shower too. You stink."

*What's she doing here this time of night? He didn't have the energy to deal with her after hours.*

"I know that Pip. You forget something?"

"Take a shower, Damian." Her voice sounded strange, low and slightly breathless, like something you'd hear from a woman in heat, not from a shrew who has acted like she hated him from the moment they met.

"Please?"

*What the hell?*

"Pip, this is my cubicle, if the smell is bothering you so much get out or go the hell on home. What are you doing here so late anyway?"

She started crying--not that controlled dainty kind of sobbing either. The woman was bawling, shoulders shaking and everything.

"Alright, alright...*goddamn*...I'll take a shower."

McCloud's wing of the school had a shower room, as well as a kitchen and other comforts and necessities of a real home.

Damian got off his cot and stood up, took a few steps towards the shower room and stopped. The Pipsqueak was right on his heels. "*What...you plan to shoot film or something? I have to take a leak too, you gonna hold my dick?*" He looked into her eyes and saw six thousand years of punishment over a bite of apple.

"Ada, I'm sorry." There's no way he should have been so insensitive. Her friends were dying all around her--probably family members too. She was close to Woody and he knew that-- even though Jenna was the only one who was bad enough to give the skinny little man some dip.

He was more stressed out than he knew. Lately he was being extra nice to her because of Woody's death and because she had actually started sending him some unexpectedly strange vibes. Though he had spent many a night fantasizing about her and what Steve called the eighth and ninth wonders of the world in the beginning, he just didn't want to be bothered with her and what she was suddenly needing, or wanting right now. Seemed like everybody was suddenly, needing a piece of him that they didn't want three weeks before.

But what the hell, it wasn't going to kill him. He needed to get himself together and start living like people again. What better way to do that than to accept what she was offering. He should be grateful to her.

He put an arm around her waist. She laid her dark-haired head on his shoulder, right in the funk of his radiating armpit.

Together they walked to the shower room.

## Chapter eighteen



### **Maguthaba**

It was down to him and Jubatta now. All the old white Scientists who came to work with him have died. He still had a bunch of assistants; most of them African.

Jubatta was as smart as they come; and had long been a tremendous help to him. He was more than capable of heading his own research team. If the fat man was nothing else, he was loyal. He was also a good friend. The best friend Maguthaba ever had.

He received a call from the United States. A kid name Damian Marson. He'd read about the boy, picked up the book the young scientist wrote when he was just fifteen years old. That's why he was even considering accepting the boy's invitation to come to the United States. That was some seriously insightful writing on biology and environment. He wanted to meet the youngster. That, and get the chance to see old Douglas McCloud again.

The problem is: Jubatta will never survive a flight to the United States. He couldn't even walk anymore; lived in the lab these days.

He had been watching his friend slowly die since that day he had pulled him out of the heat.

Jubatta wasn't just heat exhausted that day. He had suffered a stroke. And *he* never even knew it; had tugged and pulled at his friend like he was



some kind of willfully stubborn mule. The fact was, Jubatta truly couldn't walk, yet for him--because he kept pushing him--he had struggled to hobble those five meters with a fraction of the needed blood pumping from his heart.

How could he leave to go to the United States knowing Jubatta will be dead before he gets back? But on the other hand, how can he pass up this opportunity to help with a breakthrough on the breach problem? The youngster Damian spoke of some possible solution McCloud had discovered regarding a plant that could not only kill cancerous cells without harming healthy ones, the balm can also help the body maintain its natural temperature in up to 200 degrees Fahrenheit. Maguthaba looked over at Jubatta. As normally these days, the fat man was asleep. Maguthaba stood up and started pacing the floor.

"I've researched your dilemma, MugUdu"

Maguthaba, startled, stopped pacing and turned to his friend. Forget that he thought Jubatta was asleep, *when* did *he* do any research? He hadn't been awake for more than twenty minutes at a stretch in over a month.

"And my conclusion is that you should go."

"What are you talking about Jubatta?"

"I heard you on the phone. All the data comparisons say you should go."

"I can't." Maguthaba shook his head.

"Why not..?"

"Because you cannot travel and I am afraid to leave you for so long."

The fat man's smile radiated so much gratitude, tears threatened to well up in Maguthaba's eyes.

"Have you forgotten my thorough excellence so soon MugUdu? I have factored in that equation and the conclusion is still overwhelmingly that

you should go to meet this young one, named Damian." The fat man's eyelids drooped... his head was slowly falling to his chest.

"MugUdu...go...father...go...go!"

The fat man's head dropped, like Maguthaba had seen it do a thousand times, only this time, the loud, labored snoring did not follow. Maguthaba saw his friend's body relax and extract like he'd seen too many others do over the past few years and he knew there was no more Jubatta to be concerned with. He lit a candle and called on Jubatta's most righteous Ancestor to come and show his spirit the way home. He next called the lab's medical wing.

Later that week, he packed for the long journey to the United States.

## Chapter nineteen



*don't get me no doctor don't get me no pills*

*don't put to bed on no gurney on wheels*

*"rootswoman" from the new genesis cd by akamardukson*

"Aw come on baby, just let me see."

Chandra slapped away for the fourth time, the fingers messing with her blouse buttons.

She had looked like a kid for so long, no real man had ever looked at her twice. Not only that; *they* say you are what you eat---she would say you are what you looked like. She'd looked like a 13 year old for 12 years and a grownup for only one. So she hadn't quite made the complete transition into adulthood yet.

She had thwarted him four times but it wasn't but a moment before the thick fingers were back at her buttons because her refusals were as mixed a message as her emotions and appearance. This time she closed her eyes and let him open the blouse. Even let him unhook her bra. Then of course, after "just seeing," he had to touch.

"**Stop It!**" she smacked his hand hard enough to give him a clear message.

"Ok, ok, no touching...no more touching. I promise. "

He looked at her naked breasts a little while longer and then his eyes grew greedier and started traveling downward. The hand on her knee started snaking forward.

"Darrell."

"I just wanna see baby." He was caressing her thigh, close to her privates, and it wasn't anything he didn't know how to do, or hadn't done before because his touch was just right--not like some other caresses she had experienced down there that wasn't her own. He touched her like she touched herself--only better--because his felt better--better than anything she had ever known before. She shifted downward and raised her hips so he could take her underwear off. As he promised, he didn't touch her privates, just stared at them and rubbed her thighs. After a while beads of sweat broke out on his forehead although she kept the temperature inside her place on the cool side.

"You know, I don't care if you touch *me*," he said huskily.

She wasn't totally self-absorbed, and being a healer, she not only had great understanding of nature, including the nature of people-- there was a natural streak of kindness inside her. She just wasn't ready for the big deal, and it may have had more to do with wanting to wait for the right person than fear of being entered as she had always thought before tonight. He had so aroused her, she would have gratefully allowed him entry--if her heart had felt anything for him.

She reached for the zipper of his pants. This was nothing she hadn't done before.

"Lean back and close your eyes."

## Chapter twenty



"My god Damian...I said I was sorry. Why don't you come to see me? You're never home anymore. I need to know how you're doing, how you're feeling; if you're taking care of yourself. Are you eating right? I promised Letta. I promised I would look after you and all I've done is drive you away from me. Please, Damian...Come over. Call--"

The answering machine beeped and stopped recording. Sheree set the phone on its hook. She stood up and ran her fingers through her unkempt hair, brushed her eyes with the back of her hand. She sat down again, picked up the phone and started dialing.

"Janet, can you please come over?"

Damian was feeling better than he had in a long time and the reasons for it were more than one. Mr. Maguthaba had accepted his invitation and was on his way to help with the balm but no less a contributor to his improved outlook was the fact that Ada made him start taking care of himself again. It's amazing how letting yourself go can contribute to inertial and self-isolation. Of course, having a steady lover can do wonders for a person's energy level too--and their desire to comb their goddamn hair.

He should have never ignored Sheree like he did; have her crying and begging on the telephone.

Three weeks he had put her off, now he was zooming to her place in his T-bird like he thought every second that passed was next to the last one before the end of the world. He owed that beautiful woman a very big apology.

Janet got to Sheree's place first. The gorgeous woman looked so haggard, Sheree, who had called on Janet to comfort her, forgot her problems and raced to hug her friend. She had heard through their circles that Janet--like Damian--had become reclusive, wasn't taking care of herself.

Her entire life she had hurt people to the extreme just by trying to live her own life the way she wanted to; Letta, Damian--a long string of lovers, and now poor Janet. She didn't know what to do. She never meant to hurt anyone. She tried the Island thing but she needed other people just like everyone else. There was no way to live in this world all alone.

She stood there holding Janet tightly until there was a familiar knock at the door. Her heart raced.

"I have to answer the door, sweetie. Sit down on the couch. Later I'll cook us dinner."

She flung the door open wide.

"Damian!"

Damian opened his arms wide and when she walked into his embrace he held her tighter than he had ever hugged anything in his life.

His head started moving side to side.

"Sheree, I am so--"

She put a finger to his lips.

"We've both made mistakes and hurt each other, Damian. I know you care for me and you know I love you. Let's put the past behind us and start anew, Ok?"

Damian shook his head and said softly, "Ok"

Sheree held his hand tightly as she led him into the sitting room.

"Damian, have you met professor, Rivera?"

Damian had never in his life seen a more perfect set of teeth, or a more perfect face housing them, even though despite the million dollar smile, she looked like she had been crying three days straight and hadn't eaten even longer.

He recognized the symptoms.

"Call me Janet." The woman extended a hand to him.

Damian shook it and returned her smile, if not as brilliantly.

"I'm cooking dinner." Sheree looked at Damian with unfamiliar, uncertain eyes, "And you're going to stay to eat?" It was both a statement and a question.

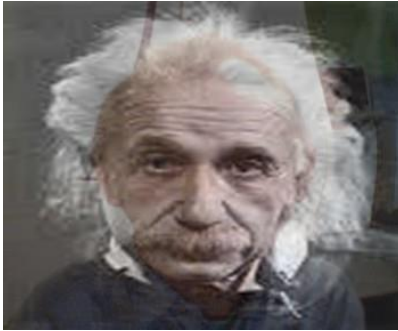
"Woman, I've been living on pizza, pop and m&ms for three weeks now. What do you think?"

Both Sheree and Janet laughed.

After they had finished eating Damian leaned back in his chair and Sheree, who had been sneaking glances at him throughout the dinner, leaned forward, staring at him playfully.

"So who's the new chick?"

## Chapter twenty-one



There was a reason that Douglas McCloud had so much instant faith, trust and confidence in an eight-teen year old black kid named Damian Marson. And that reason's name was Robert Maguthaba. He was young too, when McCloud first took him under his wing. Not as young as Damian but in his mid-twenties.

He had never seriously considered leaving his work in the hands of anything else but another Melaninite, after Maguthaba left his fold. The fact that they had better odds of living long enough to complete his work had something to do with that but it wasn't nearly everything. Melaninated people are going to perish too if no solution is found to the breach problem. They just have more time and options.

No, it's because only black brilliance has the soul, or spirit to put such energy into just helping people, instead of just into making money, or trying to destroy life. White brilliance is great in both of the latter, but it has a block when it comes to doing things for no gain, or if it don't involve elevating themselves over others. Black brilliance, on the other hand, has no limit or preconditions on how high it will soar in the pursuit of the mental, spiritual, and material progress of the species.

He had always admired the biblical figure who built the tower of Babel. In a sense, had even worshiped him by the way he had uninhibitedly pursued his scientific goals to benefit Mankind as a whole. Martin Luther King Jr, was another great influence in his life.



He became an environmental expert in hope of discovering ways to end the shameful scourge of worldwide hunger but he soon discovered that world hunger was more a man-made problem than an environmental one.

Still, he soldiered on until his research lead him to the horrifying reality of the ozone breach threat, which led to his research with melanin, which indirectly led him to recruit Mugathaba unto his team. The two had grown very close during the years they worked together. He had never been more hurt in his life than when Maguthaba left him. Maguthaba insisted on going back home after 15 years with the McCloud research team---back where there was no spotlight, glitter, or gold.

At that point in his life shine, glitter and gold was very important to McCloud, if for no other reason but the money it generated for his work.

Maguthaba went back home to Africa.

The reason he hadn't contacted his protégé in all these years is not due to anger, jealousy, or rivalry, but to shame. The student had proven himself to be a better man than the teacher in more ways than one and no man can face the personification of that acknowledgment--no matter how saintly he becomes in his dotage.

He was still glad that Damian had reached out to his old student. It was something he should have done himself, long ago.

The cancer in his leg was on the move. He could feel it eating away at his gut. He had grown as fond of Damian as he was of Maguthaba. It looked like he was going to be blessed to see them both together before he dies. Not only that, he was going to die knowing he passed WoMankind's last hope to survive the next breach onto the two most qualified people in the world.

More than that, he couldn't ask.

Twenty-two



**Steve**

"Boss...you're not going to believe it, but I...we've found it...*godalmighty*, we've found it!"

Damian stared at Steve, stupidly.

"The pattern?"

"Yes-sir...Yes, sir..." The giant puffed out his cheeks. Damian didn't think he was clowning, but the man's rubbery cheeks filled up bigger, and rounder than a softball. Any other time, Damian would have cracked up, but there was no laughter in him these days. Steve exhaled deeply. "*The mystifying, mesmerizing, paralyzing, and just plain old fucking , search defying, pattern.*"

It had been a long time since Damian had heard or seen a joke from Steve. He hoped he wasn't starting up again now. He had been trying to find a pattern for three years. McCloud had been trying his entire career. The monitors and gauges have been improving all the time. The computer had a lot to do with that, but still...

"Take a look at these, boss." Steve handed Damian a stack of graphs. Damian took them to his table and laid them out. He instantly saw why they had never been able to find the pattern before. They were looking at the whole thing from an entirely wrong perspective. They were searching

for typical, cyclical weather patterns, when the breaches were not occurring with any kind of periodicity at all. The earth was not moving towards hotter and hotter weather, it was being struck by bigger and bigger sun strikes, with longer and longer aftereffects. To put it in mythological terms; Zeus was attacking the earth, or WoMankind. And judging from the pattern, he was getting madder and more frustrated with every attack that left the species of Woman still standing. Circling the globe in a determined attempt to punish the WoMan race, the God was acting like an enraged child. There was no identifiable design to it all, but there *was* a pattern and a clear mathematically identifiable grid. He was aiming for the big cities of the world, starting with the most historically, destructive Nations.

They would have never found the pattern without the latest software written for them by NASA. To see the pattern, they couldn't just factor in climate patterns, weather temperatures, population, environmental defects and effects, as they were doing; they had to also factor in history, body counts, slavery, war, genocide. How NASA knew to do that, he could only guess but he knew the great space agency had long been deep into the occult and the whole mythological, god pantheon thing.

The heat from the breaches was an aftereffect of lightning bolts that struck somewhere in the world. Before they received the surprise gift from NASA, they were never able to record every single bolt, much less correlate it with the heat wave that followed it...The strikes with getting more powerful with each successive one.

The pattern showed that Zeus was zigzagging in an increasingly wrathful and steady pace towards the United States.

## Chapter twenty-three



### the genesis

"Sheree, I need you to pack light but include enough clothing to get you through some very hot days and bitter cold nights."

"Why...what's going on? Damian..., be still and talk to me."

"I need you to help me...to help...you know a lot of people--a lot of women. Sheree, do you know what a Rootswoman is?"

"Yes, of course."

"I--we need an Herbalist. Do you know where we can find one?"

"Damian, if we're going on a journey why don't we just stock up on medical supplies."

"Because we're not going on a Journey, we're going on a genesis... Sheree..."

Damian found the couch and sat down.

Sheree sighed gratefully.

"Sheree, we have to leave the United States--go on a trip, but the trip we're going on is back to the stone-age. Our bodies will be changing as the

magnetic atmosphere of the earth changes so there are going to be no more synthetic medicines and no more hospitals that we can depend upon. Eventually the man-made medicines and food will become poisonous to us and our children. We will have to survive on, and heal our illnesses with the fruits of a new earth. Do you understand what I'm telling you?"

"It's about the breaches isn't it? The next one is going to kill us all.

Damian nodded his head.

"We ran out of time. We tried. Believe me. We--"

"Oh Damian," Sheree reached over and caressed his cheek with the back of her hand, "I know how hard you tried."

"Some of us can still survive, Sheree...Live on to preserve our species."

"How..?"

"We've discovered a pattern. We can predict when and where the effects of the breaches will manifest next. That means if we can stay ahead of the manifestations and survive long enough for our bodies to acclimate with the earth and air, we may be able to be the ones to regenerate our species. We will have to live like cavepeople-- primitives-- but it's been done before and I'm confident we can do it again."

"If we have a chance, why can't more--"

She saw the look on his face and stopped in mid-sentence.

"Sparse food, scarce medicine, no shelter, disease, limited amount of the balm Mr. McCloud discovered. Not to mention, no time.

Tears flooded Sheree's eyes.

"Can Janet come with us?" Damian saw panic on her face as she swallowed hard.

"Of course she can. But we can only try to sincerely save but so many lives in this thing. To try to save everybody means no one will make it."

"I understand."

"Sheree," he brushed her hair from her face and the tears from her eyes, "bring Janet. We'll meet at the Lab to discuss our plans."

"Damian, my oldest brother back home in Louisiana has a daughter who's an Herbalist. Her brother is a medical Doctor. I don't know if she will abandon her family or her patients but I'll call her."

*Louisiana, of course... Why didn't he think of it? There are probably still plenty of Rootswomen down there.*

"Call her tonight, please. If she won't come we'll have to find another soon."

"Damian...stay with me?"

"I want too. You're so beautiful to me. But I can't go through the romantic thing with you again. Right now you are confusing love with compassion." He kissed her forehead. "I appreciate that you want to comfort me?"

"Maybe I want you to comfort me."

He paused and looked at her tenderly.

"I'll see you in the morning at the Lab. We plan to be ready to go in three weeks."

He walked to the door. Sheree bit her fist as she watched him lightly shut the door between them.

## Chapter twentyfour



Chandra stepped out of the shower and took her time getting to the ringing phone. She was sure it was Darrell and nothing in her heart was growing for him. They, and *he*, have gone as far as they were ever going to go.

"Ello...Oh Daddy...I thought yuh be...neva mind. Is inyt'ing wrong, Faddah?"

"Yuh aunt from Boston called me. Sey she wanted to talk ti yuh 'bout somet'ing."

"Me auntie, di Proffessa...?"

"How many aunts do yuh haf inna Boston, gal? Gi' mi baby sista a call, will yuh dawta?"

"Of course...yuh haf she numba, Faddah?"

"Yes...It's ah...8,2,0-...shit, me cyanno see worth a damn ting, inymore."

Chandra gasped, loud enough to be sure her father heard. "**Daddy, yuh *cursed!***" she teased.

"Me screwed nuff too...Dat's how yuh and yuh Breddah got he'ah. But yuh bet' nuh be doing ev'ry ting I do, gal."

The phone banged against something.

"Verlene...C'mere! I need yuh ti read dis he'ah numba for Chandie."

Shortly, Chandra heard the phone being picked up.

"Hi, Mama."

"Hiiiiiiii, Baaabae...You doing alright?"

"Yes mama--"

"Verlene *read* dat gal dat numba! Yuh see she ev'ryday. Y'all can coo at each udda tomorra."

"Oh hush up, you old grouch...8,2,8dash5,5,5dash7,0,2,2... You got that, Chandie?"

"Yes, Mama...Thanks."

"Ok dear. You take care of yourself."

"I will, Mama...Bye Daddy!" she hollered at the phone, a split second before she heard it hang up.



## Chapter twenty-five



### **Maguthaba**

He arrived in the United States three days ago.

They found the pattern. He had been searching for that pattern for 30 years--since his days as an understudy of Douglass McCloud. He already knew that it was too late to do anything to stop the breaches. He came to the United States in hopes of helping McCloud and young Damian perfect their organic solution. Now even that has been rendered a fruitless quest in light of the pattern discovery. He sure wished that they hadn't found that pattern. He was getting to be an old man. He might have been lucky enough to die in his delusions, of one day finding a solution to the calamity that awaited WoMankind.

His reunion with McCloud was easier than he thought it would be. They had both welled up like women. McCloud cried because he was old and losing control of his emotions. He got emotional because he saw Jubatta's eyes in McCloud's head...just before Jubatta went to sleep for the last time.

He still hadn't decided if he was going to join Damian in his quest to try to preserve a remnant of WoMankind, or go back home and just lay down and wait for the end. He never knew how tired and stressed he was until he landed in "America's" gravity. Maybe he was too old for a new Genesis or even a fighting chance. Maybe he didn't want to survive WoMankind's collective demise.

## Chapter twenty-six



Damian sat in his Cubicle, speaking softly into the small recorder he had recently started carrying.

"Jenna died today. Robbie and John will be following her very soon.

Mr. McCloud is bedridden, breathing through a tube. He won't last out the month. Rhoady is walking around but is thin and stumbling. Steve is as healthy as a horse. Guess he's just too big to be beat by anything. Ada and Mike are also in perfect health. I thank God for it--especially for Ada. She and I cooled off soon after we heated up but she gave me something special at a time in my life when I needed it like oxygen. I'll always love her for that. She's gravitated towards Steve and I'm happy for both of them. He has always wanted her. I only wanted her in a time of need. We both know that the time has passed.

In two weeks we began our Genesis. There are six of us so far. I'm hoping for at least two more to join us before we start out. We are, at this moment and date:

Damian Marson, Scientist and the author of this oral record.

Sheree Fontaine, History Professor. Janet Rivera, English

Professor. Steve Gunthor, Scientist,

Ada Lightfoot, Scientist,

Mike Steinson, Scientist,

This date is the twelfth day of June, in the year 2009 A.D."

Damian clicked off the recorder just as Mike entered his cubicle.

"Damian, I want to bring my wife along."

Damian looked up at Mike in surprise.

"Wife? I never even knew you had a girlfriend. Where have you been keeping her all these years Mike? Afraid somebody in the lab was going to steal her away from you or something?" Damian grinned. Mike attempted what was meant to be a smile in response.

"No. I just married her yesterday. Met her two months ago."

"What's her Name?"

"Feifong. Her maiden name is Chu."

Damian nodded. "Mike, you know you don't need my permission to bring your wife along."

"Yeah, I do Damian. I know that I haven't been the most cooperative guy in the lab, or as respectful of your position as I should have been. I just want you to know, I'm scared, and I don't know what to do. But I believe you do. And I want you to get us out of this thing alive. I'm just starting out knowing what it is to be happy and I'm not ready for it to end yet."

Mike held a hand out to Damian. Damian took it and the damp, clammy grip lay in his grasp like a dead fish.

## Chapter twenty-seven



"Call dat, bwoy!" Chandra's half crippled father, half stood up out of his lazy-boy recliner.

"Daddy, I'm not leaving dis place and dat's final"

"Nuh dat taint final gal!"

The old man stood up straight--without his walker--and loomed over his daughter.

"You gwan wit mi sista and dat bwoy and *dat's* wat be final."

Tears flooded Chandra's eyes. "I'm a grown up wombman. Yuh nuh cyan mek mi do nuhting, Faddah. All mi patients be here, and mi family."

"I cyan mek yuh gi outta I building, I can bun di bombaclatt place ti di ground."

"Dat be my place!"

"It's on *I* property."

Chandra lapsed speechless for a moment and then bellowed:

"Maddah!"

"Hush child. Listen to your Father."

She turned to her brother.

"Junya!"

"I'll care for the folks around here, Chandie. There isn't going to be that much to it anyway. We're all walking corpses and we all know it. But you don't have to be. Go on with that boy.

"Yuh don' haf ti be either. Why don' *all of you* gwan wit dat bwoy?"

"Because we're too old, dear."

"Junior taint," Chandra snapped back at her mother.

"Junya got a wife and six kids...dat we know of. Six trildren taint gwan do nuhting but suffer and die trying to walk around the world.

Junior grew red in his light-skinned face. He looked over at Chandra as if he wanted to put his hands over her ears.

"Dad you didn't have to--"

"I do wat I wan inna I house. Yuh tink yuh can mek babies from he'ah ti Miss'sippi, and somebody know nuhting 'boutit? "

Chandra's mother, who had left the room came back dragging a blue, leather suitcase.

"I packed the things you left here when you moved out last year."

Chandra knew then, that she might not have had to go with Damian, but she was going to have to get the hell out of her Family's life. But she also knew they were acting out of the purest love that could ever be. She walked over to her mother and pulled the fronting woman into her arms. The front collapsed and her mother began to wail at the top of her lungs.

The old man turned and rubbed his eyes. "Bun it, Verlène."

Chandra pried herself from her Mother's embrace and approached her father--the one who had really raised her.

"Bombaclattt. Dat woman knows how much I hate to see she cry like dat."

"Daddy," she stood directly in front of him. He wiped his eyes and peered at her.

"Hug me...Faddah...Yuh haf neva...*hugged* me."

The old man burst into sobs almost as loud as his wife's wails. He lurched at his daughter, gathering her into his arms.

"Mi baby...I babee, gurl."

Junior walked over and laid his hand on Chandra's back.

After savoring her father's embrace for a long, precious minute, Chandra separated herself from him.

"I'll go with dat bwoy. "

She looked at each of them, in turn, telling, and showing them with her eyes what they desperately wanted to see and hear...

That she understood.

## Chapter twenty-eight



**Rhoady**

*i'm about to die*

*and i hope there's not a hell*

**"i'm about2die"** from the new **Genesis cd** by akamardukson

Damian was sitting in his cubicle poring over his preparation list. Later today everybody is supposed to meet in the Lab for one last thorough briefing before they begin their genesis.

Sheree called earlier and told him he had his Rootswoman. That was a great load off his mind. Nothing will work out without the skills and knowledge of such a person.

He had put himself through a cram course on the medicinal and nutritional values of the earth's vegetation but he couldn't even begin to remember all the different kinds of plants, much less tell the difference between all those that looked so similar, yet were so very different in their usefulness. Plus, the earth's vegetation will be mutating and changing, like the earth itself. They needed someone who was born with the knowledge, not someone who learned in school.

What they were getting into was for the long haul--all the stakes-- and the

rootswoman is going to most important element in the difference between living and dying.

Sheree said the Rootswoman name is Chandra and that she is twenty-six years old. That was another pleasant surprise. He had always envisioned an accomplished Rootswoman as older, and that was a point for concern. Their journey was going to be very hard and physically taxing. Most people don't take too long to get into shape when they have to exert themselves everyday just to survive but it was still a blessing that their medicine woman is so young.

There was a polite knock on Damian's cubicle window. He turned to see the Englishman standing there looking like a propped up cadaver. The fair-haired man was finally out of his lab coat, dressed in a three piece suit that hung on him like he had shrunk inside of it to almost half his original size although he still manage to stand up straight so the pants didn't bunch up atop his shoes.

"Come on in, Rhoady."

Damian didn't see the wolfhead cane until the man slowly advanced forward; moving so gingerly, with such concentration, Damian all but felt his agony.

*What the hell does he keep hobbling to the lab for every day?*

Damian knew Rhoady had a wife and at least one child but the man had never introduced his family to him.

Rhoady made it inside the cubicle and stood there shaking and swaying, breathing like he had just sprinted 50 yards.

"Damian...sir," The man had never looked at him so directly and smirkless.

"I must ask of you, a most imposing favor."

"Just name it, Rhoady."



"I want you to take my daughter--my only child."

"What's so imposing about that Rhoady? We've worked together for three years. You know you didn't have to come to me like a beggar to ask that. You've earned a place for your daughter, or anybody else you choose, with anything the McCloud's research group, does. We are a team." Suddenly Damian felt the usual annoyance he always felt around the man.

"You don't understand." Rhoady moved closer to Damian, staring at him like he wanted to get even closer--into Damian's skin, which left Damian with a very strange feeling because since they've met, the Englishman had acted like getting too close would cause something deadly to rub off on him.

"I want you to *take* her. Marry her. Concubine her if you can't do that. Just make her your woman. I've given her some of the balm and protected her all these years...she's very strong."

Rhoady began to cough and cry like he was going to project everything inside his body right there on the floor of Damian's Cubicle.

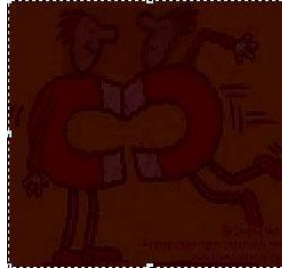
Damian stood up, undecided what to do. His initial impulse was to go to the man, help him to sit, or lie down but there was a strong revulsion at the thought of being puked on by the guy that he had never felt before with any of the other dying people he had comforted in their last moments.

He stood there and before he could move, Rhoady suddenly launched himself at him-- wrapped himself around Damian like a second skin.

"I don't want to die." The Englishman's skeletal frame rattled with steadily fainter sobs

*"I don't want to die."*

## Chapter twenty-nine



'Is there anything at all I can say or do, sir, to make you change your mind?'

Maguthaba smiled and shook his head. "Son, I'll be sixty-five years old next month. I never married...never fathered any children. Lived my whole life trying to be Daddy to the whole underprivileged world--trying to fix something God seemed to have given up on a long time ago. My work, my pretensions was all I had--all I've ever got up in the morning for. No, Damian. I've got nothing to go through a whole lot trials and tribulation, trying to escape the wrath of God for. I'm just going to go back home, get me that wife I've been meaning to woo for 40 years now, sit out in any African breeze I can find and rock beside her until the Ancestors come to get me."

Maguthaba leaned towards Damian, staring at him in a way that left Damian with the exact feelings that the Englishman's open stare had given him. Except Maguthaba's eyes weren't full of fear, but of acceptance and contentment.

"Let me tell you this, son: The only reason I can fade out with such ease of mind, body and spirit is you. It's somewhat selfish but I didn't tell you to pick up my burden now did I?" He smiled. "I'm grateful to you Damian. You'll never know how much."

Maguthaba reached into the smallest of the packed suitcases that were at his feet. He pulled out a necklace of bones, teeth, shells and pearls. He handed it to Damian.

"I know you are going to make it, son. It's going to be a hard, terrible journey but I know you'll reach the end of it. By the time you get much more than halfway through it I'll be an Ancestor. When you need help, call on me. My spirit name is MugUdu "

Maguthaba picked up his suitcases. He walked to the door, stopped and turned back.

"Call on me."

As Maguthaba was walking out, all the others, who were casting their future with Damian, were filing in. He could hear them saying their goodbyes to Maguthaba, one by one, as the tall African walked passed them.

When they started entering into his presence, Damian's eyes eagerly sought out the young Rootswoman. He was sure he'd spot her out even though he knew there might be others besides her that was total strangers to him.

He greeted Sheree, Steve, Mike, Mike's wife Feifong, who somewhat disturbed him with the bold, flirtatious way she looked directly into his eyes.

He greeted Janet. Next he welcomed a tall, demure, bespectacled, strawberry blond-haired woman who introduced herself as Jane, the daughter of Rhoady. Then he shook the hand of a very pretty teen-aged girl.

After the girl, Ada walked in and smiled at him. He returned the affection. That was everyone he expected but the Rootswoman. After waiting anxiously for her to appear, he was disappointed that the Rootswoman was late, or might not show up at all.

He looked over at Sheree who was grinning like the cat who swallowed the canary.

"Where's the Rootswoman? Did she change her mind?"

The pupils in her eyes were bouncing like Mexican jumping beans. She shook her head, "No."

*I don't see what's so funny. Everyone knew how important it is to stick to schedule and be on time.*

"When is she going to show up?"

Janet giggled.

Sheree made a popping noise with her cheeks. "Already has."

"What?" Damian looked around the room. *How could he have missed her?*  
"Where?"

It was happening again and it hurt no less than it ever did. Chandra put her hands on her hips.

"What be di matta with yuh eyes, bwoy? I am di Rootswoman and I-wombman be no ghost."

Damian gaped. She was pretty--very, very pretty; which was the first thing that put her out of the range of what he expected to see in their medicine woman. Next to that, she couldn't have been more than sixteen years old---seventeen at the most. No way could she be a Rootswoman--an apprentice in training maybe-- but they needed a full-fledged, experienced Rootswoman for this journey. Sheree knew that. He looked over at his godmother and threw daggers with his eyes. She was still silently laughing. He was mad at her. He wasn't going to let her know that in front of everybody or further embarrass the girl but she was *going* to know, that he is pissed. All the time wasted. And now they still have to find a real Rootswoman.

"Sheree, can I talk to you for a minute...in private?"

Sheree glanced at Janet, said something inaudible with her lips, and followed Damian out of the room. Two minutes later Sheree and Damian

re-entered the room. Janet saw Damian's face and doubled over with laughter.

For two seconds Sheree frantically tried to hush her friend. Then she put her hand over her own mouth just before she spat mirth all over the room. She looked over at her niece and shook her head.

"I'm sorry, Chandie."

Damian watched the young looking woman. The joke was a good one--if you knew what was going on. Few people in Sheree's position could have passed up such a glaring opportunity to so amuse the gods. Sheree wasn't the kind of person who would maliciously hurt someone for a joke but the young woman *was* hurt. He could see it in her eyes. Something else he saw as he watched her standing there, looking so vulnerable, alienated, different--not in the conventional sense--but in the spiritual way that gentle people, who have been treated differently--walked, looked over all their lives get. That look--that ethereal essence they exude, of being half in the world and half out of it. He saw in that--in her, her ageless beauty his reason to be, his pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Before, he was going to survive just for the sake of surviving or for some abstract, grandiose idea of being the savior or regenerator of the WoMan race. But now his goal was clearer, more focused, more earthy. It was going to be for her. Everything, all of it...

For the love of Chandra.

Love..? Did he just say to himself, *love*?

"Boss..."

Damian wanted to say something apologetic and healing to Chandra but Steve was rustling papers at him again.

"These are the calcs and projections you asked for." Damian took the papers and started reading. Steve, Mike, Ada, and Mr. Maguthaba all worked on the report. At a glance he saw that most of it confirmed what he had already concluded. The team projected:

1. To acclimate themselves to the earth changes, they will have to breathe the air, eat the vegetation, absorb the altered atoms and molecules of their new world; drink the water, feel the sun.

Conclusion: They can start out in vehicles but they will have to complete most of their journey on foot. The heat and altered atmosphere will soon render the vehicles inoperable anyway.

2. They will meet many people in the beginning. Most of those they meet will be deathly ill. A few may be healthy enough to join or try to harm them.

Conclusion: They will have to be prepared both to help who they can and defend themselves.

3. Animals will be healthier than people and a far bigger threat.

Conclusion: Surviving the starving or crazed animals will be their greatest challenge by the end of their journey.

5. The last bolt before the pattern begins again is expected to hit on the Southern continent in about seven years.

Conclusion: They must time their journey so that they reach the Southern continent no earlier than seven years from date, at which point, the worst of the manifestations from Zeus's bolts in Africa, will have run its course.

Analysis: There are no sustainable constants to what Zeus is doing. Sometimes he rests and the intervals range widely in time span from weeks to centuries. Sometimes he regrets. Sometimes he rages. Sometimes he forgives. Right now he is raging and in about 5 weeks, the Western Hemisphere will suffer the greatest devastation to date. Most people have no chance to survive the next month but the McCloud research group can and possibly, even other less prepared people around the world who are just plain lucky, or unlucky, depending on from what point of view you look at it.

Damian smiled wryly at that last sentence. He could easily guess which of the four contributors to the thesis wrote it.

6. Babies or Children in their group will lower their odds of survival.

**Conclusion:** Though the ultimate goal is to replenish the WoMan race, procreation must be avoided until they reach a period of respite. The first is in seven years and is projected to last about 5 years. Then there will come another fit of rage, projected to hit in the far East. After that, the pattern shows an indeterminable period of calm. This will be their chance to rebuild and replenish.

7. In the beginning of their journey, most of the lakes, rivers, and streams will be dried up. By the halfway point, most mountainous, and Arctic regions, will be completely submerged in water. Later, the melted ice caps will cause all the major bodies of water to rise-- flooding the earth everywhere, replenishing all the water veins.

**Conclusion:** Start out carrying as much drinkable water as possible. Stick close to the rivers and streams. Carry plenty of salt and purifying tablets.

The list went on. While Damian was reading Ada passed out copies to everyone.

Damian finished his reading and went into the biggest room in the wing, which was McCloud's cubicle.

He switched on his recorder.

"Three more has joined us since I first listed our group. They are:

Chandra Fontaine, Herbal expert.

Jane Smith, School Teacher.

Feifong Chu Steinson, Executive Secretary. Wife of Mike.

We are now nine.

Tomorrow we begin our Journey to a new Genesis. To begin to acclimate our systems to an altered atmosphere, we will start out in farthestmost southern part of the United States and travel Northward by foot until we reach the New York Harbor. From there we will take a boat and cross the Atlantic.

The date is the second day of July, in the year 2009 A.D."

He switched off the recorder.

"You do know that thing won't last any more than any other kind of electronics or gravity-assisted devices, don't you? Mike says that the magnetic alteration in the atmosphere caused by the breach is going to change physics and atomic reactions as we know it."

"Now that you've mentioned it..." Damian looked up at Mike's sleight, beautiful wife and smiled. He was more than a little surprised that she was so at ease and familiar with him so soon. She was a tiny woman but the way she looked at him was the way a predator looked at prey it was stalking--direct and unblinking.

It never occurred to him before but she was right. If his intent was to leave a record for all posterity he was wasting his time with the little gadget.

"I don't know why I didn't think of it. I should be doing this the old-fashioned way."

"I made a hundred grand a year doing that kind of thing."

Damian laughed. "I can't pay you quite that much. In fact, I'll only be able to pay you in seashells--when we find a sea--but if you still want the job, it's yours."

She didn't even crack a smile.

"Mike thinks a lot of you." She walked over to the desk he sat behind and picked up the old fashioned paper weight which snowed when you shook it. She shook it.



Damian got stuck on her simple statement. The way she put it was muddy. And he knew, deliberately so. Did she mean Mike thought a lot of him-- meaning Mike liked him--or did she mean Mike just thought and talked about him a lot? From how she said it he couldn't discern which she meant but he did discern one thing: this woman meant everything she said--every word, every letter, every nuance, every reflection. She was one of those word players-- the kind of people who thought they were smarter than everybody else, with whom languages were a weapon they wielded to bludgeon, defeat, belittle and to constantly remind themselves and everyone else of their superiority.

"I'm glad."

She sat the paper weight down. "I'll copy what you've already recorded."

"Thank you."

"How often will you need me?"

He had to look into her eyes to assure himself that she didn't mean that question the way her tone and body language presented it; they clarified nothing.

He coughed. "I am a good friend of Mike... a good, *loyal* friend." That wasn't really true in general but it was, in certain specifics. He and Mike had worked together as a team for a long time. Teams are like family. You fight, you hate, you love, you resent, you compete but you don't betray.

She leaned into him as she tugged the micro-recorder from his hand.

"So am I."

Damian sat bemused as he watched her turn and exit. But he soon thought of a plausible explanation. The woman was a highly paid corporate animal. You have to be a certain personality type to thrive or even last in that kind of environment. She was direct, assertive, flirtatious, and somewhat surreptitious, but he didn't know her well enough to subscribe anything seriously negative to her or her personality. Besides, three quarters of those

descriptions was what he liked most about the kind of women who usually appealed to him.

He really wanted to leave a lasting record behind him. If Mike didn't have any problem with his wife scribing for him, neither would he. And even if he couldn't trust her, he can always trust himself.

## Chapter thirty

*don't look back*

*don't look back*

*in the rearview mirror is a heart attack.*

**"Don't look back" from the New Genesis CD by akamardukson**

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### The journey

*Was Lot's wife really turned into salt by god...Or did she eviscerate herself by looking back and exploding her heart with grief?*

*Don't look back Damian. Don't look back. Don't let Chandra look back. Just keep moving ahead. Forward. That's the only way to go---the only direction to face.*

They were five months into their journey. The last of the vehicles gave out 2 days ago, somewhere in the State of North Carolina. They had begun their journey from the southernmost part of Florida. They had only been able to run the engines of their RVs at about 20 miles an hour--for five or ten mile intervals, before they overheated and had to be stopped and allowed to cool. As long as the AC worked, they slept and stayed inside the RVs as much as possible. The heat wave was cooling down and he knew that sooner or later they will have to get

out of the RVs and get out in their new world but none of them were any more prepared for it emotionally, when the last vehicle broke down, than they were when they started out. The vehicles gave them a form of refuge. After the last of their three RVs broke down they had to abandon travel by the interstates and highways. The heat bouncing off the concrete and asphalt was unbearable outside the shelter of the vehicles. Their synthetic supplies were almost gone because they had to throw so much of it away. It was time to start getting used to roots and berries.

They were on foot now, traveling through the wooded parts of the United States, as much as possible while maintaining their steady northward course to New York.

For the first time, they were seeing it up close and personal, experiencing it in full color, smelling it, choking on it, feeling it; crawling, soaking, seeping under the skin, inside the bones, like marrow.

Death.

How simple it is to imagine it, to talk about it, read about it, watch it for entertainment at the movies or for an ounce of that euphoric feeling of "lucky me" when you see it on the news and it's happening to someone else; to another man, woman, or child, in another city, another Country, another space, but not yours...not yours.

The vehicles were a greater source of refuge than they ever appreciated, or ever could have. They knew it was out there, under their wheels, in the smoke of their exhaust pipes, in the whoosh of their tailwind. But keep the windows rolled up, the radio on, the eyes focused ahead--don't look back, and you can pretend--not that it's not happening, or that it's not out there--- but that you could escape-untouched, the true essence of it.

It wasn't that he hasn't seen death up close before they begin their journey. But there is death; which every living thing will experience at some point. Death that is accidental, incidental and natural. Death that is diabolically purposeful, impartially catastrophic; all imaginable, tolerable-- mentally and physically acceptable; survivable.

Then there is death that extends far beyond the realms of imagination, thought; death that looms so large and piles up so high that nothing else can be seen...no light, no end, no hope, no future, no escape.

Chandra thought she knew death, had seen its face, shook its hand; developed a comfortable understanding of it due to her work with her clinic. Steve, Mike, Ada-- they all thought they were inoculated to the horrors of death; men and women of science, Adepts with knowledge and comprehension of the bigger picture, where death, they knew, or thought, was just an essential part of life--nothing to get in a state about.

Lot's wife... Did she also think she knew death? Understood it? Could handle it? Could withstand the full frontal image of it in all its power and majesty?

He almost lost them all when they lost that last vehicle. None of them wanted to go on; stepping on the dead corpses of men, women, children and infants every time they lifted their foot and put it back down.

It seemed like at the moment of their impending demise, all the people streamed back into the woods---back to nature. The highways had bodies lying on them but nothing like what they discovered in the woods.

Nobody with him wanted to live on when everybody else was dead.

Dead. Dead.

Jane...



What favor had they, she, by shielding her from the underside of death for so long--death that contributed so heartily to her privileged existence?

The only thing to do with her, besides leaving her free to act on her

own determination to kill herself was to keep her medicated. Chandra kept her sedated with herbs. The young woman only wakes up to scream.

Feifong...



The worldly alpha woman... What she knew of death may not be what Chandra knew or even of what he, Steve, Mike, or Ada knew. But she had seen death... maybe more than they; maybe more than Chandra. She didn't want to go on but it wasn't because she couldn't face the horrors of death, it was because she couldn't go through the horrors of life again. Life in a world where all the skills she had perfected to survive, to strive, was as useless as the vehicles they had to abandon.

She didn't need to be sedated but it was as if she had regressed 200 years. She was like an 18th century, Chinese female peasant. The woman who had looked into his eyes with such confidence when they first met was now like a well-trained pet; obedient, voiceless, without an ounce of self-will.

Sheree...



janet

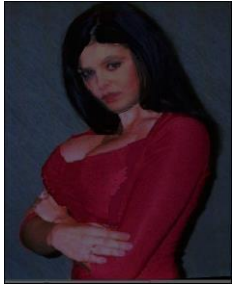


She and Janet screamed in each other's arms from the moment they entered the woods; every time a foot landed--until they grew hoarse, voiceless...Until they found a clear spot, sat down, and refused to get back up.

Chandra gave them a mixture of something. It did not put them to sleep as quickly as what she gave Jane did to Rhoady's daughter, but it calmed them and helped them eventually, to find a place of mental tranquility.

Ada...





She wanted to die. It was not as if she didn't know what to expect. She just decided that she couldn't live with it.

Steve...



He loved Ada. More than he loved life--especially in a world where life had been so completely overshadowed by death.

Mike...



Maybe he had plans, aspirations...visions in his mind of a new world with him reigning supreme over a bunch of happy frolicking brown

and black people. Damian had long known about the egoistic, superiority complex the guy tried so hard to contain under the controlled condition of laws and civilization. But in a chaotic new world where Kingship was laid out there for anyone who was strong enough to take...maybe he thought the future was his; drew so many vivid colors on the pictures in his mind that when his big moment came he never conceived of the gray, the coldness, the stillness, the emptiness...the silence.

He tried to shoot himself in the head with a d-14 tech that discharged so weakly, the bullet stuck in the barrel. Damian and Steve disarmed and calmed him down enough for Chandie to sedate him. That was the second day after the last vehicle broke down. After that day, he was back to his old, swaggering self, only quieter and more aloof.

Chandra...



She wanted to die too...but only after everyone else was dead. She never screamed when she stepped on a corpse--not even the first time. When her shoulders slumped, it was only after Jane went crazy, Sheree and Janet had sat down with no intentions of getting back up, Ada had begged Steve to kill her, and Mike had tried to shoot

himself in the head.

She told Damian of the plant that could kill them all painlessly. She would administer a dose of it to everyone and they will simply fall asleep and never wake up. The dose had to be precise according to each of their body weight; too much and they would die in agony from the inability to breathe; too little and they would wake up and slowly starve to death because the poison paralyzes before it kills. She told him that she will watch to be sure that no one survives to suffer; then she will take her own dose.

As he listened to her, all he could think about was who will stay in watch for her--his sweet, ethereal Chandra? If he ever harbored the fleetest thought of giving up it was banished for all eternity at that moment.

Chandra cannot die. What other beauty is left in the world...? The stars..? The Galaxies..? The Universe...?

What other good? What other light? Not only must she not die. She must not cry.

*No woman no cry. No woman no cry.*

Bob Marley sang in his head while the blood of every man who ever died, fought, or rose above the limits of his abilities for love of a woman pounded in his heart.

For the love of Chandra...,

They all must live. Steve, Ada, Mike, Feifong, Sheree, Janet, Jane...Not

only live, but soar, higher than the gods will allow. Above the open cage that left them trapped and naked to the whims, vices, piques and follies of madmen and mad gods.

Night fell. Fortunately, they all--his valued Charges--found peace in their separate dreams. All except Chandra, who was standing by the outskirts of their camp looking out into the night. Bathed in the light of the moon--contrasted against the black of the night--she resembled so much a wispy, shadowy, celestial entity that she had once indignantly declared she was not; he had to blink twice to see her clearly. He walked softly up behind her, turned her by the shoulders and took her into his arms.

*What authority gave him leave to be so bold...presumptuous? It was the permission granted by love.*

But he had never even held her hand before. Yet she acted neither offended surprised, nor frightened. "Chandie..."

*Is that why everyone eventually called her that, because it is her name, but a softer, gentler, prettier, more delicate version of it--more suitable to her beauty which shines from inside out but is more radiant from near, than afar--unlike the rays of the sun?*

Her sleight frame in his arms, against his flesh, warmed like fire, stirred like a swirling wind, awakened like the first breath of sun on a wilted flower.

"Please...please. Don't ever speak of dying again."

"Why?"

Did she not know? Was she toying with him? Or is it that she have become so accepting--has seen so much of it, that it held no power over her, no fear, no mystery--possibly, has even come to seem to her, as a blessing; an immutable act of kindness when there is so much pain and mental torment?

"Because I love you so much, it is like a dagger thrust in my heart to hear it. It gives me terrible palpitations to think inadvertently of it."

"Yuh *love* me?" She pulled back from him to get a more expansive view of his face."

Surely she was not that oblivious to the shameless mendicancy of the starving. For six months he had done nothing towards her *but* love her; in the way he looked at her, spoke to her, catered to her, sent his thoughts, wishes and yearnings on the wings of the gentle breeze to deliver and deposit onto to the very heart and soul of her.

"You don't feel it?"

" I feel sumting, yes."

Damian might have laughed. He might even have felt embarrassment at the condition the nearness of her put him in. But he didn't. He didn't know if she was joking or not. In nearly six months of traveling with her he'd learned that she was delayed in some things and advanced beyond the wisdom of Sages in others. And she had a sense of humor that, though often displaced, dispelled the puerile, innocent look of her.

"Do you feel it from afar...when we're not close like this?"

"I thought it was mi feelings for yuh, bwoy."

She was only four years older than he, and she looked much younger. After six months of watching him guide them all through some harrowing times, she still called him, boy. For some reason it delighted him, thrilled him in the loins like a jet magazine center -fold used to do. He'll be a boy to her when they are both bent and gray and that was fine with him.

They stood together in silence. Damian had always known when a female wanted to be kissed or touched. But he couldn't decide how to broach it with her. How do you rip the petals off a rose? And after you do, can it ever be a rose again? How much will it change his fresh, fairy ghost of a woman?

Jane screamed. Her loud terrified screech shattered their magical moment like a brick thrown into a window. Chandra pulled away from him. She gave him a look that might have been most effectively described as apologetic but there was much more in it than that. Damian's love for her soared to new heights. What he saw in that look is what every man and woman spends a lifetime searching for in another's eyes--in and outside of intimate situations. She was a healer, which may have explained that look more than anything else but to have someone see you, really see you...what you need, what you desire, what you're feeling, and sincerely caring about it above even their own screaming desires, is the end of searching, the end of wanting, yearning, the end of hunger; the need to discover, experiment, seek. It is the end and beginning of all at the same time.

"Mi got ti gi' Janie she dose before she hurt herself."

Damian reluctantly released to her, her soft, warm hand.

He stood there like a teen-aged girl, hugging himself as he watched her walk away.

"Boss."

Steve called under his breath to Damian, from across the camp site. Damian approached him and saw Ada was asleep in his arms.

Damian sat down on the ground across from them.

"I don't want her to die." The big man looked over Damian's head, to some place far in the distance. "I don't want her to suffer either. It tears me up inside to see her crying from the moment she wakes up, until she falls back asleep."

Damian knew exactly how he felt.

*No woman, no cry. No woman, no cry*

" Steve, I'm going to need you like no man ever needed another before and I swear, we--all of us-- are going to make it through this. In a few weeks we'll be reaching regions that were less populated. We'll get a respite from all the corpses. What we have to do is hold everybody together for that long. I know we can do that...you, me, Chandra...Ada is stronger than this. She's just tired and shocked. Tomorrow she'll be better--looking at things differently. With her back with us to help calm people, we'll get through this critical point, just don't--"

Steve was still looking in the distance. --

"give up on me big guy."

Steve lowered his head. He looked Damian in the eyes.

"We're going to make it through this, Damian?" Damian returned his friend's eye contact.

"Together, we will." Silence fell between them. "Boss..."

Damian had stood up and was on his way to check on Sheree and Janet. He turned.

"I never would have done what she asked and you know why?"

Damian shook his head.

"Because then I would have had to kill myself and that means I would have let you down...Boss." The big man's eyes suddenly glistened in the moonlight. Damian stood as attentive as an oak tree.

" I'm *never* going to let you down."

He lowered his chin on the top of Ada's head and closed his eyes.

Damian left them to their peace.

Sheree was sleeping soundly. Janet lay snoring softly beside her. Both of them were breathing easily through their masks, so he turned from them. He saw Chandra adjusting the air purifying mask and pulling up the covers on Feifong, so he walked over to check on Mike.

The dark-haired, stocky man was lying on his back; eyes wide open, staring at the three quarter moon.

He hadn't been near Feifong, or anyone else since his breakdown.

Damian interrupted his thoughts, "What do you see?"

He sat down beside Mike, leaned back on his hands. He was sure Mike was going to be fine. Like Ada, he was tired and traumatized but the man was a bull.

"I see the man."

He took so long to respond, Damian was halfway back up to his feet. He nestled back down.

"The man in the moon?" he joked.

"No, the better man... the man who never falls apart; the man who is destined to win."

"Come on Mike. Does this really have to be a contest with you?"

"Everything is a contest, Damian. Always have been, always will be. It's just that some people know they're in one and some don't."

"Mike, we might well be the last nine people alive in the western Hemisphere. And you're telling me the games have begun already?"

"They began four years ago, Damian. That day McCloud brought an 18 year old snot nose kid into my lab--a Lab I had ruled-- and lived for, for thirteen years of my life, and told me he was my boss."

Mike raised his head and made a pillow with his hands.

"You know what that said to me, Damian? It told me that you were better than me, smarter than me, more precious to my father than me. That's what he was you know--that old man--to all of us. He was our father."



*I liked that white haired, white robed, old white man but he was never my father.*

Due to getting to know Steve, Jenna and Mr. McCloud, he had come a long way from the days, when like most his peers, he disliked white people on principle. But he'll never come that far.

"I knew Mr. McCloud was wrong. I told him that."

Mike turned his head to Damian.

"Don't you get it? That's just it. He wasn't wrong. He wasn't wrong then and he isn't wrong now."

Damian sighed and stood up. "Can't you just let it go?"

Mike went back to staring up at the moon.

"Just remember one thing, Damian. Even the better man can't win if he doesn't know he's in a contest."

Damian departed from Mike, and went to his own spot. He lay down on his back and closed his eyes; tried to sleep.

Then he heard the leaves crackling beside him, the grass rustling.

She leaned over him, unzipped and reached inside his pants, handled him for a few seconds. Then she straddled him. She had come to him already bare except for a wrap-around skirt which she raised when she squatted. She forced herself down on him. He heard pain, escape between her clenched teeth. Moments later, he felt something shatter between them, the last barrier that stood between her and him, Damian and Chandra, two minds, two souls, one heart.

It could have lasted seconds, it could have lasted hours; there was no way for him the measure time-- internally or externally--because time had no meaning, no reality when he held her in his arms, she held him in her magical depth.

Long after she was quiet beside him, he lay awake in ecstasy, still on fire just from the sound of her breathing, the essence of her life lightly blowing against the skin of his neck. The feel of her heart, where his hand searchingly cupped her left breast, was beating like an African drum, in a call and answer rhythm with the pounding of his own heart.

How many females has he intimately known in his life? How many orgasms? How many moments when he thought he had reached the apex of euphoria? But he had never before even gotten off the ground, much less soared among the stars. He had never before experienced an inkling of what it felt like to biblically know Chandra.

No crueller trick has the gods ever played on man and woman, than to deny them unto death, their one and true love, to send to them clones and cheap imitations, shadows; when somewhere, seeking to find him, to find her, there is the heart missing from their right breast.

"You've been touched." This she said after a silence had passed between them that was so long, he thought she had fallen asleep.

"I know...by the very breath of heaven."

It never failed to amaze him at how quickly she grasped his bad poetry.

Any other woman would have looked at him like she hadn't heard him right. She said: "No, I mean by god."

All his life he had been told that in some form; by his Mother, his teachers, Sheree, McCloud, Maguthaba, and even Mike.

If it's true, what god had touched him? Even though he highly respected, and revered the real and potential effect on reality that is the energy called Jesus, he gave no knee to the image or the places that housed it, neither to the father, son, or the holy ghost.

He was a scientist. No Allahs, Buddahs, Krishnas, or Yahwehs, would

touch him for anything, because he would never touch any of them for anything.

He hated evil and injustice, so no god of hell would have touched him for any purpose.

So who is this great muse of his, that everyone seem to think is riding on his shoulders?

Like most scientists, and other great thinkers, if he had to choose one mythical character who could be considered a god, that he would revere enough to adore, it would be the one who was said to have put his greatest value on progress, unity, peace and the advancement of all, equally.

Was it that "god", who was riding on his shoulders?

He knew there was a wide perception by most, of mysticism and occult activities surrounding the kind of people that choose the path in life that Chandra has chosen. Visions, foresight, spells, predictions, and all that kind of thing. But he wasn't about to get into that with her-- especially tonight.

"Go to sleep, baby. You have been carrying the weight of six people and I know you have to be at least as tired as they are."

" Ni' bwoy." She burrowed tighter against him and to his astonishment, he heard her instantly, lightly snoring.

He wrapped his arms around her tighter and closed his eyes for what he meant to be only a moment. He was bone weary too, but he didn't want to sleep. There will be plenty of other nights to sleep. But tonight--his first night inside, beside Chandra--he wanted to be awake until it turned into a new day.

When he opened his eyes again, the wind whistled through his arms and the flesh chilled where there should have been warmth. He felt a swarm of pure desolation before he realized the sun was beaming hot against the skin of his face. He sat up.

Everybody was up and about. Some were eating, others talking. He rubbed his eyes, slightly embarrassed, but still filled with the euphoria from the past night.

The world was looking like a much brighter, better place. Not only that, the people left in it, were looking brighter and better too--even Jane. She was awake and quietly eating for the first time in days. Mike was talking intimately with Feifong. Steve was spoon feeding a giggling Ada. Sheree was looking in his direction, a wistful, faraway smile on her lips. Janet sat beside her with her head on her shoulder. Chandra was approaching him with a plate in her hand, more of her perfect white teeth exposed than he had ever seen, her skin seemingly glowing like a full moon, looking older, fleshier, in focus, real, here--with him, his world--and twice as beautiful.

They all waited for him to finish his meal. By the slightly rancid taste of the food, another day or two was going to be the last of their synthetic goods. The rest will have to be thrown away.

They passed plenty of edible vegetation as they traveled. The heat that destroyed the people of their world wasn't the dry, burning kind of heat that killed plant life; it was the humid, sweltering kind that sucked the life out of WoManbeings. They--the McCloud research team--had long known that would be the case. Zeus' grudge wasn't against the earth or nature.

Soon Chandra was going to have to show her mettle--not that she hadn't already proven herself to be the prized contributor to their survival that he knew a Rootswoman would be. Some of the edible and medicinal vegetation were easily identified by them all, but they could not stock up on most of it, and they could hoard none of it very long. Soon plants will be scarcer, and less identifiable.

Some plant life had already begun the adjustment to survive, when the breaches first became noticeable by the scientific community after the atomic explosions of World War II. The plant life was changing.

Weaker plants were taking on the looks and characteristics of stronger plants. That process will accelerate in the aftermath of the great breach. He knew that nothing could keep up with those changes but someone who was born with the instincts of a Naturalist. Already Chandra pointed out to him little things that he would have never seen or even knew was possible. Her knowledge was inexplicable-- especially for one who never studied her craft at a higher institution.

## Chapter thirty-one



According to the pattern, the next devastating Zeus lightning bolt, will hit in the Southern hemisphere. There have been strikes there and in Europe all along, but Zeus was no longer shooting arrows, he was launching missiles.

The pattern showed that there was going to be a window of calm before Zeus' next strike. Africa is undoubtedly still right now being devastated by the heat waves and after effects from the big bolt that hit the Middle-east.

The bolt that hit Europe is probably manifesting most of its damage now, in Asia.

In about six and a half years, they will reach the Southern hemisphere. By then, it will be devastated like the Western, but the heat waves will be manifesting across the ocean, in a gross overkill, into an already submerged, Europe

The reason why Damian didn't fly to Africa with Maguthaba, and why no Government of the world ever put up a real fight against Zeus, was because even though his team would have had seven years of respite, to prepare for the next breach, there was no preparing for Zeus' bolts, sitting in a lab, staring at graphs and into microscopes, or in shaking your fists, or missiles. That illusion was over.

To survive, they had to adjust--like the plants. The only way to do

that was to get out into a changing nature, earth, universe, and survive it, under its own terms. That's why they started their journey at the outer edge of the United States. They will travel the length of the devastated Country and learn to adapt to the new environment. During their journey; exposed to the new changes in the vegetation, atmosphere, gravity, atomic structure of the earth's gravitational field; there will be changes in their bodies, their blood, their eye-sight, their system's ability to absorb food, air, moisture, medicine, their brain's ability to read and decipher distance, time, space.

They had six years to adjust. Six years to reach Africa, the last projected victim of Zeus' rage...at least for a while.

## Chapter thirty-two



How amazingly fast, they were already beginning to adapt to it all; the corpses, the silence, the fear, the weather, the thinner air that they breathed, the purely leafy nourishment that they survived on. They were now in what used to be the thriving state of Maryland. Nearly three years have passed. Within that time, they have morphed into entirely different creatures--at least it seemed that way to him at times. They haven't grown any extra eyes or limbs but in so many other ways they were as different from what they were three years ago as night is from day.

To describe them most accurately, is simply to say they have become primitive, yet at the same time mentally, and psychologically advanced, so as to be almost a different species.

In the daytime they wore nothing but wraps around their private sections like the pictures in the nature magazines and the old documentaries. Except for Chandra, they all walked the earth topless whenever the terrain and weather conditions allowed. There was no longer any fear of cancer or other heat related maladies because Zeus had finished with this part of the world, and the sun was back to being life's best friend.

The weather is neither as extreme, or variant as it used to be before the breach that destroyed the people of the world. It is hot in the day; a humid heat, that they had long gotten accustomed to; at night it is cold, but they have gotten used to that as well.



The coldest is always the same 33 degrees. In some measure the environmental condition of this part of the world seem to be on a course to great improvement--a foreseeable, sort of paradise. The vegetation is thriving, the water as clear as glass, the air sweet like candy. They could easily rebuild here, but the pattern showed that in about five years from date, a bolt will hit in the Southern Hemisphere, setting off a new chain reaction that will reach its fullest manifestation in this part of the world again. The hope is by the time they reach Africa things will be improving the same way they are here. The pattern shows that there will then be an indeterminable length of respite from the breaches.

The sun is pacified but not the same. Not as high, or as bright, it seemed. Every new day is like the day before; the same temperature, the same breeze, the same sunset and sunrise. It doesn't snow, and there is rarely any force of wind stronger than a gentle breeze.

They had yet to meet any living flesh, as they had projected in their thesis--not even a single hare. It was a puzzle that could not be explained. There should be other life, especially animal life--unless, like they--the rest of the living are moving South, instinctively knowing, that survival lies to the South.

They will have to cross the wide waters in a couple of years. There will be plenty of abandoned boats, ships, vessels of all kinds to choose from once they reach the harbor, but there will be no engines or propellers to ease them across the ocean. They will have to sail under man and woman power. This, they also had projected. Steve, Mike, Ada, himself, were all experienced sailors. They had prepared for it. The waters will be calm. There is no longer any agitation in this part of the world; not in men or in nature.

It's true. They do not fight. There are not even arguments. There are

still lusts, jealousies, resentments, rivalry and ambitions... and they are transmitted and felt, stronger and clearer than ever. But strangely, there is never a conflict. In fact, there is rarely a conversation, except when a group decision has to be made. He was sure the others talked to one another in privacy but among the group, there is no informal discussion. There is rarely a need for it. Every man and woman does their job to ensure the survival of themselves and the group. The communication between them is like that of the deaf, dumb and blind. They sense and feel one another like some kind of new species of dolphins.

There will probably be no verbal communication at all among their descendants, if they ever have any. Their senses were heightening; evolving at an astonishing rate; maybe because there was now so much quiet and solitude in the world. Maybe that's why there are no conflicts. Everybody's thoughts and intentions were becoming an open book.

Yes, he now knew he was in a contest. Of course he had always known it, but now he could not help sometimes bursting into laughter at the naked yearning and resentments of the dark-haired man who has for so long been such a big part of his life. Mike was his family; had been even before the journey. He could only look at him as he would a jealous little brother, whose ass you might have to kick sometimes to keep him out of your stuff.

Steve, on the other hand wasn't laughing at all. He didn't like what Mike was emitting in regards to his "boss." Everybody can feel the tension. It is like a dark cloud hovering over them all. Maybe it was another reason they didn't argue. Violence was lingering too close to the surface for anyone to lose control of their emotions.

And Chandra...did she read, or sense Jane's thoughts towards him, or Feifong's, or Sheree's? Did Mike read Feifong's emissions toward him? Did that add to his enmity? And Janet...how did she feel knowing how much Sheree loved him? Did she--they-- sense it all, or was it just his own senses that were so heightened to the emissions that had only to

do with him?

Like himself and Steve, Jane no longer wore, or needed glasses; her once soft, marshmallow-like body was now as tight as a drum; bronzed, and more eye-catching than even Ada's stunning figure. With her new beauty came a different attitude. She seemed to know how much she was desired and it was clearly a strange situation to her. It seemed to frightened as well as bolster her. She was now like an island. Not haughtily aloof, or emotionally shut off from the group, but possessed of a self-sufficiency that left them all with little doubt that she could go off by herself at any time and still survive.

She was also a source of tension between Ada and Steve. The big man could not hide his desire for her from the group; much less the woman who loved him.

Everyone could see how Mike wanted her too. But he didn't try to hide it, and his lustful thoughts carried no feelings of guilt beside them. He acted like he cared nothing about Feifong's feelings, but Damian couldn't really recall a time when he did.

He did remember when Jane wasn't so much of a rock, when she leaned on Chandra like a crutch. The two of them had grown very close during those days... closer than twin sisters.

That's why he knew that what drove her to unclothe herself in front of him had to be something stronger than lust, or loneliness, or even misguided notions of being in love. And he had a pretty good idea what it was.

She had come uninvited into his and Chandra's hut. It was late in the day, almost dark, and an unusual time for it, but Chandra was away searching for, and gathering new additions to add to her collection of herbs and medicine. Damian was alone.

Her naked breasts were no longer any source of curiosity for him, but

he had never before seen that which lied covered between her legs. She took one step inside his and Chandra's space and dropped the veil around her modesty. He didn't react in any measured way, because he knew something had to give; that sooner or later it had to be faced. Chandra knew. They all knew, but he hadn't figured out what to do about it, and he had let it fester, even though the torment he saw in her eyes at that moment was an anguish he knew she had been living with for a long time.

She loved Chandra, and there was still enough of the old left in them all to feel shame and anguish over betraying the ones they loved. She was lonely, but more than that, he thought she was a victim of her father's fear of death. He had harbored the hope that they would have met some other survivors long before now. Found a companion for her. There had to be some healthy people left in the world.

"I can be like a second wife to you," she said, speaking her father's words.

He wracked his brain trying to think of what to say, to do, as if a solution would come to him at that moment that he hadn't been able to find in over two years. How long she has lived with this ache inside her? How desperate she must be, to expose herself this way when surely she knew what his response would be? They could all read one another on a higher level now. What did she hope to accomplish, *now*? She had avoided even speaking to him much before. Now, suddenly she is standing before him as naked as the day she was born, not only willing to risk betraying Chandra, but willing to even risk being caught by Chandra--in her own space.

Was the solution for her to go to Mike, Steve? Ada was once what would be called sexually liberated. Could she ever share Steve with Jane?

"I'm not here because I'm lonely," she read his thoughts, "and I don't want Mike or Steve."

Damian finally reached down, picked up her skirt and handed it to her. The temperature was starting to fall. He watched with a disturbing twinge of disappointment as she passively covered herself back up.

*What did you think, Damian? She was going to refuse to cover up, and launch herself at you...like her old man did?*

She shivered and hugged herself around her naked breasts. He went over to where Chandra kept her clothes, and picked out one of her night time tops. He handed it to Jane.

"I think what you want--all you can allow yourself to want --is what your daddy implanted in you."

He decided to be brutally honest. "You know, he just wanted you to be with who he thought was going to come on top in a new world. He wanted you to save his existence through your womb." As she pondered his words, he added:

"Someone other than me can do that. I'm in love with Chandie." Her face flushed red.

"I am not a scientist like you, or my father. Life is not a bunch of graphs, analysis, and calculations to me. Do you think I could open myself up to a man just because my father wanted me too?" She began to cry.

Chandra entered inside the hut. She stood for a moment, assessing the situation. She said nothing, neither did her expression change. She put the plants she had picked out with the others in the hut and returned to sit on the covered ground, beside Damian.

She reached out both hands to Jane.

"Put yuh hands inna mine."

Jane, whose posture and demeanor were rife with apology, leaned forward and grabbed Chandra's hands.

"Wat di yuh want?"

Jane's eyes tentatively shifted in Damian's direction.

"Stand up."

Like a mindless robot, Jane stood up. Chandra turned to Damian and caressed his right cheek.

"Do everyting I sey, okay?"

Damian nodded, his face a mask of confusion. Chandra turned back to Jane.

"Com', sit here between we." She patted the space between her and Damian. Damian shifted over and Jane moved to position herself between him and Chandra. Chandra took Jane's hands again.

"Wat do yuh want?"

"Really?"

Jane had never been so close to Damian and she was feeling a lightheaded. Chandra nodded.

"I want Damian to hold me...in his arms."

Chandra patted his right hand. "It's okey."

Damian put his arms around Jane and felt her melt into him. She audibly gasped. Tears wet his neck.

"Wat di yuh want, now?"

"I want...I want...Kiss me Damian?"

"Gwan bwoy. Gi she wat she want."

"Chandie?"

She leaned over and caressed his face again. "Trust me."

Damian did trust her. That wasn't it. He did what she and Jane asked of him. He kissed Jane and separated himself quickly. She was still leaning into him.

"There's still sumt'ing yuh want, gal?"

Jane grabbed Damian's hands and pressed them to her breasts. She kissed him again, wrapped her arms around his neck, tried to pull him down on top of her. He resisted, looking over her shoulder at Chandra, shaking his head.

"Wat di yuh want?"

Wat di yuh want?

Wat di yuh want?"

Chandra was repeating like a mantra, as if she was casting some kind of spell. Jane was grabbing at him, inside his cloth, like she was on fire. She had ripped the wrap away from her and was arching her back, thrusting her pelvis at him. Damian was soft and as small as the day he was born, confused, embarrassed and growing angry. Then Chandie reached over and uncovered him, touched him, sent lightning through his veins, his penis lurched at the same instant that Jane pelvis lunged at him. He touched her.

"Wat di yuh want?"

Jane heard Chandra, but she could only respond with a moan. "Wat di yuh want? Sey it."

Damian held back, held out, sensing that Chandra needed a clear answer to her question for whatever it is she was trying to do. His flesh was trembling, betraying both he and Chandra, as Jane pressed against him.

"Wat di yuh want?"

"Damian..*I want Damian!*" Jane screeched.

"Why?"

"—Because, I love him."

"But him don't love yuh. He loves *me*."

She responded with an, "Oh," grabbed behind Damian and tried to pull him inside her.

"Yuh still want he?"

She shook her head wildly.

"Are yuh sure?"

"Yes... oh god, *yes!*"

Chandra nodded to Damian and his penis found Jane's hunger like it had a mind of its own.

Inside her, he felt nothing but shame, anger and hurt--for both he and Jane. When it was over, it tormented him to think that he may never feel the same about Chandie, again.

"How di yuh feel," she asked Jane.

"--Empty... Cold... Lonely."

"Wat di yuh want?"

"Warmth...I want to be warm."

Chandra picked up the blanket that had been kicked aside. She covered Jane.

Damian had already gotten up and was sitting over in a corner.

"Soon, you will find your heart's warmth," she whispered to Jane.

Jane smiled sadly, "Really?"



"Soon... Go now."

Jane stood up, dressed and left the hut. Chandra walked over to Damian and sat beside him. She pressed her breasts against his back, nuzzled his neck.

Already he was beginning to understand.

He had once thought that in some ways she was behind and in others more advanced than the wisest of Sages.

He now knew that she was behind nothing but he at that moment and that was only because she wanted to be. He turned to her, met her waiting lips with his own.

He lied to himself so hard he was really convinced. But Jane had come to him naked for the first time in over two years of believing that she wanted him, and only him, for a reason. And that was because she was sensing, since she lost weight and had changed to be such a beautiful butterfly, that for the first time, he desired her also.

He might not have cheated on Chandie physically that night and maybe not even the next time the opportunity presented itself...but he had let Jane sit there in front of him naked for a full 5 minutes before he handed the skirt to her. He thought that he was being noble and loyal while he sat there with a beautiful, lovelorn young woman, talking to her about his undying love for Chandie. But he knew it was his suppressed desires that brought her inside their space in the first place.

He laid Chandra down, she reached for his need, which started where she grabbed, but ended everywhere. He wanted all of her. He wanted to give her all of him. He knew how far he had traveled down that road toward ruining the best thing in life he will ever know.

That's why he loved her so long and tender that night, she--always the earliest bird--- had slept the next day until almost noon.

## Chapter thirty-three



*you are so beautiful to me  
cause i can look into your heart  
and see all the many things  
that you are and no one else can see all the  
broken pieces of all you used to be "* **Feifong's**  
**song"from the New Genesis CD by**  
**akamardukson**

"In four months, we will finally reach New York. From there we will take another six months to prepare for the long journey across the Atlantic. We have survived alone in the world for almost four years. There are still the nine of us. Our days consist of foraging for food in the morning, traveling in the midday, and huddling for warmth at night. There is rarely a need for fire, but during the cold months, there is a need for makeshift shelter. Sometimes we stay in one place for a while, but rarely longer than a few months.

We all seem to be growing stronger physically, as well as mentally. So far our progress is good, and we have yet to encounter any real threat to our lives. Our journey continues.

Today is the eighth day of November, year 2012 A.D."

"Is that it?"

"I sign off the same way every time, Fei."

"Yes, but usually you have so much more to say?"

"That's why I have so little to say now; I'm starting to repeat myself."

Feifong laughed. She put her pen and paper in the airtight box that she seemed to prize as much as Damian prized its contents.

Like Jane, she had blossomed since they began their journey. She looked like a little golden goddess, with her jet black hair piled high on her head; two bangs falling down the side of her cheeks. Her pert little breasts seem bigger than ever in contrast with her now tiny waist which he thought he could circle with one hand.

Chandie had grown more beautiful too, if that was possible. Like all the others, she was darker, her dark brown skin as awe inspiring in its own distinctive perfection as Feifong's yellow complexion. She had disassembled her dreadlocks, and now wore her hair in a big afro. Her African nose sat in the middle of her face in tightly measured position to her similarly, precisely placed, full lips. Her eyes were large, with naturally thick, long lashes. Her ears were small, close to her head. Her face was round, her cheeks dimpled, with bones that were just high enough to give the illusion that there was some angularity in her face. She looked like a living doll, eternally youthful and flawless.

He didn't know how much it was still bothering her but she still wasn't getting any noticeably older in the face.

He thought Chandie was more beautiful than any of the women, but he knew that his opinion was biased, and Janet--Janet was the next step up in evolution from the already gorgeous to new and improved drop dead dazzling.

Sheree was more beautiful too. She was the oldest of the women, but

she was Chandie's aunt; two, or three shades lighter in complexion than Chandie, but it was clear in her face and form that beauty and agelessness ran in that family.

As Damian thoughts formed around female beauty, because of how particularly pretty Feifong looked that day in a strapless yellow dress he had never seen before; the little golden goddess was starting up again with an old song.

"What's wrong with me, Damian?"

She had come back around mostly, to her original bold direct self, but not fully. Something was missing; unless the old Fiefong was just a show that was never really there in the first place.

"I've told you again and again, there's nothing wrong with you, Fei."

"Then how come you don't want me?"

"Come on, Fei."

"How come Mike doesn't want me anymore?"

Damian couldn't answer that, but he wondered if Mike had ever really wanted her or just to use her. She had told him herself of the games they were playing.

"What Mike wants is a crown. Nothing less than that is going to satisfy him for very long. I'm sorry to say this Fei, but you need to face up to some things and stop letting Mike tear you down so much.

"None of them has ever wanted me."

He had heard this song before too; about all the high-powered men who had used and discarded her.

"Maybe that's because you never wanted them. You used them as much as they used you."

She smiled and looked at him with such adoration Damian wondered if she heard what he said or something else.

"How come you understand me so well?"

"Because you're a first grade remedial reading course, baby."

They both laughed. The two of them had grown very close and were the kind of friends that could say anything to each other. And they both knew it.

"What do you think I am Damian?"

"What do you mean?"

"My Nationality... What do you think it is? No one has ever guessed right."

"Then I guess I better not say what's on the tip of my tongue."

"What's that?"

"I was going to say the obvious, or the easiest."

"And that *is*, mister?" She put her hand on her slim waist and rolled her neck at him.

"I *was* going to say Chinese but now I'm going to officially say, Korean." She shook her head. He knew there were other choices but his mind was suddenly blank.

"It's like the people in the United States, has forgotten we existed or has wiped us from their minds." She laughed bitterly. "At one time we were the *only* thing on their minds."

She was Vietnamese. How could he not think of it? That should have been his choice after Chinese, except if the little he knew of East Asian names were correct, she had a Chinese, maybe Korean, surname.

"Vietnamese," he said.

"You still get an eff." You don't get that many choices in a ladies' boutique."

She looked sad even though she was smiling.

"You know what I remember most about my life in Vietnam?"

She flirted with him a lot. But that moment was the only time he'd ever felt like holding her in his arms.

"I remember the big ugly scars on my mother's back. They were horrible and every day that my mother lived she left a piece of herself on the bed sheets. Not a night ever passed by since I was born that she didn't wake me up with her screams of anguish."

He didn't have to ask her to clarify. He knew she was talking about Napalm.

"She was pregnant with me when they bombarded her village."

Feifong trembled, as if the memories had somehow touched her bones with a chill but she didn't cry.

Damian leaned toward her but she hugged herself and withdrew into another room even though she hadn't moved an inch.

"The weird thing is that even though I watched my mother suffer through hell every day because of what they came to her Country and did to her, I never felt any hatred towards them. All I felt, even then, was this great need to somehow make them love me--to get close to them. There were still many American men in North Vietnam long after the war and I must have slept with every one of them."

She laughed again. Damian heard tears.

"Finally, one of them married me as a favor and brought me to the United States--the land of my dreams."

"What happened to your mother?"

"I don't know," she said softly. "In the beginning I wrote her every day, and sent her money every Friday. She never wrote me back. The checks were cashed but I don't know if she ever got any of the money. I kept sending them until they started coming back. But I never went back to Vietnam. And I never stopped trying to make them love me, even after my husband abused me for 5 years, and finally left me. "

She suddenly looked like a wide-eyed little girl.

"Isn't that strange?"

"Maybe you subconsciously thought that if you made them love you they wouldn't do to you what they did to your mother. Did you have any other family?"

She shook her head. "It was just me and mother."

"You were alone in the world except for a mother whose very existence terrified you every day."

"She nodded her head, "Yes."

For the first time since he'd known her, she cried.

"Fei..."

She looked up at him. He walked up to her and gently wiped her nose for her, "You remember the first day we met? You actually had me back on my heels. I was scared of you. Where did that come from?"

"It comes from me trying to be loved. I would have done anything for it; become anything. I'm both an actor and a chameleon and always have been."

"What you are is the epitome of strength. When we write that dictionary we're going to put your picture beside the word survivor."

" At some point you get tired of surviving. Sometimes you want to stop surviving and just live even if for only five minutes. That's why I married Mike after only knowing him for two months. He never told me he loved me even at the ceremony but he gave me a ring. At that point in my life I would have given myself to King Kong for a banana."

"If the world was as it should be, kingdoms wouldn't be enough to win you."

"Stop it."

"I mean that."

"Then why won't you sleep with me?"

"Because I love you too much to do that, when I'm in love with someone else."

She fell silent, before saying:

"Strangely enough, I understand that, but I can handle just getting sex from you."

"Can you?"

It came out as a whisper, "No."

Damian reached out and squeezed her right arm.

"You know what Chandie told me?"

She rolled her eyes at him.

"*What?*"

"That soon we are going to meet some other Survivors."

"How does she know...tossing bones again?"

He warned her with a look.



"Seems that someone, or some *them*, has been in our cookie jar, and they are just a few days ahead of us."

## chapter thirty-four



"I wouldn't be so all fired up and anxious to meet those guys if I were you."

Damian didn't know if Steve was talking to him, or everybody. Everyone was anxious but the big man said "you" and looked at him the longest. "Why not...?" He couldn't understand what Steve's problem was. Other survivors could well mean enhanced odds of survival for them all-- especially when they try to cross the ocean.

"Just think about it, Damian. We survived because we were highly trained experts with knowledge, skills, four years of preparation, a protective balm that we never got the chance to mass produce--not to mention the pattern... Who else are most likely to be alive at this point...a bunch of people who were tucked away in a cellar somewhere?" Steve shook his head. "I don't think so. I think these other survivors are connected to the government in some way. Government means bad news--always had always will."

"I don't understand Steve, you worked on the thesis that projected there would be random survivors."

"What we said, or meant Damian, is that in the beginning some people would survive here and there. Most of them would be deathly ill. Any survivors should have been encountered at the beginning. It's going on four

years, and now all of a sudden we see our first signs of robust, living people?

Damian sigh and rubbed his eyes. "You're right."

"I don't think so."

Damian turned to Chandra, "You don't?"

"There are women with them...and children."

Steve turned to her in shock. "Are you sure Chandie?"

"Yes, I can show you their footprints."

"You didn't tell us this before," Mike said snidely.

"No one asked before", Damian's tone warned Mike. "She had no reason to think that there should be any reservations about meeting other survivors."

"Do you have any idea how many there are Chandra...their physical break down," Ada asked.

"I counted five men, four women, and two different sets of smaller prints."

"That's nine adults and two children," Mike announced as if he was the only one gathered there who could count.

Damian looked around the room.

"What do you think? Do we risk making contact with them, or not?"

"Five men could still mean trouble," Steve warned, "There's only three of us."

"Yes, but you count for two and a half men, so that makes us about even with them," Damian joked.

Steve puffed out his chest and rolled up his right sleeve. He made his bicep bulge and in a sterling imitation of Pop-eye, the sailor; even managing to squash down his face so that it resembled a peanut--said: "Aahh

gagagagaga. It's because me eats me spinach every day, matey. "

The impromptu performance went on and on, never giving anybody a chance to catch their breath. Even Mike was doubled over with laughter. Damian managed to wheeze out, "Come on Steve...we've got-- "Steve grabbed a hysterical Ada and started singing, dancing her around on the top of his boat-like feet.

"Me Olive she loves me pipe, but me sprite she hates me spinach, that's why I'm so big at night, and me Olive's so tight and skinny. I'm Pop-eye the sailor man, toot! Toot!"

Twenty minutes later they managed to get the consensus. Due to Damian's urging everyone agreed that they would make contact with the other survivors.

...Some, very reluctantly.

## chapter thirty-five



the lowees



Both Steve and Chandra were right, which means both were also wrong. There were five men like Chandra said, and four women, but there were no children. That is where Steve came in the winner's circle. There; and in his belief that the other survivors were somehow connected with the government.

What Chandra thought were children were actually two full grown adults-- a male and a female--both about three feet tall. But they weren't little people, or dwarfs, they were something governmental because they weren't anything natural looking...not to the earth anyway.

The more natural looking men were in uniform and carrying heavy hi-tech weapons, as were the women... more indications of governmental connections in Steve's opinion. Damian wondered who was running this show; if the big Cheeses were still hanging in there in their underground penthouses.

NASA was at least as smart as the McCloud research group. He wondered if they had found a means for people to adjust artificially to the changes that were coming over the earth. It was NASA, who was the biggest reason his group found the pattern, which enabled them to have a greater chance to survive. He had always pondered why the space agency sent them that software. The McCloud research group--at least while he headed them--had no projects with the government. The package had come to them out of the blue.

Was there some ulterior motive for him receiving the software? Was he and his group experimental guinea pigs, chosen all along to survive...Were the Iowees, and these Special Forces soldiers?

Was Harvard University and McCloud's fanatical pursuit of him all about science and his book, or was there something more to it--less flattering to his ego than what appeared? McCloud is dead so he will never really find the answers to his questions, but the questions were just another step on his way to opening his eyes to the real world; the bigger picture, and how little people had ever really known about themselves and the world they lived in. The pettiness they enmeshed themselves in when ultimately life is all about survival. The ideal is to live in some kind of security, dignity, peace and freedom, but the only basic reason to life is to survive. In the long run no one with any power cares about your survival because they are too involved with insuring their own, and doing whatever it takes to continue their method of survival in the way they are accustomed to.

The male soldiers were all the exact same six foot plus, height. One was Nordic, one Latino, one Asian, one African, and one Native American. The women were the same clone-like variations of the WoMan species as the men, except all but one of them were about four inches shorter than the men. There was an African, a Nordic, a mixed-blood, and a Latino.

The U.S. military always was the most inclusive institution in the United States. When it came to training people to project death around the world, the Nation never seemed to have had the problems with race that it did with everything else.

Damian was never worried about guns before, but he was looking at the U.S. government here, probably NASA genius. The guns just might work. And at that moment 9 of them were pointed at him.

He had decided-- through stern assertion of his prerogative as leader of the McCloud research group-- to approach the other survivors alone--to see if they were Friendlies or Hostiles. At the moment, they were hostile.

**"Don't move!"** the Latino soldier shrilled, all out of proportion to what Damian thought was necessary to convey his order.

He was an extremely handsome man, white-skinned, but clearly Latino, or maybe Italian; looked almost like he was genetically designed from a mixture of Clark Gable and Rita Moreno, with a dash of Arnold Schwarzenegger thrown in for seasoning. In fact, they all-- the men and women-- looked like they were designed by using the genes of matinee idols from their own prospective groups. The African looked like his father may have been the young Muhammad Ali, and his mother, super model Imani. The Nordic looked like he might have been a spawn of Rolph Lundgren and Marilyn Monroe. The Asian had the same model looks and powerful build as the others. The American Indian was the most striking figure of them all, looked like he had leaped off the cover of one of those cheap, romance paperbacks.

The mixed-blood female soldier was almost as tall as the men; short description would be Angelina Jolie, but darker, with wider, lighter eyes. She had the kind of exotic beauty that legends are made of.

The African woman was actually African American, unlike her male counterpart, who, even though he resembled a young Muhammad Ali, had that distinct air of a Continental transplant who for some reason, had come across the ocean and signed his soul over to the U.S. military. She was a shade or two darker, but otherwise, the near splitting image of Halle Berry, the movie Actress, except she was, incredibly, even more beautiful.

The female soldier, he called Nordic, because of her blond hair and light eyes, was more stunning than Jane in the face. Jane was slightly taller, and had a more voluptuous body, but this woman, like her compatriots, carried a beauty that seemed somehow artificial.

The Latino woman resembled Janet, to the point of being a twin, except she was a few inches taller.

"My name is Damian Marson."

"Where the *fuck* did you come from?" the Latino male soldier, barked.

*Whoa. What the hell did you walk into here, Damian?*

"I'm a survivor...of the breach. I've been traveling for three years-- heading south."

"*Bullshit!*" This was the male Nordic soldier. He spat tobacco in Damian's direction, "*No one from the States, survived that breach.*" The Nordic's ice blue eyes narrowed.

"Just shoot the moodafooka," the African said.  
The Indian pointed his gun at Damian's forehead.

"You do that, and I'm going to snap these two little Tonka toys in half."

Damian looked towards the voice he instantly recognized, and felt like breaking out in song when he saw Steve. The giant was holding up the



two Anomalies, one in each hand, their spindly little legs dangling in the air, kicking wildly.

The Latino soldier's eyes got big, as if they were going to self-destruct his face. He started to stutter and repeat, like a CD with a hairline crack in it. "**St-st-stand d-d-ddown.**" He took too long getting the order out, and the Women, in unison, swung their weapons from Damian to Steve.

"**Point those weapons down, goddammit! You stupid bitches!**" the male, blond soldier screamed.

One of the female soldiers--the black one--shot flame from her eyes at the Nordic and Damian had no doubt as he watched her face that if the situation weren't suddenly, so unfavorable for their group she would have flew at him with fists swinging.

"**Loook, what do you guys want?**" The African GI-Joe was sweating bullets.

Looking at Steve, it was clear to the African that the newcomers weren't Special Forces. Damian was an acceptable candidate, but there was no way any Special Forces group would accept in their ranks someone as big and tall as the redheaded guy. The enemy would see him coming from China. *They—his people--* should have seen him coming. After so long a time, of fighting nothing but boredom they had grown inexcusably lax.

Damian didn't understand how things turned so fully in his favor, but he could clearly see that they had, and it had everything to do with Steve and the two little creatures he held in his big hands.



Steve after three years in a changed solar system

Obviously the two little creatures were more important to these guys than a vault full of five star Generals. How Steve knew that, he had no idea. He had no idea that Steve had followed him. He had badgered the group into agreeing that the best way to handle this was not to seem threatening to these people on first contact. Steve, in his transfigured state, would have looked threatening to a tribe of Hulk Hogans.

"Nothing now," Steve spat in response to the black soldier's question. He reached out to the Native American soldier, "Give me *that*."

The Indian's dark eyes shifted from Steve to the Latino, who appeared to be the group's commanding officer. After a moment, he thrust the gun out at Steve. Steve put the Anomoly, he held in his right hand, in his other hand with its match and took the weapon.

He pointed it in the air and fired it. The gun hissed and emitted a puff of smoke which floated into the Indian's stoic face.

"What the fu--"

The Nordic pointed his gun in the air and pulled the trigger. The gun puffed.

They hadn't fired the weapons in more than a year and after so long a time of seeing nothing threatening, had stopped expecting too.

"All he wanted to do," Steve's voice was emotional, "was ask, if we could join you people. And you were going to shoot him down like a rabid dog." Steve looked at the black soldier and scowled. "Damian, go over there and take one. Knock his ass out."

Damian glanced over at the second coming of the greatest of all time, and decided to pass on the opportunity. He nodded to the two little Beings, who were both crying. "Let them go Steve."

"If I were you I would have taken *two*." Steve glared at the Indian before setting the two small Beings on the ground and letting them go. They scurried over to where the male Latino soldier stood.

"If *you* were me, I would have taken *five*," Damian joked. He glanced in Steve's eyes and immediately wished he hadn't. *Don't go into a routine...please don't do a routine.*

"Don't worry Boss." It was harder to read each other's thoughts with so many strangers, and heightened emotions around, but he knew he was emitting so strong, his thoughts would have reached Steve in the eye of a Hurricane.

"Look, we're sorry," the Latino soldier said. "We are under orders."

"To shoot a man just for showing his face?" Steve's voice was an octave higher than normal.

"No. To protect our charges at all cost. We thought he was Special Forces. I shouldn't tell you Civs this, but there are factions within factions, running the U.S. government and they all don't have the same agenda."

"What U.S. government? There *is* no U.S. government. There is no longer an U.S."

"You don't know that," the African said.

Steve's head whipped around. "*You. Don't. Talk. To. Me...Understand?*"

The African threw his hands up. He addressed Damian, "I really *am* sorry, sir. Some of us have been killed by the other side and we didn't think there were anybody left alive on the surface, but us and them."

"He wasn't carrying a gun," Steve pointed out loudly, unwilling to let bygones be bygones...yet."

The Asian male soldier laughed.

"You have no idea what kind of technology we have." He pulled a

button off his shirt which responded to the tug unlike any material Damian had ever seen before.

He held the button up... "You know what this is."

"A deceptive, micro-explosive, atomically depressed fusion device capable of blowing up three Chinese restaurants, two small countries in South America and the Eiffel tower in a single bound?" Steve said, sounding like a cross between the narrator of the Superman monologue and a game show host. All the government Flunkies laughed.

"Actually that's not too far-off the mark," the Asian soldier responded. "This baby has a destructive radius of more than 200 yards. With one of these he could have blown us all to pieces with a flick of the wrist."

"Well, that might have been so three year ago, but I will bet you fifty seashells and a blue pebble, that thing couldn't blow a tsetse fly off course now."

The Asian soldier's smug look fell into confusion

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Activate it and throw it," Steve dared.

"You're crazy"

"Throw it," the Latino officer ordered.

The Asian Adonis shrugged. He ran forward a distance and threw the button bomb as far as he could.

Everybody waited. Nothing happened.

"Do *anything* we have work?" The Nordic female soldier asked; the thought of their discarded communication devices suddenly fresh in her mind.

"Probably not," Steve responded, "Don't you ultimate warriors ever test your stuff?"

The blond woman sidled up next to Steve.

"Not lately. But hopefully, that's about to change soon."

The other females snickered, leering like Pirates.

Damian addressed the Leader of the soldiers.

"You said that you and another group were knocking each other off. Do you think there are any more of them left?"

"We didn't kill them all. Unless they died off naturally, or were killed by something else...which I doubt...yeah they are still out there somewhere, but we haven't seen any of them in over a year. The last time we counted, there were about 10 of them."

"We haven't seen any signs of them either, " Damian said. He sensed Steve wanting to tell him something. "What do you think?" he asked the big man.

"I'm thinking; how do we know these are the good guys, and the other group is the bad guys? *They* didn't try to shoot you for no reason."

"Believe me, they would have," the Latino male answered. "It's been shoot on sight between us since the breach...right up until they stopped chasing us for some reason. The only reason we didn't shoot you on sight sir, is because you approached us in a way that was so confusing." He turned from Damian to Steve. "As for the bad guy, good guy thing...sir, both us, and our enemies are Soldiers. We are simply carrying out our orders."

"That's the whole problem," Steve sneered. "How many of us are left on earth? And you guys are bumping each other off because of some orders you got from a bunch of pretentious mafia Dons, who right now are probably all deader than Al Capone." Steve walked over to Damian, "Let's go, boss. It's getting harder and harder to breathe around here."

Damian fell in stride beside him. "Thanks."

"For what...?"

"You know...saving my life."

Steve stopped." I knew the guns wouldn't work." He sighed. "You told me we were in this together; that we had to count on each other like no man had ever counted on another. I took that to heart. But I guess you were just talking."

"I'm sorry."

"Never should have gone off like that without me Damian. Who are you playing hero for?"

"I know---"

"Wait!" Both Steve and Damian turned at the same time. The Nordic female soldier was running towards them. The African American female soldier was close behind her.

"We want to go with you."

Steve asked: "But what about your orders? Your mission...? Your Charges? The red, white and blue, tis of thee and all that...? How are you two just going to cut out and hitchhike with us? "

"We decided that what you said made a lot of sense," the black female soldier said. The white woman nodded in agreement.

"Your superior officers are just going to let you dessert like that," Damian asked.

"Yes," the Nordic woman answered him.

"Why?" Steve demanded, his tone dripping with suspicion.

The black woman responded: "Because they think you made a lot of sense too. We all want to join with you."

Exactly what Damian had hoped for.

"Alright boss," Steve could sense that Damian had made his decision even though the thing still had to be put to a vote, "but I have to tell

you...I don't like it."

Damian addressed the two women. "There are others in our group. We have to get their opinion. Go back and tell your people to camp where they are for a day. If our group decides to join yours, we'll meet you in the morning...my Name is Damian." He extended his hand. The black female took it first. She sprung up straighter than an arrow.

"Jones, Tameka, sir. Pleased to meet you."

Like the black one, the white woman all but saluted.

"Ashinov, Mesha. Pleased to meet you, sir."

"Good *god*," Steve muttered; gave a disgusted look to Damian before saying: "Gawwwwllee Sergeant Carter, hows come yawl neva' tolt' me I wast in dee Ahhmee?" He held out a hand to the women, Pyle...Gomer. Pleast ter meet yawl."

As the women enjoyed the upside of getting to know Steve, which Damian knew was just warming up, he said to the women: "That's Steve."

"I's a stankin'. I bet' yawl's a stankin'...now, howse he git a name like pie...ill? Yew see, mah grat grat grat grat grandaddit useta git dese..."

## Chapter thirty-six



When Damian and Steve got back, the others in their group were anxiously awaiting them. Chandra--whose face he sought out first-- looked so relieved when she saw him, he felt like he had done her some grievous wrong. When the group sat down to discuss the soldiers, Ada moved so close to Steve she was halfway in his lap. Steve looked smothered, his expression registering annoyance with Ada, Damian had never seen on his face before.

Damian told everyone what happened.

"What do you make of the two Anomalies, " Sheree asked.

Steve looked at her. "Probably some government experiment. That's how they do. They'll tell you about something like stem cell research, and turn that into some kind of big point of debate when all along they have been playing god and creating life forms in the lab since before ancient Egypt."

"Why would they do that," Jane asked. Her tone was confrontational.

Damian saw a familiar fury darken Steve's eyes. He and Steve had already discussed the Iowees. Steve believed the little Beings were created to be slaves in this changed world. Damian didn't agree because he thought the creatures were too small and fragile to be slaves. But he wasn't dismissing Steve's theory out of hand. No one



was going to enslave anyone in his world.

He answered Jane before Steve launched into one of his long-winded tantrums.

"We don't know for sure why, but it's obviously the little creatures were born in a lab to be used for some reason."

"That's awful." Jane's eyes were shining. When Damian looked from her to Steve, who was now looking at Jane with different eyes, he saw something that made him feel very sorry for Ada.

Feifong, who usually sat in the meetings like she had more pressing things to do, was showing unusual interest in the discussion. Only one other time, has Damian ever seen the look on her face so open and unmasked. That was when she told him about her life in Vietnam.

What do we do about them? She was asking Damian but Steve answered her, his long, prematurely white hair and suddenly fierce, light blue eyes reminding Damian of the photos he had seen of the martyred abolitionist, John Brown. The man was a chameleon-- consciously or unconsciously.

"If I'm right, we free them."

Everyone sensed it. For some reason the subject was extremely agitating to Mike.

"Look can we cut with the bullshit," He blurted. "I hate this conspiracy crap. I agree that there have been experiments but that's science okay? Nothing should be off limit to science and it isn't. Whoopee! Big surprise! "

Steve stood up. "Excuse me everybody. I need to get some fresh air." Ada started to rise with him. "No baby, this is important. We need your input. Stay here and discuss it with the others. I'll be back in a little while ...by the way," Steve turned his attention from Ada to them all, "I don't want to influence anybody else's, but I vote no." He left to take a stroll into the night.

" I wish we could be sure we can trust them not to try to *enslave us*. Then my vote will be easy."

"I agree with Janet," Sheree said. "That's the only thing that bothers me! I don't trust soldiers."

"What did you say he looked like, again?" Feifong grinned at Damian.

"Like an Asian Adonis." Damian laughed.  
Everyone but Mike laughed too.

Damian was glad to see Feifong disregarding Mike's feeling for a change.

They could all read Mike blatantly emitting to Jane, even as they sat there. He knew Feifong could too and it angered Damian, though he knew she would never want anyone to confront Mike about the way he treated her.

Jane, who had been watching Ada, since the meeting began, and her quiet desperation in her actions toward Steve, leaned over and whispered something to Chandra, who was sitting between she and Damian. Out of the side of his eye, Damian saw Chandra nod. He coughed uncomfortably before speaking to the group, again: "This is just my opinion, but I don't think the Newcomers are any kind of threat to us. Highly trained soldiers like those don't harm anything that they hadn't been sicced on. Those guys would call a six year old, sir, by impulse and kowtow a derelict like he was god's own vizier if told to. They could have still killed me and Steve if they wanted too-- guns or not-- but once they saw we were no threat to them, they weren't going to so much as throw a punch if we had cursed out their mothers. I think it will be a good thing to have them around. I vote, yes." He looked at each of them in turn. "Anybody else have anything to say?" Silence met his query. "Then let's call it...

Chandie?"



Chandra after 3 years

"Yes."

Sheree...?



Sheree three years later

"Yes"

"Mike...?"



Mike three years later

"No."

"Ada...?"



Ada three years later"

Yes."

"Janet...?"



Janet three years later

"Yes."

"How about you, Jane...?"



Jane 3 years later

"Yes."

"Fei...?"



"Yes."

"That's seven yays, and two nays. The yays have it."

At that moment Steve returned. His thoughts of attacking Mike were no longer transmitting. What he *was* emitting was nothing they haven't all sensed before, but never so strongly, never so devoid of internal struggle and self-condemnation.

"I've got to figure out some things," he said softly to Ada, "I'll be back in a few hours."

From the start, Damian had a feeling that Steve's opposition to joining the other survivors wasn't as much due to distrust of the soldiers, as it was to fear--fear of losing something.

A night had fallen that was so moonless, none of them could see their hands in front of their face, but Damian could still see in his mind's eye, the tears, as Ada watched Jane start off after Steve. They all could.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Why did you follow me?" Steve was sitting on the ground with his back to Jane. He didn't turn around when he heard her approach.

She said nothing until she had settled down on the ground beside him.

"...Because you wanted me to." Her voice was low, whispery.

"I've wanted a lot of things for a long time. But they never came to me before."

"That's because you were never so sure before, and neither was I."

"What makes you so sure all of a sudden?"

"What makes *you*?" She retorted.

"I don't know. I guess I'm just afraid that time is running out on me."

"The other survivors...?"

He nodded, a gesture she never saw, but didn't need to.

"What about Ada?"

He sighed heavily. "I've known Ada for over twelve years. Sure, I've always wanted her but I never wanted her enough to even risk asking her out, before our friends started dying around us. Before then, she had always seen me as some kind of big, adorable clown. Lovable, but not fuckable. I've become fuckable to her now." He turned to face Jane. "But when a man finds his true heart's desire; less than everything is not enough."

"Please don't lie to me Steve. It's not necessary. And don't lie to yourself. You don't have to desecrate what you have with Ada to be with me"

"I--"

"You loved her. You still do."

"I'm in love with you."

She didn't respond.

"Why did you come Janie? You are not a betrayer. And you're not the type to casually hurt someone."

"I'm lonely."

"But we'll be joining the Newcomers soon. You have waited nearly three years for companionship. The end of loneliness awaits you with the dawn, so why now...why tonight?"

"Because I love you and tonight is the first time you've told me that you can accept that and all the consequences that may come from it."

"I can't be with you both."

"I know."

"How do I tell Ada?"

"You don't."

"I don't?"

"She'll know."

"Of course she'll know. That's not what I mean."

"What *do* you mean?"

"Us...how do I explain to Ada, us...*this*...Our love?"

"Steve, there is no *our* love. There's my love and your festering desires. You think I have forgotten the difference between how you thought of



me for the first few years, and how you feel now?--Just tonight Steve... Now."

"People *fall* in love Janie."

"Yes, but sometimes the hardest part is knowing what they fell in love with. I fell in love with *you*--your sense of humor, your intelligence, your method in how you chose your friends and your loyalty to them, your integrity, your gentleness...what did you fall in love with Steve?

"Dammit Janie, why are you doing this...?"

"For Ada."

"Let me see if I've got this right." Steve ran his hands through his long hair, "You will be with me for one night, knowing how much it's going to hurt Ada. And it's supposed to be for Ada's sake?"

"I will hurt her for one night--maybe a month, maybe longer, but you will hurt her forever unless you set her free, or at least give her a clear reason to decide whether or not she wants to continue to give her heart to a man whose own heart pines for another. I know what that feels like."

"Fuck you. Who do you think you are? You spend too much fucking time with--" He stopped himself.

"What do you want, Steve?"

"I want you to get the hell away from me."

She stood up.

"Janie!"

She was heading back towards the camp. She stopped walking.

"What do you want, Steve?"

"I want to set Ada free."

She turned and started walking away again. "My god Janie...what do you want me to say?"

"I want you to tell yourself and me the truth. What do you really want?"

His voice choked "I want to make love to you."

She walked over and stood directly in front of him.

"For one night...?"

Steve nodded.

She sat down beside him and closed her eyes as he buried his face in her chest.

The next morning Damian and all the others sensed that Ada had distanced herself from Steve but no one sensed her crying. When her thoughts turned to Jane there was no anger, hatred or emissions of malice. There was only an unreadable silence, lightly tinged with a breath of relief.

## Chapter thirty-seven



### Mustafa

*i told you to stay away from woman didn't i  
but you wouldn't listen  
now you're looking up at me with one eye  
and all your front teeth missing*

**"chump give up" from the New Genesis CD by akamardukson**

Damian wasn't naive at this point in his life--if he ever was. Where he came from you grew up fast and you learned things about the nature of people that other segments of that society denied or kept hidden until most people were already torn down and beat up by life, for believing in Hollywood and the rest of the illusions that kept everybody searching for paradise in a hellish world.

He knew things weren't going to go perfect when the Soldiers and Civilians merged but he was looking at the big picture... which was the responsibility he felt to help his people survive by the best means available.

He wasn't surprised the least when personalities began to clash and conflicts began to flair...only by how quickly and dangerously.

The atmosphere shimmered with the promise of betrayal, broken hearts, backstabbing and distrust. From the way the African soldier

looked at Chandra, he saw that not even he was going to escape the outcome of what was already looming to be a big mistake.

Introductions were made:

The Latino, male Soldier said his name was Antonio George.

The Latino, female soldier's name was Sonya Ruiz.

The African, introduced himself as Said Mustafa.

Tameka, introduced herself again for those who hadn't already met her.

The Nordic, male declared himself to be Rick Carlyle.

Mesha, reintroduced herself.

The American Indian, soldier went by the name David Bravefeather.

The Asian, male soldier was John Huang.

The mix-blood, female soldier was Michelle Johnson.

The two ETs, were called Iowees.

The Male Iowee, called himself Firsthe Newman.

The Female Iowee, piped that she was named Firstshe Newman.

The first day of their merger went well enough, but came the night, everyone but he, Steve and Chandra, were searching for experience. Holes suddenly opened up in relationships, where he never knew there were cracks.

It's was true that Sheree and Janet had stopped being affectionate long ago but they were still a couple, always under each other, always beside each other at night.

The first day after meeting Antonio, Janet left Sheree.

Feifong spent that night in the arms of John Huang.

Ada put her injured heart in the hands of David Bravefeather.

Jane gravitated to Rick after first giving Mustafa a clear offer to be the one to end her loneliness. The African couldn't see her because he had

eyes only for Chandra.

Mike paired off with Mesha after she had given up on an unresponsive Steve.

Tameka watched the way Chandra hovered in quiet confidence around Damian and withdrew her net--for the moment.

Within three days the honeymoons were over--all of them. The soldiers began to get pushy and bossy, as if they thought Damian and his people were skin-headed boots at their first day of training camp.

Jane rejected Rick in disgust, after the second day of togetherness and had sought refuge from his unwanted attention behind Steve's massive frame. The handsome soldier restrained himself from harassing her with more than passive, unwanted attention, but Damian knew he wasn't going to let Jane put him off for long. Damian knew his type. It was all about the ego with guys like that and his anger at both Jane and Steve was ticking like a time bomb.

Steve showed the willingness to stand up for Jane but he didn't show any willingness to sleep with her again. He just couldn't do it-- physically. Everyone in their group could feel him crying for Ada. She was all he thought about. The big man was a walking shell. Damian wanted so much to help his friend but didn't know how. Ada just did not want to be with him anymore.

Ada's relationship with Bravefeather lasted the longest. But it also soon ended, although the two never had an argument that anybody heard. Whatever she was looking for she didn't find it in Bravefeather. That was probably because she was still in love with Steve. After three nights she stopped sleeping with Bravefeather, preferring to be alone.

Feifong's relationship with John Huang, barely lasted through one sexual encounter. She knew from the moment she met him all she

wanted was a sex with the handsome Soldier to give her some relief from the pain over Mike. The moment it was over, she discovered it wasn't enough, or worth putting up with the man's vulgar personality. He tried to take her by force their second night together, when she refused him. Feifong kicked him in the balls and ran to Damian's hut. The first major fight between the two groups almost happened that night. It was Antonio who smoothed the situation over, ordering his people to go back to their beds.

Mustafa was testing, and disrespecting him to the core of his manhood. He warned the African GI-Joe, over and over again to stay away from Chandie. One day he had even seen him talking to her animatedly while roughly shaking her shoulders... *Manhandling* his woman... If Chandie hadn't begged and cried so hard, he would have Joe Fraziered the Ali clone right then and there.

For whatever reasons they might have had, Steve and Mike were right to vote against joining the soldiers. And he was wrong.

Now his people were in a situation that he could see no way out of...but a fight. But how could they possibly fight such highly trained men and women? He was the only one in his group with any kind of formal self-defense training. Steve was big and strong, but big don't defeat skill.

He didn't know what to do but he did know that time was running out on him on more fronts than one. The Soldiers were starting to make their intentions perfectly clear. They were going to take over and take everything they wanted from his group, which meant rape, slavery and degradation was just over the dawn for his friends.

Mustafa wanted a fight over Chandra. He knew that because he told Mustafa that if he ever followed Chandra again when she went out searching for food and herbs, one of them--he or Mustafa--wasn't coming back to camp in one piece.

She said she wasn't going away from camp until they figured out a way

to separate from the soldiers. He didn't know what changed her mind, but two days after that conversation, when she thought he was asleep, she quietly got up from beside him. He lay there motionless until she left their hut. Then he got up to follow her. She was headed out of the camp and he sensed that she was scared and crying. A moment later he saw a tall, hulking figure following her and red flashed before his eyes. He was too confused to know what to think--who to be maddest at-- or what was going on between those two.

But he had warned Mustafa.

They were standing in conversation. The moon was full and bright and he could see them clearly. Mustafa had his hands on her shoulders, shaking her again. She was crying. They didn't see him until he said: "**Chandie, come here.**"

Chandra turned and gasped. Mustafa snatched his hands from her shoulders and stood there grinning back at Damian. But it wasn't the haughty smirk that he usually gave to Damian--it was more a tortured grimace. For the first time Damian saw that having Chandra wasn't the same with Mustafa as the ego-driven need his fellow soldiers had to claim every woman they wanted. The black Adonis, was in love.

Chandra ran over to where Damian stood and stopped in front of him like a road block. He brushed past her.

**"I told you to stay away from her."**

Mustafa's eyes were more feverish than fiendish.

**"Sir, I can't do that. I love her"**

Damian had the desire not only to hurt the man physically, but also every other way he could think of. Just because he loved her, meant to him that it was alright to forcefully come between two people who were already together in love and had told him that.

**"You don't love her. And you want to know why? Because there are a**

hundred things about her you haven't seen yet. The funny faces she makes when she combs her hair. The way she giggles at her own corny jokes; the way she squirms up against you at night when she gets a happy thought. How she kisses you. Feels so good in your arms you wouldn't trade a spot beside her for a spot in heaven with a thousand virgins. Until you know her for at least five minutes when she isn't crying, you have no idea what loving her is." Mustafa licked his lips--for a moment looked like a dog staring at a pork chop on a high shelf, behind a thick pane of glass.

He quickly recovered, tried to smile, show Damian the smirk, but it was too late. Damian had already seen the weakness in his eyes.

Chandra looked into Damian's eyes and moved back in front of him. She had a vision and it was unfolding right before her face.

"No!" She wailed. "Damian stop...please stop!"

"Get out of the way, Chandie." He pushed her aside.

She grabbed his arm and tugged. "Let's go...Damian. *Let's goooooee!*" Her cries were heartrending but she wasn't going to move him this time.

"Sooner or later baby, this has got to be settled...one way or the other."

The Soldier was 3 inches taller than he, and about 20 pounds heavier; a highly trained killer. But it was never fear that prevented him from having this out with Mustafa, when he should have. He was never afraid in his life. Where he grew up you couldn't afford the luxury of fear--not of knives, bullets, gangs--and definitely not of a single rival. That was something you learned early in the hood. Eight year old boys would windmill away at teen-agers twice their size until they were beat down into the dirt. The next day they would do it all over again until everybody knew that you could be beat to death but you couldn't be punked. That was rep. In the hood everybody had to have one. If you wanted to live with any kind of dignity you had to get yours early.



His Mom had grown up in that environment. She loved him like a fish love water. That's why she made him take self-defense courses from the time he was five years old.

He never feared a fight with Mustafa. It was that he had a dream for the world--this new opportunity-- to do things differently; with the others--to build something better for themselves and their children.

The easy way is to resort to violence, to take what you wanted, rather than to earn it, deserve it, make it want to come to you under its own initiative.

Chandra was never going to leave him for Mustafa, and so now the soldier wanted to resort to the old tried and true method of just taking what he wanted by force.

He would give the man the shirt of his back to save his hopes for the future.

But he wasn't going to give him Chandie.

"Baby, go back to camp."

"Noooo!"

"Don't worry. I promise I won't hurt him too bad." He smiled at her.

"Damian, walk away from this...pleeeeeease...for me."

He sighed. "How long am I supposed to do that, Chandie? I may as well go ahead and hand you over to him now because he's never going to give up. He loves you. And he thinks I'm too weak to keep him from taking you from me." He looked into her eyes and put his hands on her shoulders--like Mustafa did.

"Go back to camp...right now. Or go over to Mustafa."

She opened her mouth.

"Don't say anything else Chandie. You want to end this your way, go to him."

He gave her a light push, "Go on!"

She twisted around and punched him in the chest as hard as she could.

"He'll *kill* yuh!"

"One of you are going to kill me. Make a decision Chandie, or I'll make it for you. I don't want you to see this fight. If I walk away because you won't leave, don't follow me. If you go to camp, don't run to Steve and don't come back here. I mean that Chandie. If I win I'll come back to you. If I lose I'll be beaten to death and I don't ever want you to see me like that, you hear...not even to bury me."

Her pupils were swimming in tears.

"Yuh bastard."

She turned to Mustafa. I'll *never be with yuh! I'll kill yuh! I swear I'll kill yuh!*"

"We'll *see*." Mustafa responded

Chandra turned and started running as fast as she could.

"No you *won't see*," Damian started striding purposely toward Mustafa, "because I'm going to knock your eyeballs out of your head."

Steve looked up and saw Chandra running like she was on fire, her breaths coming in great heaves.

He ran up to her and grabbed her arms, "What's the matter, Chandra?" She snatched loose and ran past him. Steve read her emissions. "Where is he?" he called after her.

He turned and looked in the direction she came from.

"Stay out of it, Sasquatch." Rick moved in front of Steve. David Bravefeather slowly walked up to the left of him. John Huang moved to the right of the big man.

Steve swung at Rick, who easily ducked the telegraphed, amateurish attempt. The Nordic soldier came back up and grinned widely before snapping the big man's head back with a standing drop kick. Ada ran over cursing in that voice that earned her the pipsqueak moniker from

Damian. Bravefeather grabbed her and swung her around, nearly dislocating her shoulder.

"Rick, *stop it!*" Jane yelled.

"Don't worry, I will. Just as soon as I finish stomping Bigfoot's, face into the dirt."

By this point the entire camp had gathered around the fight. Janet yelled something in Spanish to Antonio, who ignored her.

Steve was on his knees, about to receive another kick to the head when Mike charged inside the circle, head first and bowled the blond soldier over, swinging both arms like a windmill as he landed on top.

"Dumb move fathead." John Huang ran at Mike, leading with his feet. The bull-like man took a boot square in the face. His nose spouted blood as he toppled to the side. Feifong shrieked. She charged her newly discarded lover, clawing at his face like a demon. Bravefeather, ran over and slapped her to the ground.

Steve roared like a lion when Feifong fell screaming in agony beside him. His rubbery face even took on the resemblance of a lion. He caught yet another attempt by Rick to kick him, in mid-swing and twisted. He shoved Rick ten feet backwards and stood up. Bravefeather's eyes widened at the bloody, animalistic face that turned towards him but he wasn't conditioned to run. He stood rooted in his spot as Steve yanked him by the neck and pulled him forward. The big man headbutted the young Indian and slammed him to the ground on his back. Bravefeather twitched once and was still. Then Steve turned to John Huang. The Asian soldier grinned, bouncing on his toes. He beckoned Steve to come to him. Steve charged. John Huang dropped into a crouch and rolled into Steve's legs, bowling him over. Before Steve could move, Rick and John was at him, kicking and swinging with all they had.

Sheree lurched forward and Mesha spun her around.

"Stay out of it, Trick."

"That goes for you too, Cinderella, " Tameka warned Jane.

Mike never moved again after being stomped in the face, but Steve was still moving and still being viciously kicked by Rick and John.

"*Stop this Antonio!*" Janet begged.

"I will sweetheart...just as soon as we finished teaching you Civs, once and for all, who's boss in this camp."

Jane suddenly whirled and elbowed Tameka in the face. She ran over and fell on Steve, covering him with her body.

"Goddammit, y'all better kick her ass too!" Tameka screamed. Blood spurted from her nose.

"Don't worry Tam," Mesha said, "She just made a mistake she's going to regret the rest of her life --if she has any life left when I'm finished." The Nordic, female soldier, walked over and yanked Jane to her feet.

Then she threw her to the ground away from Steve and started kicking her. Tameka joined her, both of them lashing out at Jane with their feet like they intended to stomp her to death. Then they looked up at Michelle, eyes demanding to know why she wasn't fighting beside them.

"*Antonio!*" Janet was hysterical.

"Look, I like you. I like you a lot, and when this is over you are still going to be my main woman. But let me tell you something...we"-- Antonio swung his arm in an arc-- "are a unit-- a team. For five years we've been together, killing together, dying together, eating and sleeping together. Do you know what it means to pledge your life to a team--your soul? If you don't, you better recognize quick because if you open your mouth just one more fucking time, you're going to be right down there on the ground beside *that* stupid whore."

"Fuck you!" Janet's tone was guttural with hatred.

"What did you say?" Antonio walked up to Janet and punched her so hard, her left cheek caved in.

"Jan!" Sheree screamed.

"Shut that up," Antonio ordered. He was looking at Michelle. She didn't move. Antonio's eyes narrowed. Sonya hastened forward and grabbed Sheree by the throat. Antonio looked at Michelle harder, his lips pursed with indecision. Then he looked away. "I'm tired of this shit. I'm going to see what's taking Moose so long." He said to Rick: "If y'all kill Sasquatch, and the bitch who suckered punched Tameka, that's alright. But don't--"

"Don't what?"

Antonio turned around to see if the owner of that voice was really there. He looked, saw Chandra first, but that wasn't what caused his eyes to widen. Around her were some people he hadn't seen in over a year and was beginning to think he'd never see again. At the head of them was a man he has been in a running battle with for six years.

There were ten of them, six of them men, four of them women. Like his unit, they were a diverse racial group. They were also Special Forces recruits of the U.S. government.

The difference was, most of them weren't as handsome and beautiful as he and his crew.

Antonio didn't know why they cut off hostilities but he could guess. Their weapons weren't working and they couldn't be sure if his were.

Chandie knew the Soldiers were trailing behind. She saws signs of them two days ago. She didn't know if they were Hostiles or friendly so she never told the others to avoid an unnecessary confrontation. She figured if they were Friendlies, they would show themselves when they got ready. If they were Hostiles, they weren't much of a threat because they were outnumbered.

The vicious attacks on Jane and Steve, ceased. The matinee idols drifted together in a show of solidarity to face some real opponents.

The two lowees shrieked with joy and ran to the newly arrived Soldiers like they were long lost family. The latest group of Newcomers reacted the same way towards the little Beings, bending down and hugging the lowees in turn.

"Lee, long time no see. Where you been boy?"

A tall, bespectacled black man responded to Antonio's question.

" Here and there... none of yours works either, huh?" "Oh,

I don't know, maybe."

"Well I do." Lee glanced at Chandra.

Antonia shrugged. "We can't let you have them, Lee. You know...orders and all that."

"Get the fuck up David!" Rick muttered under his breath as he prodded the unconscious Indian with his boot.

Lee looked back at the lowees, who were peeking out from between a stone faced Asian soldier, and an equally grim faced American Indian, who were both staring ahead with the muscles in their jaws bulging.

"Looks like to me like I've already got them."

Lee nodded to his Recruits, and they started moving forward. "Those Civs need immediate medical attention and you're holding up the Medics. So I'm going to give you two choices Tony. Take your

people and move on...save this for another day. Or get ready for the quickest, most thorough ass-whipping in the annals of time. "

"Come on Lee...you know I can't leave without the Iowees."

"Then I guess you've only got one choice."

\*\*\*\*\*

Damian was down on one knee. Mustafa had just kicked him in the groin. He couldn't catch his breath but Mustafa was in too bad a shape to take profit from his advantage. By the time he got up off the ground to approach Damian for a deciding blow, Damian was breathing easy again. When Mustafa aimed a less than energetic boot at his face, Damian caught his leg and twisted his foot. Mustafa hit the dirt hard, face first. Damian struggled to his feet. Mustafa's face looked like an over-inflated soccer ball, his eyeballs were still there but Damian was only half off on his declaration. If Mustafa could still see, it was only in triple vision and even that little window to the world was closing up on him fast. One eye was already swollen shut. The other was a slit. Damian stood over him, about to put an end to the long, brutal fight when he saw that the man had given up. Mustafa was curled up like a fetus and muttering.

Damian was too tired to finish him off anyway.

"Mustafa," *Mustafa!*" Damian nudged the moaning man in the side, with his foot.

"Okey mooomy. "

"It's Damian."

"Dah...meeee...oon?"

"Yeah. Who do Chandra love?"

"Chandra?"

"You heard me. Whose woman is she? Damian kicked him for answering too slow. Mustafa grunted with agony.

"Chandra iz Dah..mee..oon's woman."

"That's right. And you're not going to bother her again are you?"

"No." Mustafa coughed up blood in the middle of saying "no" so Damian's ears weren't satisfied. The boot stomped.

"What?"

"No, sir," he said more clearly.

Damian left him and started back to find his woman.

What he found first, was a battlefield but the fighting was over.

There was only Antonia, John and Rick against six other men who were as highly trained warriors as they. David Bravefeather still lay unconscious from the head-butt given to him by Steve.

Antonio. Rick and John fought to the height of their considerable abilities but they were kicking and swinging against mirror images that outnumbered them two to one. They fell hard but swiftly like Lee had promised.

The female soldiers fought more evenly matched than the men had, but once the victorious men entered the fray that fight was also over quickly.

By the time Damian limped into view of the campsite, twelve broken and unconscious bodies lay stretched out on the ground.

Chandra, Sheree, Ada and Feifong were tending to them. Chandra was moving so slow, it looked to Damian like she was going through the



motions while in a state of shock. Then she looked up and saw him. She screamed,

"Oh my god! *Oh my god!..Damian!*"

Damian felt like a million dollars at her reaction to seeing him. If the woman ever got tired of running she wasn't showing it that day. She had him leaning on her before everyone else was aware he had appeared over the ridge.

"Go help them." Lee ordered.

A blond female soldier and a Latino male soldier, with dragonhunter patches on the shoulders of their uniforms, took off in a sprint.

"I got him!" Chandra screeched when they approached.

"Ma'am, let--"

"No! Get away...get awaaaay!"

"Chandie," Damian sounded like he had a mouth full of marbles. He looked like he had been in a train wreck.

"Shut up, bwoy."

"I love you."

"I hate you."

"I'm sorry, baby."

"I thought you were dead," she sobbed.

## Chapter thirty-eight



There was no conscious choice made by either group to join together-- no votes or consensus taken. Time and circumstances had thrown them together and it was inertia that kept them together so far.

It took three months for Steve--who was the most injured one of Damian's group--to recuperate enough to travel. During that time Lee and his people just hung around.

They were still living off government issued rations. But their food supply was low and most likely injurious to their health. Lee observed how Damian and his people were living and he knew that if he wanted to survive in the long run, he had learn from the Civilians. So he ordered his people to maintain a low profile, make themselves as useful as they could, and try to ingratiate themselves to the Civs.

Damian's group had lost all taste for merger, strangers, new and excitement. They became a hub, tribal, and distant from both Lee's group and Antonio's people.

When the ice began to break between Lee's and Damian's Charges, it wasn't lust or need or dependency that opened the two groups up to one another. It was time, circumstance and plain old fashioned decency.

Lee's group was irresistibly courteous and respectful. Friendships

began to develop; first between the two leaders, Damian and Lee. Then other friendships began to form. When the two groups learned each other's names, it wasn't through any kind of formal introduction but through an eventual one on one, personal basis.

Feifong learned that the Asian soldier in Lee's unit was named Bruce(Lee)Akimoto. From her, Damian learned the man's name and from Damian Chandra learned it and so forth and so on.

Jane discovered, when the light-haired soldier from Lee's group was helping her carry water to the camp one day, that his name was Patrick(midnite) Henry. He wasn't as tall as she nor was he very good looking but she saw in him some of the same qualities that caused her to fall in love with Steve. He had more qualities of a good priest, than a soldier and she instantly responded to that gentleness, and decency about him.

The Latino in Lee's unit, was named Felix(cat) Santiero. Janet, and everyone else, who didn't know, found that out the day Lee and two others had to physically restrain Felix when he found out what happened to Janet's face. She heard him screaming about killing Antonio, who was still flat on his back, neck all but broken by the hulking man in Lee's unit, named Alonzo(big house)Breiner.

For the second time, Janet ditched Sheree for a man. She still loved Sheree dearly, but she simply wanted a man--especially that particular man, who would struggle so hard, to kill over her.

Her face was healing but it was clear she will never be the flawless beauty that she was before. That still left her in the category of gorgeous and Felix had no trouble seeing that. He waited for her...waited on her. Between Janet and Felix, their relationship was a meeting of hearts rather than just the loins, as it was for Janet with Antonio.

In the meantime fate had been kinder to Sheree than it was the last time Janet left her. Dark, beautiful eyes followed her every move, watching...waiting; eyes that instantly recognized in the beautiful older woman a kindred soul. Her name was Isabella Rossolini. She was one of the females in Lee's Special Forces, unit. Her companions called her "Hi-note." Eventually, Sheree and everyone else who didn't already know found out why.

If Feifong had finally given up on Mike and turned to Bruce, it was because it was clear that Mike had found something--someone special. Her name was Shakira(shakes)Phieres. She had long dark, curly hair and big brown laughing eyes.

A lot of good feelings were being emitted towards Mike these days-- especially from Steve. He was clearly a man who was more content and at peace with himself. Whether that had more to do with Shakira, or the new acceptance he was feeling from his group was anyone's guess. Mike was emitting sincerity and pure emotions rather than pure lust in his disregard for his wife Feifong, in his feelings for Shakira, and nobody found it easy to begrudge him for it.

There was a male in Lee's unit named Chako(one trick pony) Morningsky. Like David Bravefeather, he had classic Native American facial features. Damian never thought about it before, but seeing Ada gravitate towards two Native Americans, he realized that she probably was at least half Native American herself. He couldn't help feeling bad for Steve because everyone could sense that in Chako, Ada had found what she was looking for.

The others in Lee's unit were:

Alonzo(big house)Breiner; a huge, physical specimen. He was not near as tall as the seven footer, Steve, but he was far more muscular. He was of some kind of mixed heritage, white-skinned, with Negro facial

features. He and another female soldier in Lee's unit, named Kiesha Ranes, was a couple. All Lee's people had nicknames and Kiesha--a mix-raced person(Black/Asian)-- was called "Gieshagirl" by her companions. She was slim, quiet and pretty. And devoted to Alonzo like a pampered pet.

The other female in Lee's unit, was named Tiararay(nails)Mumphrey. She was Lee's woman. Tall and dark like Lee, she wore her hair in thin braids. Her fingernails were so long they curled into her palms. Something wasn't right about that picture but Damian figured she grew them after the year-long lull in any encounters with danger.

Nothing was officially announced but Damian's and Lee's group had merged. Thanks to Chandra's expert care, Steve was well enough to travel. It was time to move on.

Antonio and Mustafa were still on their backs, unable to travel. No one else in Antonio's unit had been seriously hurt.

As Damian and Lee set out to leave, the men and women they were leaving behind, sat, stood, and lay in various positions, some with almost teary faces--mostly when they looked at the lowees--, but others were staring with faces full of hatred.

"It's not over Lee, if you leave it like this, Antonio called out. You know the rules. You should kill me."

Lee paused. "Be glad to Tony, except it's not just you."

"It's kill or be killed, Lee and it always have been between our kind."

"Since when... We don't kill surrendered people, Tony. We're warriors not bloodhounds."

"You're chickenshit, Lee. You know it's different for our kind than it is with regular Soldiers. You should kill me and you know it. Chickenshit. That's why in the end you always lose."

Antonio slowly turned his severely strained neck to train his hatred on Damian. "No matter where you go-- anywhere in this whole wide world-- I swear we'll find you...all of you. Vengeance *will* be mine."

"Why...because you lost a fight?"

"No, because you broke my brother. You took his spirit, and you repaid my family's generosity in sparing you your life by betraying us. You'll pay dearly for that, boy."

"We betrayed you by not letting you take what belonged to us--lord it over us?"

If Antonio heard Damian, he gave no indication, or credence to his words.

"Lee and me, we are alike. We're SFS. The best of the best. We know the game and all the rules. We live and die by the rules. And there is no hatred, no sorrow in it when we lose to one another; there is only respect and honor in the way you fight. But you fucking Civs...you don't fuck with us, you don't defeat us, and you don't take from us. We do the taking. We do the killing. We do the fucking."

Damian put his face so close to the prone man, their noses were almost touching.

"You lay there on your back--helpless as a new born baby-- and threaten me and everything in the world that I care about. That's makes you either, very brave, or very stupid. For either case you deserve a second chance but if you say one more thing, I swear, *I will finish breaking your goddamn neck .*"

Antonio's eyes said plenty--declared more war and called down every unholy curse that had ever been uttered-- but his tongue said nothing more. After a long minute of intense eye-to-eye contact, he finally, slowly and painfully, turned his head to the side.

The rest of the two opposing groups stared hard at each other as Lee's and Damian's people began to move on.

Mustafa--like Antonia--was still on his back, his eyes still shut, his ribs still poking through the skin and half his front teeth still lying over there somewhere near where he and Damian had fought. He didn't look as much like Muhammad Ali, now, as he did like bad, bad Leroy Brown of the famous Jim Croce, song.

Damian might have been looking like something similar to Mustafa because their fight was no unanimous decision; it was a split decision, which down to the very last second, could have gone either way. The difference in the way the two men were recovering was in who had nursed them. Mustafa was being taken care of by his group's medics. Damian was healed by the love his life. The herbs she mixed up and rubbed on his wounds to keep down the swelling and staunch the flow of blood; the wraps she put on his broken bones; the words she whispered into his disorientated mind; the caresses she gave his burning needs.... he had something to get better for and he did. So quick and thoroughly, the difference between the way he looked, from the way Mustafa looked six weeks after their fight, was the difference between the way Pernell(sweat pea) Whittaker looked after a fight and the way Rocky Balboa looked after a fight.

Mustafa had moisture in his eyes as he watched Chandra walking away from him.

Rick wasn't crying but his eyes were boring holes in Jane's back. Damian saw it before, and watching Rick, he was seeing it now. The guy wasn't going to give up until somebody was dead.

Michelle--all six feet of her--was staring at Steve. Damian was told about the confrontation between her and Antonio. He saw in the way she was looking at Steve a possible opportunity to help his friend. Steve clearly had no interest in romance now that Ada was lost but time heals all wounds and the tall woman obviously had feelings for the big, tall man. Besides that, everyone could see that she had hurt

herself with her group. She was being ostracized already. Who knew what Antonio would do to her once he got back on his feet?

Damian asked Chandra to see if she could talk the strikingly beautiful soldier, into coming with them.

Chandra approached Michelle and said something to her. Damian couldn't hear what she said to the tall woman, but he did see the big smile that lit up Michelle's face. Antonio's renegade warrior walked over with Chandra to join him and Lee.

Damian saw in Michelle's face and body that every insult hurled at her back, hit her like a hollow tip bullet. But she kept walking away from her old Unit with her head held high. Jane--the only evidence of the brutal beating she took, left, being a fading black-eye--walked over to Michelle and took the hand that Chandra wasn't holding.



## chapter thirty-nine



Michelle

They walked for twelve miles that day. When they stopped, it was only because the sun was setting.

It was late December and the nights were coming faster and colder. Throughout their journey they had avoided taking shelter in abandoned homes because of the risk of disease from the dead bodies and trapped microbes--deadly remnants of an old earth that was no more.

Damian still felt that there was danger inside the homes but the other Scientists among the group agreed that after four years any risk from lingering microbes will be too small to be concerned with.

They were still traveling the wooded route but they passed plenty of lonely houses and estates all the time. Directly ahead of them was another one--a sprawling, red brick mansion; the most certain, once impeccable lawn was overgrown with weeds and many different colors of flowers that had grown wild.

The smell of death still lingered in the atmosphere when they entered the house. The first skeleton they saw was of some kind of small animal--possibly a dog. As they toured the mansion they discovered more easily identifiable skeletons but they had long ago, gotten used

to such things. Of more importance to them were the stone-faced fireplaces that graced two of the biggest rooms in the mansion.

There was no electricity, so besides being colder, it was also darker in the house than it was outside.

They decided to camp in the large room closer to the front of the home.

"I'll start a fire." Damian saw that some wood was already in the wood box but it wasn't enough to keep the fire going all night.

"Bruce, Alonzo...go out there and see what you can find to burn." Lee ordered. The two soldiers left the room with the fluorescence lanterns they carried in their packs.

Damian got the fire started which lit up the entire room. Chandra started going through her bags. The smell of herbs and spices overwhelmed the stench of decay in the air.

"Can I help you?" Michelle was standing over Chandra's shoulders, looking into the bags.

Chandra and Jane were the ones who always prepared the meals but they were cooking for 21 people now, instead of nine. If the gal could cook she surely was welcome to help.

"Yes, thank yuh. Yuh like to cook?"

"Love it. My mama taught me how. Before I dropped out and joined the military, I spent two years in school training to be a master chef."

"Really?" Jane moved closer to join the conversation, "Why did you drop out?"

"My mama was killed in a traffic accident and I spent the next six months losing my mind. I was actually kicked out of culinary school. When I got so I hated living with my father more that I liked feeling sorry for myself, I joined the military."

She left out the part about the breakdown, the drugs, the brief period of running wild with a group of racist skinheads. She had Negro

ancestry mixed in with about 3 different other ethnicities but her dominate traits were Caucasian and no one could tell what ethnicity she was by looking at her. She was so beautiful no man she ever went after, who had to hold on to a prejudice, cared, or dared to probe too deep to find out *whose* blood she had in her.

Chandra handed her two small bags. "Yuh tink yuh cyan do sumting with dis?"

Michelle opened the bag and sniffed. "Umm...wild cress. My mama used to cook this all the time--especially when money was short. What part of the South are you from, Chandra?"

"Louisiana."

"My parents came from near there--Mississippi. I was born and raised in Detroit but we went back so often to see my grandparents, I feel as Southern born as my Parents. Michelle turned to Jane. "What part of the Country are you from?"

"Massachusetts...Lived all my life there. But my parents came to the United States from South Africa."

Damian, Lee, Steve, and Chako came in carrying a wide, heavy table from the dining room. The ladies set their wares on the table and begin to slice and dice. Michelle smiled at Steve.

"Why does Steve always look so down?"

Jane looked at Chandra.

"Him had sumting very special but didn't know it until he lost it," Chandra said.

"Broken heart... I thought so," Michele said, "Who is she?"

"Ada."

"The girl with Chako...?"

"Yes."

Silence fell between the three women. Alonzo and Bruce came noisily into the huge room.

"Couldn't find much heavy stuff, that didn't need an ax or chainsaw to gather, but I think we've got enough limbs to get us through the night." Alonzo said to Lee.

"That's good enough," Lee said.

"Damian..." Ada was over in a corner reading some papers. Damian walked over to her.

"You were right. It's in the walls, the carpeting, the cabinets, the furniture-- everywhere. I think we can stay here tonight but we won't be able to make a habit of this. These homes are poisonous to our systems."

"Are you sure we can stay tonight?"

"Yes, but it might--most unlikely though-- be like contacting a mild case of food poisoning for some of us if we stay until morning."

"Well folks, Damian addressed the entire crew, "Let's enjoy tonight, because we're back to sleeping outdoors for the rest of our journey."

Lee Shrugged. "Why change things now anyway, we'll be on the ocean in a few months."

Tiararay looked at Alonzo and then at Chako. "We've been meaning to talk to you about that, Lee."

"We...What's this we stuff? You're the only one who's afraid of sailing." Lee grinned at his woman.

"Not the only one, sir," Alonzo said, "I get seasick in the backyard swimming pool."

"Me too," Shakira spoke, "that's why I joined the ground forces instead of the Navy?"

"I'm worried about that myself, sir." Chako's tone took on a more serious bent than the others, "None of us has any experience sailing model boats in the bathtub, how are we supposed to cross the Atlantic?"

"The Civs had prepared for this. We've got four experienced sailors with us."

"The Civs...?" Chako looked around at Damian and his crew. "No disrespect to anyone, sir, but we're talking about the Atlantic here, not some bay on a tourist strip."

"We've discussed this Lee," Tiararay spoke softly, "and we think the risk is too high. We should stay and try to rebuild here. We'll follow your orders of course, but we all thought you should know how we felt."

"You all?" Lee looked around, "How many of you feel that way?"

Damian spoke up. "You do know that in three years from now, a big one will hit in Africa, and the aftereffects will circle the globe?"

"We understand what you've told us," Alonzo said, "but who knows how strong the aftereffects will be by the time they manifest here? We may be able to withstand them. Besides, the odds of surviving something that *might* happen are a whole lot greater than trying to survive sailing across the Atlantic like sixteenth century Pirates. If we had engine power, that's still risky enough, but oars, paddles and sails--come on."

"There's always a chance to beat the odds, but as a Scientist who has spent four years studying the breach situation, I don't think you will survive the aftereffects that will manifest here...but this is your lives." Damian looked at Lee. "I think we all should have a say on what to do with our own skin. What do you say, Lee? Let's put this to a vote."

"The military isn't a democracy, Damian. I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't--"

Damian put his hands up. "--You're right. Sorry. Not my business."

Damian thought he knew what Steve and the others in his group wanted. But maybe they were getting cold feet too. The military is not a democracy, but the McCloud research group, is.

Damian addressed all those who started out on the new genesis with him. "I think it's time I find out how all of you feel about crossing the ocean, now that we are so close to the Harbor. Chako and Alonzo are right. Sailing the Atlantic under nothing but man and woman power is a great risk. Personally, I believe we can do it, but as you all know too well, I've been wrong before. None of you have ever pledged, or signed your life away to me, flag, Country or anything else, so you all have a right to make this decision. Do we stay here, or do we cross the Atlantic?

Chandie...?"

"Go."

"Steve...?"

"We have no choice, Damian."

"There's always a choice Steve...vote."

Steve sighed. "I vote we go."

Ada...?

"Come on Damian...what is this?"

"Your vote, Ada?"

"Go." She threw him one of those looks from the old, early days at the lab.

"Mike...?"

"Go."

"Fei...?"

The little woman glanced at Bruce. His eyes registered nothing.

"Go," she said softly.

Sheree...?"

"Go." She didn't look at Isabella.

Janet...?"

She looked at Felix. His eyes begged her to say, stay.

"Go." She said after a long moment, whispering so softly, as to be almost inaudible.

Damian took a deep breath. She was his only real concern because the others were Scientists, or at least had had the situation explained to them in much greater detail than Janet. Some of them were in love too, but they understood there was no future here for them.

"Jane...?"

"Go." She looked at Patrick with pleading eyes.

"Michelle...?"

"Go." Her eyes were on Steve.

"That settles it then," Damian said.

"What about the Iowees?" Feifong asked. "They are not military. Shouldn't they be allowed to--"

"--The Iowees stays with us." Lee's tone was stern. Most of the heads in his unit nodded their agreement.

"But--"

"Fei, don't do this." Damian knew how she felt--how they all felt--both his people and Lee's. There was something about the lowees that made you fall in love with them--even want to fight over them. But his people couldn't win that battle with Lee. Besides that, they didn't have the history with the lowees, that even Antonio's people had. They had shed or lost no blood. They had no claim or stake.

Feifong looked at him hard. She read his emissions. He read their emissions. They--all the original members of his group--were with Feifong. His little friend did not press the issue although he sensed her anger towards him

"Sir." Alonzo addressed Lee, "I want a vote."

"Denied, soldier."

"Then, I want to resign my commission."

"You can't resign to me, soldier. You have to do that through the proper channels. Through me it's call mutiny and desertion."

Alonzo's voice slightly hinted of tears. "What proper channels sir? There is no channel but you. If you refuse to release me, I won't disobey but what right have you sir...by what authority?"

Lee thought about the man's words. What authority, indeed? There was no headquarters. They hadn't been in so much as a single radio contact with anyone from Command in over four years. There was nothing out there... nothing to bind any of them to their oaths but him. And who was he, but a soldier just like they, whose authority is really propped up on nothing more than the loyalty of these men and women to him, personally, because for all any of them knew, the higher ups, were all dead.

Lee put his hands on the big man's shoulders, "Alright Big House. It's a new day. We'll take a vote."



Alonzo's eyes squinted and blinked. "Thank you, sir."

"You all understand the situation here," Lee said to all his troops, "And you know my position. But what Damian told his people, I'm going to tell you; this is your lives in a new world. The choice of what to do with it is yours... Alonzo, you first, do we go with them across the sea or stay?"

"Sir, I vote that we stay."

"Bruce...?"

"Sir, I serve under your command, but if you have no objection, by your permission I would like to go." The Asian soldier looked longingly at Feifong who was looking at him with bated breath.

"What about you Midnite?"

Patrick stiffened and squared his shoulders. "I serve under your command, sir."

"Make a choice, Pat. That's an order."

"Then sir, I choose to go."

Jane walked over and took his hand.

Lee looked at Chako, who was immersed in animated conversation with Ada.

"What's your vote, Sargent?"

"Ada, please."

Ada took her hand from the young Indian's grasp.

"Chako!" Lee called in a commanding tone.

"Sir...I choose to..., " he looked at Ada, whose eyes were filling up, "...I choose to go."

Ada launched herself into his arms. Alonzo's head snapped around, his face registering pure shock.

Tiara...how about you," Lee asked, his voice sounding strained.

"I'm staying Lee. We'll never make it across that water. I know it."

Lee's voice quivered, "Felix...?"

"Jan, I love you. Stay with me baby. Don't throw your life away. Don't throw us away. We can stay here...have kids. Build a life."

Damian read what Janet was feeling and knew that he had just lost one of his own. She had changed her mind. She walked over to Felix and hugged him tight. The man's face glowed brighter than the fire crackling in the firebox.

"We're--I'm staying," Felix answered Lee.

"Isabella...?" Lee turned to where the dark-haired woman stood beside Sheree.

"Sir...stay."

Sheree whispered. "No!"

"Stay with me 'ree," Isabella begged.

Damian could feel Sheree's panic like a blast of hot steam. He could feel her looking at him, but he refused to meet her eyes. And then he heard her mumble. "I promised Lonetta," before she said more clearly to Isabella, "I can't."

Damian felt selfish for feeling so relieved. *He* had someone to hold at night. Sheree had lost Janet and now she was giving up Isabella for him--for ma, and yet he couldn't help being happy for himself. He hated it. He couldn't give her anything she needed to be happy, or to live without grinding loneliness.

He said, despite believing Sheree made the right decision if a better chance to live more than a few years meant more to her than love: "Ma wouldn't want you to do this Sheree. She loved you, and she would want you to have some happiness in life."

"I promised Letta. And you know my track record Damian. I don't know how to keep anyone around too long anyway. Besides that, I believe what you say about another breach. I've come this far, and lived this long thanks to you Chandie, and the others. I'm not going to let you abandon me now." She hugged Isabella. "Have a good life 'Bella." She walked over to stand beside Damian. Her eyes were flooded with tears. Isabella turned away but the soldier didn't cry like the Civilian. Lee

said: "Shakira...what do you want to do?"

"Sir, I wish to stay here."

Mike exploded. "What?" I told you, we'll die here!"

"If we do, at least we'll live a little while. *Think* Mike. The Atlantic ocean... You can't do it. You'll never make it."

"Kira--"

--Stay here Mike...with me."

Mike stood silent for what seemed like forever. Then he looked around at all his longtime companions. No one met his gaze. They all sensed his decision. Feifong gasped loudly.

"Kiesha...what do you want to do?" Lee asked, as if he didn't already know.

"Stay, sir."

Lee smiled and winked at Alonzo.

"Of course you do," he said with genuine affection for the quiet woman."  
Well, I guess tomorrow we part ways," Lee said to Damian.

Damian knew Lee believed he and his people were going to die if they stayed, but he wasn't surprised at the man's decision to keep his fate with the majority of his charges--come what may. He would have done the same thing himself.

"The food is ready," Michelle announced loud enough to be addressing them all, but her eyes were locked on Steve.

## Chapter forty



Lee

"I just wish there was some way to change their minds," Damian said to Lee.

He liked the bookish soldier and since coming to know him, he really enjoyed Lee's extensive knowledge, his stories, and his enthusiastic--sometime comical way of telling them.

"I do too ...kind of strange how the same people who can sign up to possibly face bullets and bombs every day, can be so phobic about certain other things."

"I wonder if it's as much phobia, as it is lack of control. On the wide waters without an engine, the sea really has the ultimate control. There's nothing to strike back at when things go wrong. "

Lee nodded, "You're right about that, Damian. For people like us--military people--control is a very big thing."

"Tell me something Lee...where are you from? Where I come from we didn't join the military and when some of us did, it was only for lack of another alternative."

"I'm from Minnesota. I'm one of those who joined the military for economic reasons. My intentions were to get in and get out as soon as I qualified for the GI bill. But while I was in the military I traveled the world, saw what it's like everywhere...and let me tell you something Damian; there's nowhere to run to get away from evil and injustice. I know why you hated the U.S. government and its military, but I don't think *you* do."

"What do you mean? I know exactly why I hated them."

"Oh, you mean the aggression, the small scale genocides, the meddling in other Nation's affairs, the economical robbery."

"Yeah, all that, among a long list of other things."

"Is that stuff the real cause of your hatred Damian, or was it the pretensions? If the United States had stopped lying about what it was, and had gone ahead and let the world and its people know that it was a ruthless Empire that fed off the blood, sweat and tears of the Nations of the world because it simply could not have survived any other way, would you have hated it any more than say--the Egyptian, or the Roman, or the British, or the Arabian or the Atlantean, or the Assyrian, or the Meroe, or Soviet, or any other empire? Would you have hated it, or would you have just accepted it for what it was, and started making choices?"

"What do you mean; making choices?"

"Before the breach, you had to plant roots somewhere, Damian. Like I said; there's was no Garden of Eden on earth. So what do you do --? Wander the world like a Gypsy--give evil all the cards, or do you find you a spot to settle in, and try to fight to even the odds some on behalf of the little bit of good that is in the world?

There are two opposing factions in this world and seemingly in this universe. There's a freedom faction and a slavery faction. Always have been, and always will be. The two factions have been struggling for control since the dawning of time."

Lee liked to talk. And Damian liked to listen. They will be parting ways in the morning, so Damian was delighted when he saw Lee get into that comfortable position that meant he was ready for a long conversation. He was going to miss these times with the worldly soldier.

"Take my nemesis Tony and the Iowees, for example," Lee said, "Their mission is to keep the Iowees alive so they can be bred like chickens or cows for a role of eternal slavery.

So Steve *was* right, Damian thought.

Our orders were to liberate the Iowees--kill them if we had to.

Two years before the breach, we engaged Tony and his unit in the badlands of South Dakota, and took the Iowees. In the time we had them we all fell in love with the little Scamps, so killing them was off the table for us despite our contingency orders. That's why three years later Tony's unit was able to take the Iowees back from us.

Our mission was to survive the breach and if possible save the Iowees. The latter was not a priority. There are only two of them, but we all wanted them to be able to live out their lives.

When we had the Iowees, we no more wanted them caged and enslaved in the present than we did in the future. They delighted so much in running free in the grass and frolicking among the flowers and trees, we began to let them. It had been so long since we've seen any signs of the Drakes--that's Tony's unit--we thought maybe they had succumbed to the breach, though we should have known better. They had everything to survive that we had. We forgot security and caution--everything we've been taught--and we paid dearly for it.

One day they came and snatched the Iowees.

Over half of us died because we were more concerned about the Iowees than our own people and lives. If we had just killed the Iowees to prevent them from falling in enemy hands we would have easily

won that battle. Instead we fought for them, with one hand tied behind our backs because the Drakes, were using the Iowees as a shield as they made their retreat. Obviously they had us under surveillance for some time. All this occurred before the breach caused everything mechanical to stop working. They gambled that we wouldn't be able to shoot the Iowees, and they won."

When Lee paused, Damian asked: "How useful a slave can such small Beings be, now, or in the future?"

They were bred to be small, so they could be easily dominated physically and controlled. They were also bred to be docile, happy, loving, passive and content with any situation. That's why they are so easy to fall in love with. They are totally without guile--like small children. Eventually, they would have been bred with other people-- maybe even you and your group. The word around then, was that some Civs were going to be given the balm so they could survive the breach."

*So the balm--like the software-- came from the Government. Now you know the answers to your questions Damian.*

"Lee, you ever hear the name, Douglas McCloud, in your circles?"

"Sure. He was at Harvard wasn't he--with you? Look Damian...Don't get bent out of shape about this. Every major Scientist or Lab worked with the Pentagon. The government had the money, but a lot of the ideas came from independent Scientists and labs."

"So you think we were helped, so we could survive to breed with the Iowees?"

"That was the talk. And it also makes sense. If the Iowees were bred to be docile, I doubt if they would have wanted them to breed with warriors. And it seems, your people were the only ones either faction tried to save besides their special forces soldiers."



"Seem to me that whole thing is more iffy than scientific. What was to ensure that the descendants of the lowees and...us Civs, wouldn't have taken as their dominant traits, the traits of we men and women, instead of the lowees? Believe me; we are not docile, or easy to manage. We have a giant among us for god sakes. And I don't think any of us are going to develop any romantic attraction to the lowees, so how was all this interbreeding supposed to happen?"

"That's the limitations of this sort of thing and always has been. You might be able to isolate certain genes to breed into a new life form, such traits as brawn, beauty, docility, etc, but you can rarely have it all. Ultimately things still has to be done the old fashioned way. God is still king and none of Its creatures has been able to take Its crown yet. As for how they were going to get you people to mate with the lowees, you've seen what the Drakes unit is like. They were saved for a reason too."

Lee, do you know the myth of Nimrod the mighty hunter.

The studious soldier nodded, "Yeah."

"What do you think he was doing?"

"He turned the world upside down, Damian. According to the Enuma Elish, he changed the ways of the gods. He snatched the world--its reality--, away from the gods and masters, and claimed it for the slaves.

That was the way Damian deciphered the story too.

"I've always believed that the ancient Priest who handed down that allegory meant The Tower of Babel to serve as an euphemism for the rise of man--the slave--from a state of bondage, to a position of freedom."

Lee agreed. "And of course the so-called, gods, had to band together and destroy the tower because the slaves had taken over the

plantation; Nothing new under the sun, Damian. To be free, has always been the ultimate struggle for man.

"Stories like that, is why I got away from revealed religions," Damian said.

"When you have people interpreting for you all your life what is good or bad, black or white, right or wrong, it's easy to be induced into accepting things as *they* understand them, but when you read it for yourself, what it actually says, means, you develop a whole different point of view if you're really trying to see what the message is."

Lee reached in his pocket and pulled out a package of cigarettes. He offered one to Damian who refused it. Lee shrugged and put the pack back in his pocket.

"I recall a discussion I had with my big sister, one day. This was back in my angry militant days when I was looking at the world through a tunnel. She was talking that bible stuff again. And for some reason I just flew off the handle. Understand; this was the person who had raised me like her own child. I knew that everything she did, she did out of love and concern for me. Times were hard for us. Her life in particular was sadder than a Greek tragedy and I had never tried to take her crutch from her before, even though, like you--I stopped hearing what she was talking about as soon as I learned to comprehend what I read. I knew how much she needed her beliefs to get her through day by day, but still, one day I say to her--speaking to her like I was talking to some kind of enemy:

I don't want to hear that shit today, sis. I'm tired of people like you talking a bunch of bullshit about things you have never stopped for one second to really think about. Somebody gave you a poison and y'all passing it down to everybody you love from generation to generation, and all the while thinking you're going to be rewarded by the same devils that gave you the poison in the first place.

I was a grown man then--about nineteen years old, as tall as I am now.

She was a little thing, blacker than a berry, never had space enough from stress to form a romantic relationship in her life, never had a dollar to spare at the end of the week; forty years old, never had a vacation. All she had was that bible and that church, and that god that cursed her to the life she lived.

She was crying, never heard me talk to her like that before. I felt like shit, watching her, but I couldn't stop myself, says to her:

You ever stop to think about what you read in that book, sis? This guy Noah, you keep saying was so righteous; what do you read in that book that was good about him? The book itself tells you what he was, but because some other devils told our great Granddaddy that Noah and god were pals, we go to our graves worshipping the head devil of the world.

I took the bible she held in her hands and started flipping through it. I used to know the book like the back of my hands but I couldn't even find the Noah story anymore even though I used to think he was a righteous man too, saved me from the flood, had god's own ear and all that. Couldn't find what I was looking for so I ask her:

What does it says in there about, Noah? I still don't know why, all these years later, but for some reason, it was the most important to me to destroy something that day--something, I now believed was hurting us and the world--something, I was afraid to tackle before because I knew how much her beliefs meant to her.

And she answers me, Damian...because you know...she defending her life here...fighting for all she had...all that was keeping her sane and coping. She says:

It says Noah was perfect in his generation.

And I shoot back: And what was Noah's generation known for?

She looks at me, eyes brimming. I knew she didn't know what I was getting at, so I say: Why was Noah on the goddamn boat? Just like that; cussing at my beautiful big sister, who had never so much as raised her voice to me.

Because god sent the flood, she says, like a child--so shocked by my behavior she couldn't even think. All she could do was respond like a prisoner under interrogation.

And I say: Why did god send the flood? Because

all the people were wicked, she says.

Then I said to her: so the book says Noah was perfect in a generation when *everybody* was evil and wicked. What does that tell you, Sis?

I knew she wasn't understanding what I was getting at, so I answered myself--

It tells you that in of world full of evil people Noah was the most perfect of them all-- head devil. And it tells you that same thing over and over again. The man was a drunkard, he was licentious. He was hateful, vengeful, vain, cruel, without any natural affection at all. It wasn't enough for the man to project his evil for a while, or throughout his lifetime--like a head devil--he had to keep it going for all eternity. You ever stop to think Sis, what kind of mind would curse even his worst enemy's children, to an eternity of poverty and slavery? You ever stop to think about all the shit that goes hand in hand with slavery?...The child rape... the female rape, the male rape, the poverty, the degradation, the mental and spiritual torment? You ever stop to think that the way you live--the way most people in this world live--is exactly the way Noah and his god cursed them to be?

I saw something in her snap then, Damian. Most people like her, I have told this stuff too, had enough survival instinct to just let it go in one

ear and out the other because they knew what they had invested in their beliefs. But my words stayed with her--probably because they came from me--the one thing she had in life that she knew loved and cared about her. And you know." Lee's voiced choked." After that day she just died; gave up. Been carrying a mountain on her shoulders all her life, and because of my selfish need to lash out, she finally let it crush her... Never opened that bible again. Never went to church again. I joined the military because I had to support her, and had no other way to do it. I had sapped her of everything that she had inside her. And I had no right." He shook his head. "Whether what I said was true or not, don't mean a blasted thing in the grand scheme of things. The truth, a lie, a devil, a god, a flag, a pill, a drink--it don't make a difference what we use to help us make it day by day through this hellish place--as long as we're not hurting anybody else--we all have a right to it. And there isn't anybody big enough in this world to take that away from us.

I used to think about all those young kids with their lives and futures ruined, sitting in jail or prison, because they had a joint in the ash tray or in their pockets and they were stopped, or patted down by some Drake who--if he didn't smoke weed himself once in while-- sure as hell drank to get high. But yet, thought nothing about doing to some black kid what he would have never wanted done to his own kid--who he knew, was getting high more than the black kid ever did, or could. I used to think about that Damian, and I realized those Drakes were me. That's what I did to my sister. Took her future and put her in hell just because she wanted a release from constant pain. It just wasn't my goddamn place to be in that kind of position and have that kind of power over somebody else's life.

I learned a life altering lesson that day. I learned to leave the pied piping shit alone-- to stop trying to tell other people. To stop preaching, and to stop focusing on people smoking joints, taking pills, drinking alcohol, worshipping bullshit, or whatever they indulged in to find release from constant pain. You don't blame the players for a

messed up video game do you? No, you blame the ones who created the game. I decided to search and find out why there was so much frantic need to escape in the first place, and then to try and do something about it. And there *is* a cause for the pain Damian. The Preachers don't tell you what it is, but all the Prophets and Disciples did."

Damian still recalled enough from his bible study days to discern what Lee was referring to but he was a Scientist. He didn't completely dismiss that kind of thing but even if it was real, he thought it fruitless to even acknowledge it. You still had to live in the world. He knew from talking to him over the months that Lee was something more than just an elite soldier, he was some kind of spiritual warrior. He discovered the U.S government had those too--just like the Catholic Church used to during the Middle Ages.

"I understand what you're saying about the Noah hocus-pocus. Reality, to most people is not what they see with their eyes, or what they discern with their minds, but what they are told. Didn't one of the Prophets say that to those people who course and record history, good is evil and evil is good? So them calling Noah perfect good was really calling him perfect evil--by their definition."

"Exactly," Lee nodded, looking at Damian with renewed respect. "That's why you can't base your truths on what those who get to do all the talking and recording tells you; you base it on what you see with your own eyes and understand with your own mind, using your own sense of Creator-given, morality."

"...Kind of how the people controlling the governments of the world were always talking about freedom, justice and Human rights, while at the same time being the only real destroyers of people's basic rights and lives. But by "Human" rights they meant *their* rights to be happy, free and prosperous, because they didn't consider most people--the poor people of the earth--to be Human.

Lee nodded, looking even more impressed.

"Somebody school you, son? That kind of stuff wasn't common knowledge laying out there just for anyone to pick up."

"No...just observant. Take Communism. Stripped of all the bullshit they add and attach to the meaning of the word, what does it really mean? What's the root of it?"

Lee smiled, already knowing where Damian was going. He'd heard all this before during his short stint as a revolutionary, but he knew the kid thought he was about to say something new and profound.

"Community."

"That's right. But because people are told that Communism is defined by Russia, Stalin, genocide, or some other fake situation, cooked up by the forces of slavery and exploitation, they can't see that the only way most people in the world can even survive without handouts and charity is by a communal, group help, way of life; like it had been for the Aborigines since the dawning of man.

Communism/Community is nothing less than the basic survival of the poor of the earth in freedom. The species of man and woman is naturally communist. When they are deprived of that way of life they can only survive as Slaves or Wards.

If they can take a simple word like community and propagandize it into something that people start frothing at the mouth with hatred just to hear it spoken, it should be no wonder that they can take a murderous demon and turn it into the god that half the world is worshiping as some kind of benevolent father. "

There was a long silence between the two men until Damian said: " I can understand you joining the military to support your sister, but why did you go the extra yard, why did you give your soul to it."

"I didn't give my soul to the U.S. military. I gave it to a belief."

"Belief...what belief...? Imperialism, war, genocide, robbery, napalm, injustice, clusterbombs...that's what you believe in, Lee?"

"You're a remarkably *observant*, "Lee grinned, "young man Damian, but there's still a lot you don't know. Before you understand how this world really turns, you will never understand me so don't form an opinion."

"...Too late. I've had this one since I first saw those naked women and children running in Vietnam, from those planes chasing them with napalm. Everything I've learned since then, has only re-enforced it."

"The first problem, Damian, is that you looked at the United States Military and you saw a Monolith--one giant machine just churning along in perfect harmony. And the reason why you saw a Monolith is for the same reason my sister read the Noah story and believed Noah was perfect in righteous. It's because that's what you're told, showed and indoctrinated to believe.

You believed it despite the fact that you know that from that Nation came the greatest written document for the freeing of man that has ever been written, at the same time where men were kept as brutally treated, chattel slaves. That document didn't say all "Humans" were created equal with certain inalienable rights, it said "Men" and I'm sure you understand the difference.

You believed it, despite knowing that the United States, was the only Nation in history, where the master's sons, slaughtered themselves over the condition of the slaves.

You believed it, despite seeing with your own eyes how the people took to the streets, driven by basic morality, and forced their Nation to surrender in a war they wanted to win.



Believe me, Damian, if all I knew about the world was what you know, I would've hated the United States too, and in fact, once did.

But there's a struggle going on, Damian. It is ancient and eternal, and what went on within the soul of the United States was just a microcosm of it. It didn't stop with the U.S. Constitution, it didn't stop with the Civil war and it didn't stop with the Vietnam protests."

"I've heard this same song about "the great struggle" from that guy we left behind lying on his back, but the Vietnamese, the Koreans, the Cambodians, people in South America, Africa, Yugoslavia, Iraq, Somalia-- millions all over the world are still just as dead, still just as tortured, still just as unjustly impoverished and degraded."

"The thing about body counts Damian is that you can only count the corpses. How many people weren't killed, attacked, degraded, tortured, impoverished...? You'll never know. You think after 9-11, when they threatened the whole world with nuclear war, they never meant to start one? But four years after they set their big agenda in motion it didn't happen, and you know why...the struggle.

And that's what I believe in. I'm a Special Forces warrior who defended life, liberty and justice at the behest of the very same Nation who took life, liberty and justice away from so many in the world. I'm a Special Forces soldier, who hunted down other Special Forces soldiers, and not all of them carried a foreign flag. That's just one of the things you never knew. Somebody has to fight from the inside, Damian. Somebody has to infiltrate the rungs of power, or the struggle for freedom would have been over with Atlantis. The slavery faction, would have had complete, unassailable power for all eternity. That's what the Noah curse was about. It was a written agenda to the Initiates of the forces of slavery.

It's the forces of freedom in the universe, that's puts people like me on the earth, because most people don't have the will, drive, or courage to look evil in the face--to sit beside it, stand beside it, fight it where it

lives.

You had no idea of the kind of things they--using forces like the Drakes did-- but we did-- and though no one ever heard about their actions or ours, they never got away scott free. Like Tony said, it was game--a ruthless, deadly, game, but it was serious and it was for the soul, freedom, of men, women, children and the universe. It was the struggle and it was as old as the world."

"You mean, like Jonestown?"

Lee's eyes got wider

"What do you know about Jonestown?"

"Everything."

Lee's voice sounded noticeably strained. "When that happened, it was a pivotal point in my Military career. I was just a young Sargent--had a bright future in the military if I wanted it-- but by that time my sister had died and all I wanted to do was finish my remaining time and get out. Then some people pulled me in and told me what really happened at Jonestown. The next morning I was in command of an ultra secret, elite special forces unit assigned to the hunt."

"You know, Lee. In the end, Zeus never saw the struggle. All he saw were the body counts."

"Neither did you, Damian, but I did, and even if I had ended up in some unmarked grave on the outer edges of Siberia, ultimately that would have been all that mattered to me."

"Why did you let them live...Antonio and his soldiers? If the situation was reversed they wouldn't have spared any of your people."

"I recognized a couple of hard core criminals, but some of those people with Tony are too young to have participated in anything more dastardly than obeying their orders regarding the lowees. They probably were recruited right before the breach. Times have changed Damian-- in the most drastic way imaginable. The great struggle is

over--at least for a long time to come. I just don't want to kill anymore."

Damian stood up and stretched.

"What are your plans now?"

"Any suggestions...?"

"How did you survive the breach the first time?"

"I suspect the same way you did."

"The balm?"

Lee nodded, "Along with other measures."

"If the Government had that formula all along, any idea why they didn't mass produce it?"

"I don't think they had it--at least not finished. I think they got the perfected version from yours and McCloud's work and they had no more time to mass produce it than you did. Besides, as you know, the balm alone wasn't enough to save most lives."

"Any ideas as to why the big Cheeses didn't use the balm on themselves or their children?"

"Short answer; they just didn't want to do the hard part of surviving. You know, the traveling, bearing the atmospheric conditions to acclimate their systems, the less that 5 star food, the uncertainties, the dangers of wild animals and people in a world where they no longer had ultimate control and protection."

"That's the short answer? Damian laughed.

"Yeah."

"What's the long answer?"

"We don't have time. Besides, I think you know."

Damian agreed. "Lee, according to the pattern the next breach that manifests here will be at least ten times more devastating than the last one. You're committing suicide by staying here, you know."

"I don't know that, Damian. There's always a chance of beating the odds. We have what...four years? What if we were to go underground?"

"You can do that. But you'll never be able to come back up. Being underground weakens your system's ability to adjust to the surface, and heaven only knows what kind of adjustments your body will have to make after the next manifestation."

Damian looked out a window and saw the darkness getting blacker. " I want to get over to Chandie before she falls asleep. "

"You think Command, and all the people who went underground with them will be able to come back up, Damian, if they're still alive?"

"I don't see how-- after all this time--at least not without being in a very weakened state, and fatally susceptible to the effects of the changes that has taken place on the earth. They will probably be so white as to be transparent--even the blackest ones who went under with them. Their children may do a little better--especially if they were genetically enhanced, like Antonio's group or gradually exposed some way to the new earth. A third option is they, or their descendants can kidnap some of the Descendants of the people who survived on the surface and breed with them, or extract from their cells and genes. In a few generations they may be able to resurface.

Maybe that's the real reason why the lowees were created; maybe they are some kind of living storage of cells and genes. All the more reason to get away from here unless you want to go where they are and check if the Undergrounders, are still alive. I never underestimate NASA genius or the ingenuity of the power Elite." Damian looked

towards where Chandra awaited him. I'll talk to you tomorrow before we part ways." He turned.

"Damian..."

Damian paused.

"Take the lowees with you."

## Chapter forty-One



**Patrick**

"We have lost two of our original members. They are: Scientist Mike Steinson and Professor Janet Rivera.

It was not by violence or fatal accidents; it was through a conscious choice to divorce their fate from ours. Specifically, we lost them to the power of love. They will be sorely missed and we all wish them well.

We split up with the Soldiers we had been traveling with the past year, three days ago. But four Soldiers chose to stay with us. They are:

Bruce Akimoto  
Patrick Henry  
Chako Morningsky  
Michelle Johnson

There are now eleven of us.

We are 4 months from the New York Harbor.

Today is the sixteen day of March 2012 A.D.

"Thank you, Fei."

"For what, you know how much I treasure and look forward to these times alone with you.

"Thank you for staying with me--with us. I know you didn't want to sail."

"I don't want to die either. I trust you Damian...with everything."

Damian stood in silence. He knew what she meant because he felt the same way about her. There was no desire, hunger or pleasure-seeking in what he felt for Feifong. There was just something that getting to really know her had put under his skin--inside his bones. And it was something that could not be adequately explained by words. All he wanted for her was her happiness and he didn't care how or where she got it. He loved her like he loved Chandie, but with Chandie, he wanted *all* her happiness to come from him, alone.

"How are things going with Bruce?"

She shrugged. "He hates you."

"What?"

"Not really, but he hates the time I spend scribing for you and the way I talk about you."

"Fei, what are you doing talking about me to Bruce? That's like me talking about you to Chandie, which I don't do because I know that the only way I will be able to speak of you, is in terms that she will never understand. Tell me you don't talk like that to Bruce about me."

She hunched her little narrow shoulders again. "When he asks, I tell him. I can't help it if he doesn't understand the way things are between us. I'll never apologize for it."

"Do you love him?"

"Yes." And Damian knew it was true in Fei's version of romantic of love which was probably a lot different from Bruce's,--if no less real and committed.

"Then I'm warning you, Fei. You saw what happened to Steve. Don't take love for granted. Don't mess up your happiness."

She stared at him for a long moment "That's why I love you so much."

"What?"

"Nothing."

"We're finished, Fei."

"I *know* that." The famous neck roll never ceased to endear her more to him.

"Then carry your little Vietnamese butt over to your paramour."

She laughed.

"Damian...?"

"You still here?"

"I am happy."

He smiled at her tenderly.

"That's all I want."

"I know." She turned and left.



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Chandra, Jane and Michelle, were out together looking for edibles and other useful plants.

"Can you really read each other thoughts?" Michelle asked Jane.

"Yes...when the emotions are strong, and there are not a lot of distractions around... you couldn't do that when you were with your unit?"

Michelle shook her head. "No."

"Chandie, why do you think that is?" Jane asked.

"I dunno. I'll ask Damian, weh we get back."

"Can I ask you both something?"

Both Chandra and Jane nodded.

"What does Steve think about me?"

Chandra laughed. "The last ting I heard him sey in his mind 'bout yuh was, ummm dat girl sure cyan cook."

Michelle and Jane laughed. Jane said: "One day I'm saw him watching you-- while trying to pretend that he wasn't-- and he was thinking about how pretty you are."

"Really," Michelle asked breathlessly.

"Him likes yuh gal, but I dun tink him gwan to mek di first move. Him heart is still on the mend."

"If I make the first move, what do you think I should say to him."

" Wat else, gal? Yuh cook him sumting and invite him ti eat with yuh. Dat haf he panting weh for yuh soon enuff."

All the women laughed.

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"Do you really think we are going to die at sea?" Ada sat on the ground with her head on Chako's shoulder.

"Yes."

"Do you know what that says?"

"Yes."

"Any regrets, yet?"

"None that has to do with my decision to go with you." He combed her hair with his fingers.

"What *are* your regrets?"

"It's more worries than regrets. I just wish Lee had killed Antonio, John, and Rick--at least. I'm afraid--" He paused. "It was their choice."

"I want to be honest with you Chako, and the truth is I could have never done what you did."

"Doesn't matter."

"But you gave up everything for me. Your unit, your peace of mind and even your life since you think you are going to die at sea. I don't know what to think or how to feel. I feel so selfish, so...undeserving."

" I'd rather live five minutes with you than a lifetime without you."

" There's so much imbalance between us. And I don't know what to do to make it more equal.

" Just love me back, Ada. That's all. Don't complicate this, please."

" I can't help it."

"Okay, let me ask you this...do you really believe that Lee and the others are going to die from the breach in five of six years?"

" I'm sure of it."

"Then you're saving my life because if it weren't for you, I would never have left my unit. Not if god himself was aiming at us with nukes in both hands. I think that equalizes things between us more than enough."

She studied him, eyes fixated on the way his chin rose when he said he would have never left them.

"You miss them?"

"Yeah," he sighed, "very much."

"Then you *do* have regrets."

"No, Ada. No real man would chose something else--no matter what it is--over the woman he loves. I'll never regret choosing you, it's just that I've lived so long expecting, and willing to die with, and for those guys, sometimes I feel like I've been separated from a part of my flesh. But you've filled in that missing part, and when we have kids..."He grinned at her. "You are going to bear kids aren't you?"

"Not if you die at sea," she said in a tone that carried no lightness.

"I love you, Ada."

"I adore you." She turned up her head and he kissed her.

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"Why did Lee change his mind and let the Iowees come with us?"

"Because they wanted to."

Patrick sat on the ground beside Jane. It was late in the evening and the group was stopped for the night. They were back to sleeping outdoors, a fire in the middle of their camp was already roaring.

"But they seemed so much happier with Lee and the others than they were with us and Antonio."

"I know it's easy to miss it, Janie, but the Iowees have minds of their own. It may not seem like it because they are so quick to go along with whatever is presented to them, but they have their own wants and desires and they are a lot smarter and observant than you might think. They wanted to go with Damian, because they heard the talk, and they wanted to live. Besides that, they were always most attached to Chako and Bruce."

"They are so lovable. I'm glad they are with us."

"So am I, but the guys back there--I don't know how Lee got them to hold still--they are really hurting right now."

"Will you resent me one day?"

"For what?"

"Causing you to separate from your unit. I know how painful that is."

No...no...Janie. He caressed her face. "I'll never blame you for that. The choice was mine. I don't regret it. I love you."

"You're hurt."

"I'll get over it."

"I'm so afraid that one day you're going to wake up and I won't be enough to help you live with the decision."

"I would have died in a second for any of those guys, but believe me Janie--no matter what happens between us in the future, I would have made the same choice a thousand times without hesitation. You've given me more joy than I've ever had in my life, and every minute with you makes it all worth it."

Tears brimmed in her eyes.

"Hold me."

Patrick took her in his arms and quietly sat with her.



Damian heard her scream in his mind though he never heard her voice. He ran through the camp in a panic. "Steve, Chandie's in trouble!" He kept running.

The big man, who was sitting with Michelle, scrambled to his feet and took off after Damian. Michelle struggled to keep up with his long strides. "What's going on?" Sheree cried in a shrill voice.

"Come on!" Jane yelled behind her as she ran, "Chandra's in danger!" Patrick ran with them.

Feifong looked at Bruce, who along with Chako was looking around wildly--both still yet unable to read the frantic emissions to know what was happening without being told.

"It's Chandra!" Fiefong said, "She's being attacked!"

Bruce grabbed her arm, "Stay here."

"Let me, go!" Feifong snatched her arm loose and took off running after the others.

Bruce and Chako followed.

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Damian had seen her run before and he knew how fast Chandie could

sprint--like Flo Jo, of Olympics fame. He was grateful for it because right on her heels were a pack of about 12 barking, growling dogs. The two closest to her were Dobermen. They both were on the thin side and mangy looking but they were still fast enough to gain on Chandie, and it was clear they were single-mindedly intent on easing their hunger on her flesh.

The two lead dogs were just a leap from her now and Damian was more than twenty yards away. The hungry dogs were going to reach her first. "Drop Chandie!" he yelled both mentally and with his lungs. She instantly obeyed and the two Doberman Pinschers jumped. They soared past her and Damian ran by them to stand with Chandra.

The other 10 dogs caught up at that moment. Damian put Chandie behind him and kicked the first dog that reached them full in the face. All the others were ready to rush them--one of them--some kind of Rottweiler mix-breed, crouched, showing all its healthy white teeth and Damian knew he and Chandra was in deep trouble--trouble that for them, was going to end up very bloody.

Then Steve showed up, running straight into the midst of the pack of dogs kicking and yelling at the top of his lungs. The dogs scrambled, even the big muscle bound mix-breed scurried back a few yards to access what new thing he was up against. Seconds later, the pack regrouped, encircling Damian, Steve and Chandra; moving forward again. The first to rush in was the biggest Doberman, but close behind him were all the others.

Steve grabbed the snarling mass of teeth and slobber by the head and twisted. Damian leaped up and kicked the one that leaped at him, and in the same motion turned in the air and punched the first dog that jumped at Chandie. One of the dogs grabbed Steve by his left leg and held on. Then another--a healthy pit bull-- clamped down on his left arm. Damian punched the terrier on Steve's arm in the face again and

again but the dog wouldn't let go. His jaws had locked and his teeth were churning. Suddenly the huge mix breed leapt on Damian's back knocking him to the ground.

"Damian!" Chandra dove on the Rottweiler and grabbed him by the neck. The big dog easily twisted his head loose and lunged at Chandra. Damian rolled on his back and grabbed the big dog's hind legs just as his teeth snapped. The dog yelped and yanked its legs from Damian's grasp. He lunged at Chandra again.

Bruce Akimota entered the struggle, feet first. The Asian Soldier kicked the big dog in the head. Chandra could feel the heat from the dog's breath just before its head violently whipped away from her. The big dog rolled twice on the ground and was still.

Damian was back on his feet, pulling at Chandra when Patrick and Chako showed up. The smallest dogs Fled. Bruce karate chopped the dog that held Steve's arm in the joint where its neck connected to its spine. The dog flopped. Chako broke the back of the dog that had Steve's leg and the remaining dogs ran yelping into the distance.

All the men had outran the women and as the ladies came huffing up, Damian couldn't help laughing to himself and thinking, even at that tense moment, that Bruce, maybe--but none of the other men would have outran Chandie.

The first of the women to reach the scene was Michelle. The last was Sheree. Michelle, who was one of Antonio's Medics, looked at Steve's bloodied arm and tore off the scarf she wore around her head. She calmly approached Steve and began to administer to his wounds. Chandra walked over to them.

"Let's get he back ti di camp. I mek sumting for dis."



"Can you walk Steve?" Damian put his shoulder under Steve's left arm. He had called on Steve during his moment of panic like it was second nature--as if it was Steve's job to drop everything and be there when he needed him. As always, the big man had answered his call like it **was** his job, risking his life without a moment's hesitation.

At this point, Damian knew he would do the same thing for Steve, but he also knew it wasn't always that way with him. He never understood why, but Steve had treated him like a close brother from the moment they met. It took him a long time to completely trust the situation because that kind of thing just don't happen between people--not in his world, or any world. But the friendship was real. The loyalty is real. And it was more than just in the mind and heart, it was in the blood.

"Yeah," Steve answered Damian's question. "The leg's not as bad as the arm. I know a Pit had my arm but what was that mutt on my leg--teeth wasn't long enough to bust a grape but it was holding on like crazy glue. Pit-bull wannabe..."

Damian sensed a skit coming on, and he couldn't have looked more forward to it if it was the opening to a Michael Jackson concert.

## Chapter forty-two



*she's a big cat*  
*big cat walking*  
*big cat*  
*big cat talking like that*  
*cuz she knows she'll get her way* **Big Cat" from the New Genesis CD by**  
**akamardukson < loop="FALSE"**  
**autostart="false">**

For the first time, they started to make weapons.

After the dogs, they had an encounter with a Tiger, a bear, and more dogs. Even a house cat attacked one time, leaping out at Jane and scratching her face. Patrick killed it. Jane stayed mad at him for 3 days.

The animals were everywhere. Damian figured they had all migrated here and came up against the waters, and couldn't go any farther.

Damian and the others had reached the harbor. As expected, there were plenty of abandoned sailing vessels. The plan was to spend six months here honing their sailing skills before they attempted to cross the ocean. They took a boat out every day.

They started making and carrying spears and knives after the tiger attack--if it really could or should be called that. The big cat looked half- starved even with the great concentration of prey around. When she stalked towards the lowees, the cat didn't seem to know how to

attack. Damian could tell by the cautious way she moved forward that if not for starvation, she wouldn't have approached any of them at all. The lowees were screeching like sirens and the cat kept looking behind to ensure her path to escape was unencumbered. Damian watched calmly from his hut as Chako, and Michelle approached the animal. He saw the tall woman calming Chako down, and everyone else was relaxed by watching her demeanor.

The big cat started backing up, but was still unwilling to run yet. Michelle was cooing to the tiger while Chako stayed beside her. Steve stood back and watched, but he was alert, as was Bruce and Patrick. Finally Michelle took one step too close and the big cat turned and fled.

Wasn't exactly Cujo was it?" Steve said.

"It was tame," Michelle answered.

"Think it'll be back?" Chako asked. He was soothing the lowees.

"Probably."

"Then why didn't you let us kill it? If it hurts Firsthe and Firstshe--"

" It was just hungry."

"They are all *just* hungry."

"No, I mean... it's tame. If we feed it, we probably can keep it around like a pet. It won't hurt anything."

"Now why would we want to do that?" Patrick walked up with Feifong and Bruce.

"Because why kill a beautiful animal like that if you don't have to?" Feifong asked.

"Because it was going to eat Firsthe and Firstshe," Bruce answered his

woman.

"And what about Chandra and Jane...?" Patrick asked, "You want them out there walking in the woods with that thing lurking around?"

"I don't want them out there at all, right now...too many wild animals around," Damian said. "...At least not without some kind of protection," he added quickly, sensing Chandra's ire.

"By gide, theen that sittles it," Steve said, sounding like a mush mouth Englishman. "Wee feed the cot, and wee make wippons to keel all the bod enemas. Ah wee ah-greed theen?"

The grouped laughed. Michelle looked up at him with her eyes beaming adoration.

"Alright, we feed the cat." Chako shook his head, still chuckling and put an arm around Ada.

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They named the cat, which was female, Sheba. She was obviously once someone's beloved pet, not only that, but spoiled almost beyond toleration...and deeply in love with people.

It was now unclear if, even despite her obvious hunger, she wanted to eat the lowees or play with them--like she does now. From sunrise to sunset she shadows the lowees and Damian figured it might be because she once belonged to people with small children.

The cat took swiftly to Chandra too. The only time she would leave the lowees, was to follow Chandra when she went on her forays to find useful vegetation.

Both Chandra and Jane carried spears but Damian had a lot more

peace of mind knowing Sheba was with Chandra than the spears. Chandra had long ago discouraged him of the idea that he or some other man should shadow her when she went out. She never minded company but she didn't want a keeper.

Most of the animals avoided them if they could. The biggest danger was the hungry dogs who ran in packs but even they weren't much of a threat now that they all were carrying spears. When one of them was in trouble with the dogs, it only took minutes before they had help. The women could hold the dogs off with the spears as well as the men.

Damian felt they were now ready to pit their maritime skills against the ocean. The vessel they chose to sail in was a mid-size schooner with three collapsible masts. They had practiced a lot in the ship and it was sturdy and easy to maneuver. In this part of the world the waters and winds were always calm, so they knew their success handling the boat was not a true marker of their abilities. They had no real idea what kind of conditions they will encounter the farther they got from the coast.

As was their habit before they went to their separate spots for sleep, the group sat in discussion. There was a lot more verbal communication because the soldiers still hadn't developed the ability to read thoughts. Damian was at loss as to why. Not even Steve had anything to put forward to explain it.

Chako had taken to sailing, like a fish to water. He was good at it and like anything you are good at, he loved it.

"I think we just might make it across that ocean after all," he said wistfully, wishing now that he had done more to assuage Alonzo and Tiararay's fears rather than encourage them.

"Well, it's not going to be as easy as just sailing up and down, close to

the shore, but we are prepared. It's been done routinely before. I see no reason why we can't do it, and if conditions are as calm all over world as they are here, all we'll really need is stamina and a sense of direction. We should be fine, but the first rule of any endeavor is to not be too overconfident."

"Overconfidence is not a problem with me, Damian," Bruce said. "I have to tell you, I'm nervous as hell about this." Feifong squeezed her lover's hand.

The big cat sat between Chandra and the Iowees like she was people too. "What about her?" Steve asked. Aren't cats supposed to hate water?"

"That's not cat," Feifong said, "That's people."

The Iowees laughed with delight.

"You haven't seen her on the boat yet Steve?" Damian laughed.

"Yeah, but I thought the cat was Chako because it looked from here like she was steering."

Chako threw a playful air punch in Steve's direction.

"What about supplies? The greens don't keep too long and we have a lot of water to cross."

Steve answered Patrick. "We have a map, listing every Island and land mass between here and the South Atlantic. We should be fine on that score."

"You think we'll ever start eating meat again?" Bruce asked.

"You ate meat?" Steve said, then adding, "Only if you change your name to Abel and start speaking in tongues."

"And who are you supposed to be, Steve?" Bruce retorted--"Cain?"

"He was a vegetarian, wasn't he? Right now, we're all Cain. Let's just try not to start speaking in tongues, alright? So we don't start gutting big cats, small sheep and each other."

Sheba yawned widely.

"What's Sheba going to eat?" Firstshe piped in her tiny little voice, surprising everyone so much that they openly stared at her. She visibly shrunk within herself.

Everybody started babbling at once to answer her. The gist of it was that they will pack some meat in one of the steel containers on board and drag it along in the water behind the boat.

"Wonder if god will get too mad if we turn the cat into a vegetarian," Steve asked.

"Sheba can't live on veggies, "Firstshe giggled, seemingly emboldened to speak by his companion's bold leap into the waters.

"Why not...?" Unlike the others, Steve talked to the little Beings in the same tone he used normally, "If Elephants, Giraffes and Gorillas can be vegetarians, why can't other large animals?"

"It's something we can try later," Damian said thoughtfully, "But we'll feed her what's she's used to until we're settled in Africa."

" You don't believe in god, do you Steve?" Jane asked bluntly. He and Jane didn't talk much to each other since the night they made love, but they had developed a good relationship that didn't require conversation, courtesy or even acknowledgment of each other.

"I'm a Scientist."

"You didn't answer my question."

"Yes I did. What about you, do you believe in god?"

"Of course."

"Then explain something to me Janie, because all my life I've been puzzled by this. Your people are first generation, white South Africans, right? I want to know how people can believe so much in a god who is supposed to be good, just, and vengeful-- and at the same time commit so much evil. Do you believe in the hell thing or not?"

She didn't answer. Damian and Ada both knew Steve; has known him for a long time. Damian smiled tightly, knowing a diatribe was brewing. Ada leaned forward. Steve launched:

"You remember how miserable it was outside during the heat waves before the big breach? Can you image living inside of a real fire forever and being unable to die? Your people claim to believe in eternal damnation, yet you have lived like gods for two centuries among people you have robbed, slaughtered and tortured by the millions.

I don't care whether your Ancestors considered them "real people" or not, they were still living, thinking Beings--just like the lowees, yet every sin, inside and outside the book, was committed against them without respite for three hundred years. And you want to come off on some superior tip to *me* about believing in god? No, I don't believe in god because god is what incurious people like you believe in. I believe in whatever created all the beauty and goodness in the world, and whatever that is, cant be this thing that people have been calling god while murdering, enslaving and stealing.

And that's because, I have never in my life treated anybody with one ounce less consideration than I would have wanted for myself and my love ones, despite what anybody or anything says. I come from a line of mostly dirt poor people, who keeps themselves separate from the world... people who had always lived like they thought they were being



watched and judged--not in pretensions and their bellies. Seem to me, I'm not the one who doesn't believe in god."

"You're not being fair, Steve." Tears were in her voice and eyes

"Am I being truthful?".

"I've never hurt anyone and neither have my parents."

"Did you or your parents ever atone...apologize for what your grandparents did? It's not like it isn't documented, or is ancient history.

I'm a Scientist Janie, and I know what the Aids epidemic in the Southern part of Africa was. It was a vengeful act of biological sabotage against entire groups of people. Or do you think it was a coincidence that Southern Africa was the stronghold of Western domination of Africa...a stronghold that was steadily being dismantled by liberation wars.

Thousands of white Missionaries and so called world health organization workers knew the time frame of the start of the Aids epidemic. They may have been unknowingly used, but they had brains, and they had to have at least asked themselves questions. But did you ever hear of any of them atoning in public by simply raising the question? Any white, South African?

Can people, who do, benefit from, or remain silent of such atrocities, really believe in hell, Janie...or God?

Steve stood up. "I'm going to bed." He turned and left the gathering. Michelle stood up and followed him.

A heavy silence fell over the group before Damian said to the sobbing, Jane:

"He wasn't really directing that at you, personally. I've known Steve for a long time and I've heard that rant a few times.

"He had no grounds to talk to her like that," Patrick said bitterly, "She was raised in Massachusetts."

"Maybe he should have talked to *you* like that instead," Chako said. "You never took in a word he said did you? All you could be; feel...after all that passion and truth from the man, was insulted over the way he spoke to your woman." Chako stood up. He looked at Jane. "Like Damian said, that wasn't meant just for you." He turned and left. Ada looked at Jane sympathetically and followed Chako. Jane was muttering I'm sorry, to no one in particular.

"Go to bed," Chandra said to her. She looked at Patrick, "Tek she home."

Janet, Bruce, Feifong, Chandra, Damian, all stood up.

"Be ready everybody," Damian said loudly, "we're setting sail tomorrow."

## Chapter forty-three



Damian&Chandra

say you wanna have my baby  
say you wanna give the world  
lots and lots of boys like me  
and i wanna give it girls  
like you baby

**" Like you, baby"from the New Genesis CD by akamardukson**

They were three days out from the Northern coast of what used to be the United States, and so far it had been nothing but smooth sailing. When Damian stood at the bow and stared ahead--something he loved to do--the big cat was always right beside him. She seemed to love staring across the water as much as he did. Every now and then she would nuzzle him with her head, ears quivering to be scratched. Damian would happily oblige. He had grown to love that cat.

They rowed the boat in one hour shifts, three shifts, four people each shift, except when it was Damian's turn to row. He, Steve and Bruce, rowed without a fourth pair of hands.

The ship was designed to cut through the water like a knife through

butter and on the calm waters it didn't take much strain to keep it pointed where they wanted it to go. They have yet to even hoist the sails but they still had a contingency plan in case they ran into rough waters.

"It's so beautiful...God's green earth." Chandra had joined him. The big cat's head swung over. Chandra scratched behind her ears.

"That, it is," Damian nodded, "almost as beautiful as you."

"Is it fair, bwoy?"

"Is what fair, baby?"

"For me ti be so happy...so much in love...with a kingman who loves mi back?"

" Why wouldn't it be? You deserve everything that's good."

"I don't know." She held her head to one side and stared him in the eyes.  
Do yuh eva tink about yuh, Maddah?"

"Not too much anymore."

She sighed. "I wish mi Maddah could be here. Ti know yuh. She would be so happy for me. And mi Faddah too, in he own way, though yuh'd never know it by listening to him."

"I wish ma could know you. She never had any one close to her but me and Sheree. She never saw Sheree much. You would have made ma so happy. She would have adored you Chandie."

"Really," she looked at him with disbelieving eyes. Damian knew what she was thinking.

"Yes, really. Ma was deeply Christian, in the way it was taught to her. Yes, she thought that anything healing that didn't have the u.s.d.a., stamp of approval on it was voodoo, but no one can spend five minutes

with you Chandie and not see you. She would have focused on you and forgot about everything else."

"Dat meks me happy ti tink about."

She didn't mention that she had helped his mother die. Sheree had called her brother because Damian's mother had no insurance, and was not being treated seriously by the hospitals. Her brother did what he could, and had sent her to help the woman pass easily.

"It's true."

"Sumtimes, weh I let mi mind go like yuh do, staring across dat watta, I feel like I'm awake, dreaming. Ev'ryting dat's happening seems so fantastic, so unreal."

"I know what you mean."

"Do yuh tink we cyan haf trildren, bwoy?"

"One day, if you want."

"I want to gi' di world more Damians." She laughed, " Lot's of Damians."

"What about Chandras. There can't be Damians without Chandras." She twirled and let her hand run lightly across his face.

"But di Chandras cyan nuh com' out of mi belly bwoy. Maybe di Chandras com' outta Ada, Fei, or Janie."

Damian laughed at her silliness. "Maybe. You really don't want any girls?"

"Mi nuh wan' ti birth any Chandras for mi Damians."

"I'm serious, Chandie."

"Do yuh wan' girl chile?"

"It don't matter to me."

"Me neither." She giggled.

"Come here, you little--." Damian laughed and grabbed her by the waist. He picked her up and carried her toward one of the cabins below deck. The big cat padded off to find someone else to scratch behind her ears.

## Chapter forty-four



"This sea air is spoiling our food supply two times faster than we factored."

Damian listened till Jane finished speaking. He turned to Steve.

"How far away is the next Island?"

"At our current pace, we should reach the West Indies in about six days."

"Jane, how long can we stretch what we have?"

"Three...four more days, if we ration..."

The big Cat was sitting up on her haunches, between Chandra and the lowees, head up, like she was the chairman of the board or some equally important thing.

Steve looked over at her. A devilish gleam suddenly leaped into his pupils.

"If push comes the shove, we can always barbecue. I've heard that tiger meat tastes just like chicken."

Sheree, who was sitting to the left of Steve, exploded with laughter. She punched his arm.

"Stop it."

The big cat blinked and yawned. The lowees were cooing and rubbing her coat.

Damian cursed. "That's at least three days with no food. I thought we calc'ed for the sea mist's possible effect on our food supply." He gave Steve a look.

"We did." Steve shrugged, his tone clearly saying lighten up, "But we don't know this new world we're in yet Boss. Everything we've ever known about our environment before the breach gets tossed out the window."

"What's the big deal? Three days without a meal isn't going to kill anyone," Bruce said.

Steve puffed out his left cheek like Marlon Brando, in the classic movie, "The Godfather."

"How can I 'splain this to youse Bruce. It's a Scientist thing. Youse see, we Scientists don' likea supprises. Yew unnastand what I'ma sayin' to youse, Brucie?"

Damian felt he was being mocked, even though he knew Steve was just being Steve.

"I like the barbecue idea myself," Patrick laughed. "We've been eating so many leaves I'm starting to shit green."

"It's not leaves." Jane said sharply. "And don't curse in council."

"Yes Mommy."

"You're asking for it."

Chako snickered. "I think you better stop digging, Midnite, while your ears are still above ground."

"Yuh tink inyone is still alive dere?" Chandra asked Damian.



Damian heard strain in her voice and the only reason for it that he could think of, was that her Father's relatives had lived on one of the West Indie Islands.

"No, baby." He sent her waves of compassion with his silent emissions to her. "I don't think so." He turned from her finally and addressed the entire group: "I'm sorry about the food situation."

"Why is that your fault, boss? You have nothing to apologize for."

"I guess you're right, Steve. It's not my fault. It's *yours* and *my* fault. It's our job to handle the logistics of surviving. We just can't afford to make these kinds of simple mistakes. What if we were in a stretch where the nearest land mass was weeks, or months away?"

Steve thought for a moment. "I don't know...go fishing maybe? I get your point, but I still say we had no way of knowing that the sea mist would spoil the food supply so fast."

"Could we had done a sample test before we left, or not, Steve? We made a potentially, grave mistake. And it was one that could have been easily avoided. I'm not saying that it's possible to think of everything, but we can at least own up to our mistakes without qualifications. That's the only way we'll keep on our toes."

Steve stood up.

"Oh, now you're going to walk off in a huff as usual." "No,

I'm going to walk off in my skin."

"Admit that you're wrong, Steve." Damian felt like something was tearing away from his insides. He couldn't let Steve walk away from him angry, but he couldn't bring himself to give an inch either.

"I would if I was." Steve seemed reluctant to walk away too. But he was as stubborn as Damian. Both wanted desperately, to patch things up. They had never argued before. But neither knew how.

"You're both right. And you're both wrong," Sheree said. "Steve...sit." The big man looked at her, one brow raised.

"*Sit.*" Sheree patted the spot beside her.

He obeyed, but mainly because he wanted to anyway. He sat there with his arms folded.

"Damian, look at Steve." Sheree was the Elder in their group, and more and more she was conducting herself like someone who will one day have that exalted position which was once so cherished by Aboriginal peoples. "What do you see?"

"I see a big assed, long haired man with his arms folded."

"That's right, you see a *man*. A man that has proven his friendship and love for you and for all of us over and over again. So why would you chastise him like he was a child in front of everyone?"

"Maybe for the same reason *he* felt he could talk to Janie like he did."

Patrick groused.

Jane's face instantly turned beet red.

"Look Patrick, I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't keep using me to moan over *your* injured manhood. He was talking to me and we're not sewn together. I'm okay with what Steve said, *alright?*"

"You're right." Damian stood up. "I don't know what the hell got into me." He walked past Sheree, over to face Steve. He looked directly into the big man's eyes. "A man save your life one time, and he earns enough respect to last an eternity. When he does it over and over again, at the risk of his own, you *never* get so high and mighty--even in your mind-- that you talk down to him. I'm sorry Steve."

The big man lurched to his feet. Damian hugged him and Steve hugged Damian back. The two men separated.

"I was wrong Boss."

"Let's not go through *that* again," Sheree said hastily.

"Janie."

Jane looked up at Steve.

"I'm sorry for the way I spoke to you."

The love she had for him was suddenly shining in her eyes.

" I understand what you were feeling Steve. I didn't cry because of the way you spoke to me. I cried because I heard what you said."

The big cat walked over and wedged herself in between Damian and Steve. And as all eyes were suddenly trained on her, she yawned.

## Chapter forty-five



They reached the first of the West Indie Archipelagos in six days like Steve projected. None of them felt any real hunger pangs even though the food ran out in the time span Jane predicted. That was something to think about because Damian felt it would be useful to know if their ability to comfortably go without food for so long, was due to being vegetarians, the changed earth conditions, or the alterations to their systems. Later he will get the crew to help him do some in-depth research on it.

It was early in the day when they arrived, so they were able to begin exploring the Islands immediately. They anchored the boat close to the coast and set out.

"Which Island is this," Feifong asked.

"Dis is Trinidad," Chandra answered. "Mi Faddah was born here."

Damian, who had never left mainland U.S. before, was stunned at how different the Island looked from what he had imagined.

It was a beautiful place, but from the time they got 10 yards inland they were seeing modern buildings. He expected more jungle.

There was an eerie silence to the beautiful little spot in the world. They weren't seeing any signs of life--not even of animals.

The big cat--as if she had gone stir crazy on the boat--shot off like a bullet as soon as her paws touched land. They all watched her as she disappeared in the distance, running and sniffing, sniffing and running. The lowees were also running wild in a way. They were in bliss-- laughing and playing, rolling around in the grass.

The farther inland they walked, the more skeletons they were coming across. Damian had entertained thoughts of setting up camp on the Island for a while but Chandra was emitting so much sorrow, even the Soldiers seemed to sense it, though she said nothing, and her face expressed nothing any different than usual.

"It stinks of death here, even more than back in the States." Steve said. "Let's stock up and get away from here." His eyes were on Chandra, full of puzzlement as they tried to match what she was emitting emotionally, to the expression he saw on her face.

They all agreed that they should set sail for one of the other Islands as soon as they gathered some food. Chandra, Jane, and Michelle went about the task. The pickings weren't abundant. They were in the wildest part of the Island but as they walked along the coast, they saw that things weren't getting any greener or more fruitful.

"Let's go back," Steve urged again. "We just need enough food to last for a day or two. The Antilles group isn't far from here. We'll find plenty of what we need there; Should be able to stay there a while too."

Damian called Chandra with his thoughts. Ten minutes later she came back with Jane and Michelle. They were carrying nearly empty bags.

"Not too much to find here," Jane said to Damian.

"That's one of the reasons we're leaving." Damian turned from Jane and whistled loudly. Soon the Iowees were back with them.

"Wonder where Sheba is?" Feifong said.

Steve looked over all their heads into the distance. "I don't know, but Sheba' ta get her feline ass back here."

"We need a signal for her like we have for the Iowees," Chako said.

Damian sighed. "Alright, let's go find the cat."

"Sheba!"

"Sheeebaaa!"

"Sheba!"

"Sheeeba!"

"Shebah!"

"Shebaaah!"

"Sheeeebaaaaaaaah!"

"Sheba!"

"Shebaaaaaaaaaaaaaa"

"Sheeeeba!, Sheeeeba!"

"Sheeeeeba!"

"Shee-itt!"

Michelle playfully rolled her eyes at Steve. Just then the big cat came bounding up. It stopped in front of everybody and sat. Then she yawned, and after the lowees got off her neck, she stood up and shook, walked passed everybody with her head straight up in the air.

Steve looked at Damian and back at the cat who was heading towards the boat.

"Well, exscuuuse us."

## Chapter forty-six



They all got back on the boat. Chandra, Jane and Michelle, immediately went to work at preparing a meal. If they weren't feeling the hunger pangs before, the wafts of Michelle's expertise with spices and herbs soon had them all remembering what three days without food was supposed to feel like. When they sat down to eat, the first thing Steve did was throw the big cat a taste of the vegetarian meal. She sniffed at it before lapping it up. Then she looked up at Steve for more.

"I'll be damned!" Chako exclaimed.

"I'll be damned too," Steve said to the cat, "before I give you any more of my supper." He stuffed a big spoonful in his mouth and shrugged. "Who knew?"

"You got any extra," Damian asked Chandra.

"There's plenty of fixings left, yes--if no one wants seconds."

Michelle stood up and went into the boat's kitchen. She came back with a big bowl full of greens. She set it down before the big cat who took one whiff before she went to work lapping in earnest.

Damian thought as he watched the tiger, the world had truly become a bizarre place in which to try to live.



The next Island they landed on was much more to what Damian expected. There were even sounds of the living that weren't their own. He was sure if they moved much farther inland they would find it as modern as the Island of Trinidad, but they had no intentions of moving very far inland, or any need to. The coast was a vegetarian's dream, and the scent of the air was sweeter than berries compared to the smell of the place they had just left. They could stay here a while. Get their land legs back and have plenty of supplies to take with them when they left.

They began to unload the ship and set up for at least a two month stay.

The big cat didn't run wild this time. She found a spot and lay down near the frolicking lowees, drowsily watching them with constantly opening and closing eyelids.

When night fell, the moon seemed close enough to touch, it didn't get much colder than it was during the daylight hours and the mood with the scenery and pleasant scents was surreal in the way it affected them all. They were all paired off; the sounds of people making love seemed as natural as the chirps, whistles and calls of nature .

Damian didn't unclothe Chandra but she was in his arms, the two of them enjoying the stillness of their deep love as much as they did when they were being physical.

Finally Chandra said softly: "I wonda wat mi Auntie is feelin' ri' now?"

Damian wondered if she read his thoughts, or he hers, because he was wondering the same thing. No one should be alone on a night like this--especially when they can clearly hear other people being together.

"Why don't we go find out? Be company for her?"

Chandra was up almost before he finished his suggestion. She grabbed his hand.

"Okey."

They walked over to where Sheree had set up. Since they had the boat to carry as much gear as they wanted, they had raided the sports supply stores of New York, and with a lot of other things, taken some outdoor tents to use as shelter. Damian knocked on Sheree's tent.

"Sheree..."

"Auntie..."

"Damian, Chandie...come in."

She had been reading. Damian looked at her face and he saw no signs of unhappiness there. Not even in the emotions she emitted did he sense any sorrowful feelings--in fact, from what she was transmitting, she was feeling pretty damned good.

"What art thou reading?" Damian boomed in his imitation of Othello.

Chandra giggled.

"Chandie...come and sit here." Sheree hugged her when she obeyed. "You too, Damian, sit close to me. It's so good of you two to think about me on a night like this." She held up the book and looked at its cover. It's called Nimrod:Lost son of Sumeria."

"Really...Is it about *the* Nimrod?" Damian asked.

"Yes, and it's very good."

"What made you pick up a book about Nimrod?"

She had taken it off the shelf of a bookstore before they left New York.

"I don't know. I've been thinking about that story in the bible, off and on since you started talking about Zeus and a new Genesis. When I saw the title on the cover in the store I just picked it up."

"Is he a good guy or bad guy in the book, because I've never heard a story where Nimrod was depicted as a good guy. Even Satan and Hitler had people who thought they were good guys, but as far as I know, Nimrod never had a single fan... none who would openly admit it anyway."

"He's a good guy in this book. In a lot of ways; the way the Author depicts him, reminds me of you."

"Are you serious?"

"Yes."

"Can I read it [when you're finished?](#)" Both Damian and Chandra asked at the same time.

"Yes. You two can read it together. I see you in the book too, Chandie, but you will be a composite of three Characters because one of them dies and one is cold and vengeful, but they all have some of your characteristics, and two of them love Nimrod, like you love Damian."

"I [cyan nuh wait ti read it, Auntie.](#)"

"I'll give it to you as soon as I finish."

"Sheree, do you mind if I ask you a personal question?"

"Ask, but I already know what you want to know Damian, and I don't mind talking about it."

"Do you miss Isabella--I mean do you regret leaving her?"

"I miss Janet more. And no, I don't regret being where I am Damian."

"Don't you get lonely?"

"Yes...but I'm used to long periods of being alone. Don't worry so much about my happiness, Damian. I'm as happy as I've ever been... which is not saying too much for that state of being, but I'm OK. I'll be OK."

Chandra leaned over and wrapped her arms around her Aunt. Sheree closed her eyes and basked in her niece's embrace, her face a mask of pure pleasure.

"Oh Chandie, I wish I had spent more time with you when you were younger. Forgive for saying this; but my brother is such a grouch, I couldn't stand to be around him for five minutes. I hated the way he talked to people--especially Verlène, even though I knew he was always all bark and no bite."

"I know Auntie. Him mellowed sum in he old age, but him neva learned how ti talk ti people. But him was a good kingman, Auntie. Yuh just had to get ti know him t' see it."

"I knew him. But you're right. He had a good heart. And he certainly loved you, Junior and Verlène. I think it was losing the full use of his legs that soured him. When we were children I loved him so much--we were so close. I guess that's why it was so hard for me to be around him after he changed. He used to talk to me in ways that made me feel so special. That's why I always believed I could do whatever I set my mind to. Then he turned into Oscar Madison." Sheree suddenly cackled. "You two pups have no idea who Oscar Madison was do you? God...I loved that show."

Chandra couldn't remember if she'd ever heard her Aunt laugh with such uninhibited joy. She didn't know who Oscar Madison was, but she didn't have to. If he gave her Auntie so much joy in her life, he was alright with her.

## Chapter forty-seven

The big Cat almost killed her.



She was a wild looking thing, nearly unrecognizable as people, under the dirt, rags, and the wild mass of hair that was housing almost everything that grew in the jungle.

Bruce, who had an ear out for the Iowees even though no one expected any trouble, heard them scream. He was probably the only person in their group who could run faster than Chandie. Three point nine speed, a soldier's ability to swiftly and calmly assess a situation and a deep love for the Iowees was the only thing that saved the wild thing's life.

Bruce got to the scene just as the big cat crouched. He instantly recognized before him, a person about to be leaped on by a 300 pound cat who thought she was protecting the terrified, screaming Iowees.

"Down! Sheba. Down girl!" Bruce Yelled.

The big cat turned at the sound his voice. She looked at the Iowees, who had run to Bruce and were now quiet. She turned away from the thing she was about to kill and sidled over to stand beside the Iowees.

Bruce looked at the wild thing, who was standing there, still frozen with the fear of coming into a clearing and finding herself face-to-face with a fang baring tiger.

He saw that she was hurt and bleeding. He stepped towards her. She screamed, and took off running like a deer. During his days in College, as a star cornerback for Virginia Tech College, he didn't have to run as

far to catch top rated halfbacks from behind.

Hurt, as she was, the wild thing still ran faster than that guy who was the top draft pick for the Washington Redskins football team his senior year who they said--when he played against him--was as fast as that year's Olympic sprint champion. He caught him from behind too--just like all the rest.

By the time he caught her, the wild thing would have been in the End zone. But he did catch her, and nearly got his eyeballs scratched out for the effort. She was fighting like she thought he was trying to rape or kill her.

"You need medical attention...sorry." He pinched a nerve in her neck, and she went out like a light. He threw her over his shoulders and started walking.

The big cat, who was now lounging under Chandra's feet, saw them first. Her ears stood straight up as she rose off her haunches. Chandra looked where the cat was looking and gasped. She started running towards Bruce. Her emissions alerted the others and they all stopped what they were doing and started approaching Bruce.

"What happened to she?" Chandra asked Bruce.

I'll tell you what I know later. She's okay but her arms, wrists and hands are cut badly."

Damian helped Bruce ease the female off Bruce's shoulder. The two supported her between them as they carried her towards the tent they set up as Chandra's "emergency room.

What happened to her, Steve, the last one on the scene, asked.

" Besides me putting her to sleep with a nerve pinch I don't really know."

"Why did you do that?"

"Because she was hysterical, and about to beat me to death out there." Bruce and Damian carried her inside the tent. They laid her down on the covered ground.

"How did you come across her?" Damian looked at the unconscious woman and saw that she was very young--no more than eighteen years old. Even under all the dirt, her beauty was evident. She was a light-skinned Africoid woman, looked like one of those mix-raced Models who were always the faces of the Islands' tourist industry.

"She came up over the ridge...I think running from something, or some one. I heard the lowees scream and got to the scene just in time to stop Sheba from jumping on her. I saw that she was hurt, went to help her and she took off like a bat out of hell. I chased her. When I caught her she almost tore my face off. I think she's been raped, or otherwise attacked by someone. The cuts on her arms and hands look like defensive knife wounds. I don't know what the burns on her wrists come from...rope maybe."

" I've got to tek she dirty clothes off," Chandra said. She asked Bruce, "weh she gwan wek up?"

"Any second now." Bruce started moving towards the exit. Damian followed him out of the tent.

"Knife wounds...?" Damian asked as he and Bruce walked side-by-side.

"I'm pretty sure."

"That means there are other people on the Island beside us and the girl."

"Yeah."

" You really think she was raped?"

" I've come on the scene a few times after women had been raped, or, otherwise brutally traumatized. That's what she acted like when she fought me. She was frenetic."

" So there's at least one dangerous person around somewhere. "

"At least one. But in my experience Damian, predatory people are like deer trying to cross the road at night. It's not the first one that fucks your car up, it's always one, of the two or three others running behind him. In other words, I think there might be more than two people left alive on this Island. And they aint nice."

"What makes you say that?"

"Look at the girl. She's been living like a hunted animal for a long time. One man don't keep anybody on the run like that in this much space. She's being terrorized by a few people."



""I guess that answers my next question."

"What's that?"

" Do we move on or stay.

"Yeah I guess it does."

\*\*\*\*\*

" I'm going Steve, and that's final. I know a hell of a lot more about fighting than you do. And I'm also a Medic. Chandra is staying in camp to watch over the injured girl, so who do you suggest is more qualified than me to go?"

Steve put up his hands. " You're right. Excuse me for wanting my woman to stay safe like all the other women."

"I really don't feel like doing this right now." She tucked her knife in her waistband and picked up her spear.

"I'm sorry Shelly, It's just that I--"

She pressed him. "It's just that you what?"

"Never mind."

"Are you ever going to say it to me, Steven?"

" Shelly...I, I love you."

She put the spear down and moved into his arms.

"I love you too...so very much."

It was decided that Steve, Michelle, Bruce and Chako, would go with Damian. Patrick and the rest of the women would stay in the Camp with the Iowees. The big Cat was also supposed to stay, but she decided she wanted to go. She acted like she was going to stay as told. Sat there as obedient as a show dog, and watched until Damian and those with him disappeared from sight. Then she got up and took off in a full stretch after them before anyone could say gone.

She stayed on Steve's left, just out of range of his stride. And as if she was deliberately toying with him; when he stopped and playfully kicked at her every once in a while, she would skip ahead just far enough so that he missed. And then fall right back into the same range.

"You have to keep it down, Steve," Bruce said, "Were on a reconnaissance mission and we don't want any potential enemies to spot us before we see them if we can avoid it."

They were out with their weapons trying to find out who was hunting

the young woman, and if any other people were being terrorized in the same manner.

Suddenly the big cat's ears sprang up and she stood as stiff as a board.

"Get low," Bruce hissed. Michelle and Chako instantly dropped into a crouch. Damian and Steve saw what the soldiers did, and followed suit.

"One trick...," Bruce addressed Chako, "you go ahead and see what Sheba is reacting to."

The young Indian nodded and took off, moving quickly and quieter than a tiger's shadow. The real tiger stayed right beside him.

## Chapter forty-eight

*I'm coming Lee. Won't be long now, soul brother.*

Antonio lay awake on his back, staring at the stars long after all the others in his unit were asleep.

Damian would have found it hard to recognize him; his coal black hair now fell down past his shoulders, the space age military uniform had been ripped up and made into a scanty loin cloth. His heavily muscled chest and arms were bare. Always extraordinarily handsome, he was now truly a magnificent creature to behold. Like a Olympian god.

The others in his group had also shed their uniforms for a loin cloth, and they all looked bigger and stronger.

Mesha and Tameka had learned a little from Chandie, about how to gather up vegetation to eat. They knew nothing about how to fix an eggplant so that it tasted like chicken, or how to make cress salad explode on your tongue like something that a master chef would set before a King, but they knew enough about what to find to keep their group alive. They also prepared meat when they could.

Since Antonio and Mustafa fully recovered, the Drakes had been tracking Lee and his unit with a single-minded obsession--Antonio's obsession.

*Should have killed me Lee, when you won the fight. You knew the rules. Now they have found them. Lee and his unit had planted roots in the wilds of Canada. They were digging in--literally. Everyday, they were out there working on a hole that was now, as big in length and width as a small town. And they were doing it all with shovels, picks and wheelbarrows.*

Antonio had been observing them for three days, all that time, he was hoping to catch a glimpse of the lowees. They weren't with Lee. He didn't know what Lee did with them, but he was going to find out. He was going to find out a lot of things...then he was going to settle things with Lee once and for all.

Of course it will be done with honor. They had some nicely built huts close to the big hole they were digging. He saw no weapons on them, but he was certain they had some somewhere. He was sure Lee had prepared the Dragonhunters as well as he had prepared his Drakes. He had put his people through exhaustive combat drills with the knives and spears that they now carried. He had to assume Lee has done the same. Lee knew he was coming.

The last time; he had fought Lee without David, Mustafa and...Michelle, that traitorous bitch! He wished now he had killed her when she blatantly disobeyed his direct order. But she *was* their best Medic. Besides that, he wanted her sexually. That's something else he should have done. Taken what he wanted, when he wanted it, instead of spending four years trying to win her over. He won't make that mistake again.

He saw that Lee was the one who was shorthanded this time. He only had two of his male warriors with him. All his female troops were still with him, plus two of the Civs--Janet and that fatheaded prick who couldn't fight his way out of a paper bag if it was smothering him to death. That left Him, David, Mustafa, Rick, John, Mesha, Sonya, and Tameka, against Lee, Felix, Tiararay, Alonzo, Shakira and...the mouse. He couldn't think of her name because she never said anything so nobody ever spoke it.

This was going to be almost too easy.

Maybe he should offer Lee a choice to fight without weapons. He is

going to kill them all, except the Civs--maybe even torture the big, white Nigger, who almost broke his neck. But there was no hate or spite between warriors, only honor and dishonor, in the way you fight and die. Yes, he'll give Lee better odds to die honorably since Lee had always lived, honorably. The outcome of the coming fight was not in doubt--with, or without weapons--so why not use the opportunity to tune up for the real fight--the one with that boy.

Lee was going to die, but he will give him a proper burial--give them *all* a proper burial.... and why not? They've already dug the hole.

But those goddamn Civs! He could hardly sleep at night for thinking about them. They probably have the Iowees too, though he can't see Lee and his people, willingly giving up the Iowees. He *did* know that Lee wouldn't have killed them, so where else could they be but with that boy?

He knew where Damian was going. He'll find him...just like he found Lee. When he does; what he's going to do to Lee is just soldier business, but with those Civs...it's *all* about hate and vengeance.

He could see Damian in his mind's eye now. First he will let Mustafa and Rick have him--work him over--then, make him watch Mustafa do that bitch they were fighting over until she pukes.

But Damian, and those Boots who deserted Lee and their unit, are the only one who are going to die. He hated fucking scalawags, so they are going to die like the traitors they are.

Michelle and the Civs are just going to wish they were dead after a while. Maybe not Michelle--if she acts right.

Fucking Civs.

Think they can fuck he and his family! They'll learn--when they and their children are cleaning his house, scrubbing his toilets, cooking his

food, working his garden-- that soldiers and their Superiors do the fucking. And in this world it's going to be just like it was in the old world. Slaves and Kings.



## Chapter forty-nine



*freedom fighter where have you gone to  
or could it be you've always been here  
freedom fighter I know that I owe you  
everything I got and all I hold dear*

**"Freedomfighter" from the New Genesis CD by akamardukson**

"You're not going to believe it."

"What did you see, One trick?"

Chako looked from Bruce, to the others, and back to Bruce, "You ever see that movie, "Roots?"

"Yeah, so...?" Bruce responded.

"That's what I saw."

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

"Keep your voice down Steve...*goddamn!*" Chako hissed.

"I counted about fifty of them. Set up in some kind of compound. White men...Walked and talked like Commandos, probably Special Forces--- from their accents,-- British. There were also Natives to the Island--some of them roped around their wrists and ankles... about a dozen of them. Of the Natives, there seemed to be some kind of Enforcers... judging by the way they pushed around and barked at all the others. Most of the Islanders were women...about two hundred of them. I saw about twenty children, a few old men, a couple of middle-aged men.... Except for the

ones cracking the whips, I didn't see any young Native men...or any white women."

Damian fell out of his crouch, unto his ass, stunned.

" What the fuck is going on?" He rarely used profanity... Felt like Ma heard him every time he did--even when she was alive and in another State, or he was on the playground playing away from the house when he was little. Ma and that old wide, brown belt, just waiting for him to get home.

"They were probably chosen to survive just like we were," Bruce said.

"All the secret Agencies and Special Forces, of the so-called free world worked hand in glove with some factions of our forces; did a lot of the dirty work against our own citizens, that we didn't want to risk doing. Our unit hunted some of them down for some of the crimes they committed against Americans. "

"So...you're saying there could be cells like that, all over the world," Damian half-stated, half-questioned.

" There's seems to be a planned agenda unfolding before us sir," Chako said. "We knew about it but we didn't think they had the time to distribute the balm, or to equip all the cells well enough for them to ride out the breach underground. That still may be the case, but...we had hoped for the best case scenario--that the extent of their plans began and ended in the U.S. with the Drakes unit. Looks like we may have gotten the worse case scenario. Their plans might have been fully implemented, which means, as you suggest, they are set up, and fully operational all over the world.

Since they are operational in such a small theater as these Islands, that suggests that more likely, than not, they are set up to take over the whole world for slavery like it used to be back in Atlantis, before the great rebel, broke up the world wide Draconian Empire."

It no longer surprised Damian, how deep the Military, Scientific world, Spy, Space agencies, and other such esteemed, supposedly "rational" institutions were into the whole, occult, hidden history thing.

Unless they wrote in the bible, most people believed the ancient Historians, Priests and other recorders of events of the past to be fools, fantasists, liars or stupid children who were so much less

knowledgeable, serious and reliable than today's historians and learned scribes are. But the people who really ran the world--who had all the artifacts, documents, evidence and information--took what the Ancients recorded and reported, *very* seriously. They had run the world and coursed the future by it.

What did continually surprise him, was how openly and casually these occult soldiers, starting with Lee, were saying such things to him. Intellectually, he knew they were doing it because they figured secrets really didn't matter too much considering the condition of the world. But it still always shocked a little to hear how much truth was kept from people and how different the world really was from the way most people lived and died, believing it to be. People had stopped believing in magic, the fantastical and the supernatural, not knowing that their way of belief is what was truly lie and illusion--not the magical, and sometime super advanced world the Ancients believed in and wrote about.

"This is ridiculous." Steve got up.

"Where the hell are you going?" Bruce grabbed the big man's spear. Steve yanked it loose.

"I'm going to kill some fucking devils."

Oh, did I forget to mention," Chako said quickly, "all of them were armed with some kind of wicked weapon."

"Steve," Damian said evenly, "we have to plan how we are going to do this. We can't just rush in on that many highly trained killers. We need to get Patrick, and sat down and figure out some kind of strategy...but I promise you big guy. We won't leave these Islands, before we liberate those people."

Steve turned and started walking back to their camp. The big cat walked beside him, looking as solemn and stiff in her stride as Steve did in his.

When he arrived back in the camp, Damian immediately put everyone to the task of disassembling the camp and packing up. They were leaving the Island for one farther away. There, they will plan, train, and

prepare to come back and liberate those women and children. He would have liked to do it yesterday, but he knew that simply wasn't possible. He had four professional soldiers with him--Bruce, Patrick, Michelle and Chako. Good as they were, they were no match for fifty men who were just as highly trained. The big cat will be a huge asset in a battle, and he had no doubts that she understood what was going on as silly as that would make him sound if he ever told that to anyone. He had to put Chandra, Sheree, Feifong, Steve, Jane, Ada, himself, and the new girl, through an extensive, intense combat training course. He knew Bruce and Chako could do the job. It might take them months, maybe even a year, but they'll be back, and these people will be set free on their Island.

They still had to get to the Southern Continent on schedule but he was sure they could spare at least a year. They had crossed the U.S, much faster than they calculated they would. Plus they were making good time at sea. They had figured in two or three months stays on land, all along their trip to Africa. After they liberate those people, they will have to now, abandon that part of the plan and make shorter stopovers.

Once they settle in Africa, he knew what his life's mission was to be. He will sail around the world.

In the story the Ancients tell, the great Rebel went all over the world liberating the enslaved.

He felt like the great Rebel's spirit was still alive--inside him... and still obsessed with the same purpose.

*Who's that muse that everyone seems to think is sitting on your shoulder Damian?*

*You've been touched.*

*I know... by the very breeze of heaven.*

*No I mean by god.*

*I see the man...the man who never falls apart...the one who is destined to win.*

*Just remember Damian. Even the better man can't win if he doesn't know he's in a contest.*

*It's the struggle, Damian...always had been always will be.*

*The way the author depicts him in the book reminds me a lot of you* The ship was back at sea. Damian was back in his favorite spot at the bow, staring across the water. The big cat stood beside him, lost just as deep in her own thoughts. Chandra stood in the cabin doorway silently watching him. Tears were streaming from her eyes.

## Chapter fifty



"Today, goddammit!" Antonio growled like a coach before the big game.

"Yeeeah!" Mustafa thumped his chest with his fist.

Antonio and his unit were gathered around, going over their battle plan.

"Moose, I want you and John, to take out the white nig--uh boy together. He's the strongest one in their unit. We take him down, and half the battle is over."

"Yes *sir*!" Mustafa's eyes gleamed. His missing front teeth made the words come out as, "stess stir."

"Rick, you kill the Spic. After you do him, get Fathead, but don't kill him if you don't have to."

Sonya scowled, "What's with all the slurs lately Tony? You're a Spic your goddamn self." Since his Mother--whose family raised him-- was Anglo, and his Father only quarter Mexican, he had never in his life saw himself as a Latino, or anything else but a white man. His last name was pronounced "George, not Jorge", and not many people in his life had made the mistake of mispronouncing it twice. Still, Sonya was right. The military taught its Commanders to put a lid on their racism for a reason and he was smart enough to know what that was. He couldn't afford to drive any wedges between himself and his people. He wasn't racist anyway. At least not with his family. He would die for any of them.

"You're right, Sonya. I guess it's that goddamn boy...stuck his black nose right in my face and turkeyed me. But yawl know it was only

because of my neck. Still, I can't get it out of my mind how he punked me. I see his face in my sleep every night and I guess it's starting to effect me. It won't happen again I promise you...You too Moose."

"What?" Mustafa said.

Antonio went back to detailing the plan.

"I'll take out Lee. Sonya, you take Lee's woman. Don't let her scratch you with those monkey paws. You see her nails?"

Sonya exhaled and pursed her lips "*fuck*," she said under her breath.

She was reeeeeeally beginning to dislike this bastard.

She had joined the unit three years before the big breach. Been on about a dozen missions. Done a lot of killing but she couldn't recall much about who, why or how she killed. During that entire period she was strung out on drugs. She could get release from the torment over her dead child no other way. Now, all her drugs were gone. She never went through any kinds of withdrawal pangs and didn't know why. But she was getting her memories and her conscience back. She'd rather have the drugs.

She was ex-military when she joined the Special Forces. Dishonorably discharged for beating a black woman to death during a traffic accident and dispute, despite the fact that her 2 year old daughter was killed in that accident and the woman had attacked her first. She just lost it, blanked out and went into killing mode. It wasn't racially motivated, but she knew those who recruited her for the Drakes unit thought it was. Thought she was some lowlife scumbag who would eagerly go around killing people for no reason but hate for what they were born looking like.

Her best friend in the Unit was Michelle. She missed her so much. She wished desperately, that she had deserted with her. She was sick of her life. Sick about her past, sick of the memories, sick of being straight. She needed something or she was going to slit her wrists soon. Marijuana, did nothing for her and that's the only kind of drug



she can get now in this godforsaken world.

"Mesha," Antonio was saying, forgetting his promise 2 minutes after he made it, "You get the Sandnigger."

"Shakira?" Being Ukrainian for twenty, of her 30 years, Mesha had no idea what a Sandnigger was. "Yeah, Shakira...Tam, you take the mouse."  
"

"Yes sir," Tameka smiled, her perfect white teeth, overkill, shining in such a dazzling beautiful face. She had to be the most gorgeous straight woman in the world, who at the age of twenty-seven, has never had a man show interest in her. Her romantic situation was one of the unexplained mysteries of the world, or proof positive that personality was like magnetic force--it can attract and it can repel. "David, I want to take out the dago, Lezbo as quickly as you can and then help out any of us who needs it"  
"Yes sir."

Antonio leaned forward and looked all of them in the eyes. "Do.Not.Touch. Janet. You hear me? Or Lee--unless by some stroke of luck, he gets the best of me. They're mine." He stood up straight. "Alright warriors..."

**Let's do it!"**

## Chapter fifty-one



They planted anchor about three Islands away from the one they left. The first thing Damian did was to send Bruce and Chako to check the place out. The big cat went with them, everybody else stayed on the boat. Four hours later, the advance team returned. There was nothing living on the Island. No signs of people or animals.

This Island was every bit as charming as the one they left. The greens were plentiful, and the air clear. There was even a fresh water stream less than a mile to the South of them. They decided that the best move was to set up camp near the coast like they did before. It could be advantageous to have the sea at their backs.

All cleaned up, and having been able to sleep in peace for the first time since the white men showed up, the girl soon showed that, far from being wild, she was highly cultured, intelligent and articulate. She was the child of what was once the Island's black elite.

She said her name was Elizabeth.

She didn't know where the white soldiers came from. A rumor went around among the people who lived outside the cities, that they were ghouls who rose out of the grave. White people had long lived in the Islands but after the great sun flash, they all died. None were seen for so long after that, people almost forgot they ever walked among them.

Damian figured the soldiers emerged from underground bunkers. Since so much time had passed since any Whites were seen, that meant they rode out the aftereffects from the breach, underground. Almost five years underground. With the way the earth had changed, that meant they couldn't possibly be full-strength physically, so how did they manage to defeat and kill all the young men? Damian suspected that, besides the fifty rebel women Elizabeth talk about when telling her story, and maybe a few men who may have been killed, most of the people simply did not fight back, either out of superstition, awe, or fear.

She said when the white men appeared, they immediately started killing all the young men and boys, except for those who cried and begged the hardest for their lives. Then they spent months raping all the young women until most of them stopped resisting. Those who showed no signs of giving in, were bound hand and foot and separated from the others. The ones who stopped fighting were forced to work with the old men and women, building the compound, and doing whatever else the white men had for them to do.

There were about fifty women like her, who were still resisting weeks later. The white men started treating them better than anyone else. They were given more food, housed in the first buildings built and given all kinds of gifts. One by one, the rebellious women started going with the white men under their own freewill. After a while, all the women but she and 12 others were with the white men as willing Mistresses.

The white men gave up trying to win her and the other 12 over with kindness and started raping and beating them again. Two of them was tortured to death in front of everyone because they bit their Assaulter's penis off. When after a while, the ten of them, who were still surviving, still

wasn't broken by the brutality, they were turned over to the Native men who had chosen to sell their souls to the white men, in exchanged for their lives. Most of the ten rebel women found being treated like dogs, by the black Enforcers, a better alternative to being mistresses of the white men. Six of the white men harbored such respect and affection for the rebel women that they had tried to force into their beds, they secretly protected and adorned them. The women's black Keepers were only fronts for their white, secret admirers. Compared to everyone else, the six women lived like queens as they took from black hands what they refused under torture from white hands.

Elizabeth was one of those six holdouts. But even a cushy slavery like the one she was under was more slavery than she could live with. Even though she was no longer in bonds and not even bossed in her home, much less the fields, she still took the first opportunity she got, to run.

Two days after she escaped, one of the black Enforcers had stumbled upon her while she was sleeping under a bush. He tried to take her back. She fought the Enforcer like she fought Bruce. He forgot all about taking her back and tried to kill her with a knife. She took it from him. Cut her hands in the process, but cut his throat worse. She had been on the run since. Both the white men and the Black Enforcers made it personal--one of the white men in particular. They wanted her, but she was fast, learned to sleep with one eye open. Fear so heightened her senses, she learned to hear and react like a rabbit--even when she was dozing.

She had eluded them for three weeks after killing the Enforcer, but she knew she wasn't going to elude them much longer.

She saw the boat arrive. Had hidden out of sight until she saw who was on it. She saw Damian, Chandra, Sheree, and Chako, and saw hope. Then she saw Steve, Patrick and Jane, and fled back into the dense.

The next day, she saw the lowees playing. Had watched them a long time with fascination. Was compelled to try to talk to them so she approached them. They screamed. She knew she must have looked like some kind of monster to them. She wanted to show them that she meant them no harm. Then the big cat came out of nowhere. She thought it was going to attack her, but she was too scared to move. But it didn't attack her, it just sidled up to within a few feet of her and sat down, watching her unblinkingly. She moved, and it snarled, baring its fang as if saying *I'm not going to hurt you if you don't move, but if you do move, I'll eat you.* She didn't move, was growing fascinated, losing her fear of the cat. Then she saw Bruce running towards her like so many men had done over the weeks. Her body reflectively jumped, the big cat growled, the man yelled; she panicked and started running as fast as she could.

No one had ever caught her before. She went insane with fear when Bruce tackled her. Started fighting with all her soul force. That was the last thing she remembered until she woke up and saw Chandra sitting in front of her, looking at her like her mother used to do when she was a little girl, and mother thought she was asleep.

She remembered saying mama, but even then she knew Chandra wasn't her mother. She felt so much like she remembered feeling when she was a little girl, safe in her room with her mother, she said it anyway. After living in terror for so long, she sensed when she was safe--when someone was with her, who would fight to protect her. She remembered Chandra walking over to her and laying down beside her. She remembered turning towards the pretty woman and falling asleep.



## Chapter fifty-two



Lee

"Sir," Shakira leaned over the big hole and yelled. "Here they come." Lee put down the shovel and wiped his hands on his pants. Alonzo, Felix, Kiesha, Isabella, and Tiararay, calmly chose their weapons and started climbing out of the hole. Lee followed them.

He had known about it, the very minute when the Drakes had arrived. They were sloppy, nothing near the professionals they were 6 years ago when they had surprised him and took the lowees from him.

They had him outnumbered and he'd thought long and hard about the implications of that. This was low tech warfare, as primitive as it got; nothing was going to win this day but skill, stamina, numbers and muscle. Advantage: Drakes.

He would have killed them when he had the chance if he knew his people would balk at crossing the ocean, or had any inkling that he would lose Chako, Patrick and Bruce.

Maybe what he should have done was order them all to get on the boat. He was sure Damian was still alive somewhere--he and his crew. Another time, another day, another place, he *would* have ordered them to go, and shot anybody who refused, but he wouldn't have had to shoot anyone. All he had to do was give the order. They would have

obeyed him. But he no longer felt he had the right to assert that kind of authority over them. Why...he didn't know. They were still under oath. He was still their Commanding officer. For all they knew Command quarters was still alive and functioning someplace.

Then again he did know. It was when he looked at the world around him. Saw how small he was. How insignificant. He was little, *too* little to have command over somebody's life in a world where the faces weren't just a blur of unidentifiable multitudes, but clear, distinct, so few, he not only knew every living person left alive in the part of the world he inhabited, he knew every personality, every quirk, every ounce of them--like a part of his own body. It's easy to not see a man, woman, body part; to take for granted what you didn't really need to survive. Easy to treat their existence like your own possession, to do with what you will, to kill, to order them to kill themselves, when you can replace them with a million others, like changing socks. But when there are no multitudes, when there are just a few, and you lose a man, a body part, you feel it, you really see how small and weak you are, and how losing that body part renders you even weaker and smaller. That's when you begin to see that if you aren't God almighty, you're just too little--too goddamn little for anything but bossing around yourself.

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Lee and his group stood waiting calmly as they watched the Drakes approach.

"What you doing with that hole, Lee?" Antonio led his unit to within a few yards of the Dragonhunters, stopped and raised his hand." Trying to survive, Tony. Maybe you should try it too."

" Very funny. Don't waste time trying to bullshit me, Lee. You know what's going to happen today."

"Doesn't have to, Tony. Look around you. Take a good look. What do you see? Hear? Not a goddamn thing in this whole world but us. We



can kill one another, but why? The lowees aren't here. And there's nobody to pin any medals on you-- no daddy sitting behind a desk in a uniform to pat you on the head and give you that acceptance your real daddy never gave you."

Antonio laughed at the bespectacled Soldier. "You know the biggest problem with giving Niggers access to books Lee? They start believing and absorbing every goddamn thing they read. They think everybody who writes a book is Confucius. But a white man knows who writes the books; the Psychology books, the Science books, the Religious books, the History books, because it was probably some twerp whose face he farted in when they were kids. We don't take 'em that seriously Lee, so don't waste your time trying to psychobabble me"

Now it was Lee's time to laugh. "That's good Tony. But what I'm saying to you is we have no reason to fight and kill anymore." "And that brings us to the major difference between you and me, Lee. *You're the one who had a reason to fight and kill.* "

Lee knew then, that trying to talk his way out of a fight was impossible, but he wanted to try one more thing because on the faces of a few of Antonio's people, he could see some kind of uncertainty.

" You know there's going to be another breach in three years, Tony. If we don't finish this bunker, we're all going to fry."

" You're chickenshit, Lee. Always have been, always will be. That's why in the end you always wind up as soup for guys like me. You should be on a boat with that boy, but here you are digging a goddamn grave.

And don't think I don't know why. I know you, Lee. And I know if you had imposed your will like you were supposed to, you would be on that boat. Chickenshit. I seen it in your eyes the first time I saw you. That's why you're going to die, and that's why you deserve to die. But I'm going to give you a choice, just like you once gave me a choice. We can stab you to death, or beat you to death. *Whichever you want. Your call.*"

Lee couldn't believe the man would cut his advantage like that. The odds were still heavily in his favor, but it was senseless for him to take such a risk in a fight to the death.

" Alright. I choose to fight without weapons but how do I know you'll

stick to that if we throw down ours?"

" The code of honor between warriors. I'm not the kind of goody-good soldier you are, but despite what you think, I'm still a warrior with honor.

"Alright, we'll throw our weapons in the hole and move up there to neutral ground." Lee nodded at the men and women around him. They all threw their knives and spears in the hole. "Toss 'em." Antonio ordered. His troops stepped up and threw in all their weapons.

"Let's go." Lee started walking. His group started after him.

" Leave the Civs behind Lee. They can't help you in a fight anyway."

"Why...so you can have them at your mercy if we lose? They chose if they want to fight or not."

" Janet...I swear. I won't hurt you. Stay behind." Antonio pleaded.

" Fuck you, Tony." Felix snarled. " Don't talk to her."

Antonio ignored him. "And I won't hurt the other Civ. I give you my word, Warrior's code of honor. Just stay behind baby...I'm sorry for hitting you. It'll never happen again."" It won't?" Janet started walking towards Antonio. "

Let's see." She stopped a few feet in front of him and leaned into his face.

"Fuck you." Then she stood there watching him changing colors, looking into his eyes as the pupil's got tiny with rage. But he didn't lash out at her. Finally she turned and walked back to Lee. "I wanna fight."

Lee had trained her in combat--she and Mike. She wasn't up to par with any of the female soldiers, but she wasn't defenseless either.

Mike said nothing, but he didn't have to. As he stood there beside Shakira, the look on his face said everything anybody had to know, to realize what he was going to do.

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Alonzo "Big house" Briener threw the first punch. Knocked another one of Mustafa's teeth out. The two men had been staring at each other from the moment the Drakes showed up in Lee's camp. Mustafa's

smirk didn't hold the amusement it did when he trained it on Damian-- aimed at Alonzo it was full of challenge and disrespect. Big House was aching to push it into the back of Mustafa's neck. Mustafa had barely turned after they reached the designated fighting area before his face stopped a hard rock fist in full swing.

Mustafa hit the dirt, blood spurting from his already crooked nose. Mustafa rolled and pushed himself up from the dirt and Alonzo kicked him so hard two of Mustafa's recently healed ribs cracked again. Alonzo stood--eyes beaming triumphant as he watched with satisfaction, the groaning Mustafa.

John Huang watched Alonzo. He didn't even approach him quietly because he was enraged. Alonzo still didn't notice him because he was so focused on Mustafa. John Huang took Big House's leg out from under him with a side kick that would have snapped an electrical pole in half. Alonzo's knee joint snapped, and the big man fell to the ground rolling and screaming in agony.

Mustafa got up. The blood that dribbled down his chin was nothing compared to the bloodlust that was in his wild eyes as he went for the disabled Alonzo Briener.

John Huang turned from them to see who else he could take down.

Suddenly Mike came rushing at John and took him down.

Forgot all his combat training and charged in like a bull seeing a red flag-- the same way he did, when he tackled and wind milled at Rick that day, and took a boot in the face from John Huang. This time, John was taking it in the face--again and again and again from Mike's wild, furious punches.

Sonya was in that black place, and she was completely overpowering

Tiararay. She could fight a lot of professionally trained men to a standstill when she entered that place of darkness.

By the way she let her nails grow, it was evident that Tiararay had lost that edge, that instinct, that desire that it took to be an effective fighter. She had her mind in a peaceful, domestic mode. She still had skills, which the reflexes of alone, made her a formidable foe, but Sonya fought like a maniac. She lost herself in it. She fought dirty and ruthlessly. She was killing Lee's woman-- just like she did that lady during that traffic accident.

*The accident...when she lost her baby.*

*That poor woman... She never meant to beat her that way.*

*Her baby... She saw her baby; bloody, neck broken. She was in shock. Got out of the car... Saw the woman coming towards her. She wanted to tell the woman about her baby. She didn't know who the woman was. Didn't know she was involved in the accident. She just wanted the angelic woman to help her baby. The woman was cursing and screaming from the moment she saw her, but she didn't know it... Couldn't hear her... She couldn't hear anything.*

*The woman got closer. Her hands were waving, her lips were in a snarl, her eyes were flashing, but what she saw was an angel sent from God, who had come to help her baby.*

*"My baby..." She said, and the woman raked her nails across her face. The pain was excruciating. Everything turned to red, then black.*

*And then a Cop hit her with a billyclub with all his strength. Janet hit Sonya with all her might. And then she hit her again. Even then, Sonya didn't react like she was hurt. She just stopped punching Tiararay and rolled off her. Then she sat there beside the unconscious*

woman and sobbed like she was never going to stop.

Janet watched Sonya, crouched in a combat stance; saw that she wasn't going to do anything but sit there. She knelt down and took Tiararay's pulse. She was dead. Janet reached under Tiararay's arms and started dragging her off the battlefield.

Kiesha and Tameka were fighting evenly matched, blow for blow. Then Kiesha looked over and saw Alonzo on the ground. Mustafa had him in a neck hold. Alonzo looked like he had already been kicked to death.

Kiesha knew that neck hold. She saw Mustafa lips say something just before he turned Alonzo's head almost completely around. She screamed, called his name, reached for him. Tameka punched her in the throat, took her voice and her wind. Then Tameka leaped and spun. Kiesha fell to the ground, her neck as broken as Alonzo's, her arms reaching out towards him, her eyes empty of life.

David Bravefeather killed Isabella in four quick moves. He ducked the swing she took at him, grabbed her arm and got behind her, kissed her on the neck, then he yanked her head back as hard as he could, breaking her spine.

He then looked around and saw Mike on top of John.

Shakira's face was unrecognizable as human. Her mouth was a mass of blood and flesh, both her lips were split in half, her left eye was shut and her nose was a bloody pulp. Still, Mesha looked worse, and was now on the ground crawling, mewling like a newborn kitten for it's mother's teat. Shakira answered each pathetic small cry with another kick. Finally Mesha fell flat and stopped moving.

Then Shakira fell flat too.

When Bravefeather made the decision to rescue John Huang from Mike's fury, first, Mesha was still standing. Bravefeather didn't see

when his on/off again lover fell but he saw when and how she died. It enraged him. He left John to take revenge on Mike by himself. At full speed, he ran up to Shakira and leaped in the air, kicking her in the back so hard, the sound of Shakira's neck breaking was like a gunshot. She fell to the ground, dead before she hit the dirt.

With his first counter move, Lee broke Antonio's right arm. The fight between them was really decided at that moment. But Antonio was still fighting back twenty minutes later.

He was on one knee now, preparing himself to take yet another kick to the head instead of lying down. It wouldn't have mattered if he lay down or not and somewhere in the back of his disoriented brain, Antonio knew it. Lee was determined to kill him this time.

John and Tameka were holding a struggling, Janet. Mike lay stretched out on the ground like a dead man, still breathing only because John remembered Antonio's order, not to kill the Civs.

Felix and Rick had fought the longest, most brutal battle of them all. Felix seemingly won, beating Rick so bad, the blond soldier was on the ground writhing in some kind of seizure. David Bravefeather, and Mustafa--even though his broken ribs tortured him with pain--was slowly bearing down on Felix, grimly determined to make the exhausted soldier pay dearly for that victory over Rick.

Felix was already dead--dead tired. He was also bleeding like a waterfall, internally, but he kept fighting and Lee knew why. But it didn't matter anymore. Nothing mattered anymore--not even finishing off Antonio. Lee ran past Antonio, determined to do for Felix, what Felix did for him. He started swinging and kicking, screaming in a high pitched, sustain wail as he gave up mastery over his mind and body to a whirling dance of death.

Felix dropped to his knees and fell on his face. Bravefeather stomped him in the back of the neck with all his 200 pounds, but Felix was already dead from a hit the master kickboxer Rick, had scored beneath his heart, halfway in their fight.

Mike had hurt John Huang, but most of the wild punches were blocked by the Asian soldier. If not for orders, he would have killed Mike. He had no such orders regarding Lee. He saw Antonio and Rick and Mesha lying still on the ground. He screamed with rage and went for the last Dragonhunter still standing.

The last thing the bone tired, and probably insane Lee saw was more colors in his emptied mind. He never saw John Huang's running, driving kick aimed at the back of his head.

## Chapter fifty-three



After four months, Ada thought she was getting pretty good with a drop kick. She felt so despite Bruce yelling at her that she'll never get it.

Everyone was so wound up and edgy, especially Steve. She thought about how much she used to love him. So much that it hurt. So much that it felt better to let him go than to live with having less than all of him to herself. When he slept with Jane that night, she had actually felt relieved. He was already building walls between them, pulling away from her, showing annoyance with her.

She was in agony thinking she was losing him, but she wasn't really losing him. He wanted to experiment-- see what was on the other side of the fence. She knew he still loved her. At one point in her life, what Steve did wouldn't even have bothered her. But then again, it's easy not to be possessive if you don't feel true love. She could have forgiven him--taken him back--but she felt so much better in heartbreak than in love, she decided not to .

Now she had Chako. Steve showed her what real love is. Chako showed



her that you can find it twice.

She still loved Steve, just like Jane still loved him. It's hard not to love Steve once you know the man inside the clown. He was so genuine and guileless--not in the childish way of the Iowees, but in a manly way, the way of a true man of honor--a knight in shining armor. He felt things so deeply, and was so shameless in acting on his principals, even when he got on his soapbox, or said something to hurt your feelings, it never made you mad, because you knew he was real, it was never about winning arguments, or oneupmanship with Steve. It was always about his heart. What he had inside.

Seeing him so committed to preparing himself to actually fight, and maybe die to free the Natives on that Island only reinforced to everyone that all those fits of anger, all the rants, the almost embarrassing loyalty to Damian, *everything* that he has said and done over the years was really Steve. He was a very unique man, and all the women who loved him, Jane, Michelle, herself were enamored of him.

She was glad that Damian and Steve were so determined to liberate those people. And she was happy to have a role in it. She just wished she felt better about their odds of success. They can train forever, and all become as good a fighter as Bruce, but eleven Bruces against fifty Bruces still adds up to defeat. She knew the men were working on a strategy to even the odds some, but she couldn't stop herself from adding up the numbers and believing they were going to die on that Island.

Sometimes she thought about Sheba; saw pictures in her mind of the big cat tearing through that compound in a fury. It was the one thing that shone light on the darkness of her fear.



## Chapter fifty-four



Elizabeth always emitted so much stress, discomfort and apprehension when any of them entered her presence, all the men avoided her whenever they could.

Of all the women, she was by far the most ferocious fighter, even getting the best of Michelle once in a while during the sparring sessions although at this point it was more due to exuberance that would get her swiftly killed in a real fight than actual skill. She came on so strong, other than *actually* killing her, there wasn't much Michelle could do but give ground.

Like most of the women in the group, Elizabeth developed a fond attachment to Chandra but she adored Sheree. She spent almost every waking moment inside the older woman's tent. To Sheree, Elizabeth was the daughter she never had, the niece she never spent time with, the beloved godson, she never got the chance to watch grow up.

Damian had never seen Sheree so happy, except for snatches of moments with Janet. It wasn't romantic love that Sheree had for Elizabeth; it was like the kind of love he had for Feifong.

Thinking of Feifong--

She was trying so hard. She was too tiny to ever be much of a fighter. She baffled him with her passion to be a part of the liberation

movement. He recalled a discussion they had one time where she also surprised him. They were talking about slavery, and she had showed an interest in that meeting that she had never shown in any other.

Damian had come to know Feifong very well. He knew that perhaps due to her early life, she was basically a cold, selfish person, even though she could be fiercely loyal--even sentimental, and if a man didn't probe too much, or too deep, he would never find out that she was not one to ever really fall into romantic love. She did love in a way, and when she formed any kind of tie with someone she never broke it no matter how they treated her. But she didn't *fall* in love. Sex to her wasn't an act of love, it was an act of friendship, bonding, a kindness maybe, lust rarely, and sometimes--especially in the past, a means to an end.

If he had to place a bet, Feifong was the last person he would have put money on, to risk her life for a stranger. Yet, she was out there every morning, sweating, running, grunting, getting knocked down, bruised and tossed around. Bruce showed her no favoritism--in fact, he seemed to ride her harder than anybody else. But you could see the pride in his eyes--the love...And sometimes if you watched really close and fast; the tears.

At those moments he knew exactly how Bruce felt. He sometimes shed those same tears when he watched Chandra going through the drills.

After Elizabeth and Michelle, it was clear Jane was going to be their next best female warrior. She was tall like Michelle, just one or two inches shorter, with a strong frame. She was also a fast learner and though she wasn't as strong or fast as Elizabeth, she was acquiring true skills faster. Even at this early point she had stopped charging in and wind-milling, she thought out her moves, and she retained and used what she was taught.

Ada was a girly girl, through and through. She had the kind of body that without an ounce of fat on it, was still soft. She tired quickly and she simply couldn't let go. If she hit somebody she always had to check to see if they were alright--every single time--no matter how lightly she might have tapped them. When she was struck, she always got this shocked kind of look on her face. She could never get in the mode even though she was told time and time again that she had to develop a killer instinct. She just didn't have it and she wasn't going to get it. Damian still wanted her to stay out there and learn what she could. If she couldn't hit anyone in aggression, maybe she could in self-defense, when she had no other choice.

Steve was a force, not only was he as tall as most NBA centers, he was stronger than most oxen. He also burned with determination. Now he was developing combat skills to go along with the rest. He was still early in his training and already, not even Bruce could give him much of a fight. You couldn't reach him. Couldn't kick him, couldn't punch him. Now that he had skills, if you kicked at him, he kicked at you, and your legs never got near him. If you swung at him, he swung at you and his punches always traveled farther than yours.

It was frustrating for any Instructor to be so ineffective against a student, and Damian could see it on Bruce's, Chako's and Patrick's faces. Sometimes he laughed because they were so serious and trying so hard while at the same time trying to maintain semblance of being in control.

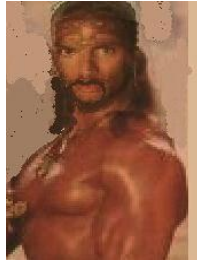
Sheree was closer to Ada than Michelle, another girly girl. But she was older and though she was in excellent physical shape, she was a cultured, Professor at a major college, and had been that too long to learn to be much of anything else. Damian just wanted her to glean from the training what she could.

They even made the lowees show up for drills. It was an utter waste of time, but there was always the chance that they might take in things

that they'll remember at a desperate moment.

The big cat showed up under her own initiative. Every morning she would go to the same spot and sat there watching. The others were always talking about training the cat to fight. Damian knew that Sheba already knew more about using her body as a lethal weapon than anything any of them could ever teach her. They just needed her to do it at the right time and he felt that motion was already covered. She'll be there.

## Chapter fifty-five



Six months after his final battle with Lee and the Dragonhunters, it still enraged Antonio every time he thought about how Lee had beaten him. It was a blow to his pride and what made it worse was knowing that Lee had beat him just ten seconds after they started fighting. He couldn't give himself credit for fighting such a highly skilled warrior so long with a broken right arm. He had put on 25 pounds of pure muscle since that day he lost the fight to Lee. He exercised and trained sometimes until he blacked out from pain and exhaustion. He was determined to never lose another fight. The war wasn't over yet--will never be over-- until that boy is in a hole like Lee, and the rest of the Civs are calling him master.

He and his unit had made their way back south from Canada, to New York. They were camped at the Harbor, perfecting their sailing skills. He was going after Damian. He knew that with Bruce, Patrick, Chako, Michelle, and Sasquatch with him, the battle with Damian was going to be riskier than the one he fought with the shorthanded Lee. The boy had already defeated Mustafa head to head, and he had no doubts that by now the soldiers with them had put the Civs through drills because that's what Soldiers do. He lost Mesha in that fight with Lee and his Unit. Rick was a sore sight to look at these days; one-eyed, snagged-toothed, with a nose flatter than an Orangutan's. Rick had recovered physically; had put on almost

as much new muscle as he, but he was crazy as a shithouse rat. The fight with Felix had rattled his brain. He probably should leave him behind instead of risking trying to cross the sea with him. But he wanted to use Rick's murderous madness on Damian. Through his addled brain Rick still remembered Jane and Steve if you mentioned one of their names. The one eye would bulge almost out of its socket. The veins in his neck would grow thicker than rope and he would literally puff up like a blowfish and explode, lashing out at everything he could get his hands on.

He needed Rick. He just had to find a way to control him when he fell into one of his fits of rage, and keep him from the women. He was already barred from the camp. Lived and slept outside the perimeter. He was a lunatic, but anything with nerves and tendons will learn what they can and can't do after enough pain. Rick had learned through the trials of bumps and bruises not to come into the camp. Maybe on the boat he'll keep him locked up in one of the cabins below deck.

Everyone else came out of the fight just fine.

He took pride in John, David, Tameka, Mustafa, and Sonya that he couldn't take in himself. They will live like gods with him when he come into his kingdom.

Sonya was another head case; had finally unraveled the last string in her wound up mind. But he had something to keep her under control. He had been holding it back because he knew she was going to lose it one day. But she wasn't like Rick--beat up in the brain--she was just beat up in the heart and soul. All she needed was something to help her forget.

He had buried all Lee's people--with the genuine respect due to brave warriors; had stood there at the edge of that big hole and saluted like he was standing before the President of the United States.



Fathead was alive and recovered but he paid a big price for jumping on John. He had him beat to within an inch of his life. He looked worse than Rick, and walked with a hobble, but he let the Civ live, and would have kept his promise to Janet if the Fathead had stayed out of the fight. He was a warrior and he kept his word.

Janet...He was tired of her now. Doing her now, was like sticking it in a hole in a mattress. He tried to be nice at first. Didn't even punish her for hitting Sonya. At first she refused to spread her legs, fought him from the moment he got on until the moment he got off. She probably didn't know it, but it was exhilarating and he would take her in the morning and at night, every day for two months until she got so worn-out and hopeless, she hardly even breathes any more when he does her...Took all the thrill out of it.

But she'll still make a good cleaning lady for when he builds his mansion. When they get settled in Africa, he'll plant some kids in her; make her kids work for the children he's going to have with Michelle.

Yes, he now knew who he really wanted--who he has always wanted. This time, he will take her like he took Janet, and countless other women, but her, he will make an honest woman out of. He'll marry her. Make her kids gods among the slaves on the earth. She'll come around for that. Ultimately that's what all bitches want--to be made honest, secure and put up on a pedestal; and they didn't care what, who, or how, a man had to do to put them up there.

## chapter fifty-six



Mike after beating

"Fathead. " Antonio was sitting in a chair, basking in the sun, watching Mike and Janet load supplies on the boat they had chosen to use to cross the sea.

"Come here." Sonya was sitting on his lap. He had his hand between her legs. Mike limped over to him. Sonya opened her mouth and Antonia fed her a red pill. Mike stood in front of them trembling with rage, but in the past few months he had been taught the dire consequences of losing control of his emotions.

"Aint you some kind of Scientist or something? "

"I'm an Ecologist."

"What's that?"

Mike stared, more than willing to die for the satisfaction of cursing the bastard to hell, but he didn't want to leave Janet alone. Sometimes at night--when it was real quiet, he thought he could hear Damian and the others in his mind. Sometimes he concentrated really hard in hopes that maybe they could hear him. He hoped that once Antonio set sail, and they started getting closer to Damian, he will be able to contact Damian with his thoughts. It was the one thing, besides Janet that kept him alive.

"Never mind, whatever it is, I'm putting you in charge of the logistics of getting us across that ocean, which means if we run into any problems that don't have to do with the wind and the rain, I'm blaming you."

"You don't have enough food."

"What...we've got three months of food supplies ready to be loaded. It shouldn't take more than two months tops, at sea, to reach the Islands and resupply."

"You have three months of food for living on land but the sea water mist will spoil the food supply at least twice as fast as land air."

Antonio cupped Sonya's left breast and rolled the nipple between his fingers. He smiled.

"See? That's why I'm putting you in charge of things, but you weren't going to keep that knowledge to yourself and let us get out there and starve, were you, gimp?"

" I would have told you."

" What were you waiting on? We set sail tomorrow. Listen Fathead, don't *fuck* with me. Don't play games because you are not going to like what happens when you lose. And you *will* lose."

## Chapter fifty-seven



Chako

It was his third reconnaissance trip to the slave compound in three days and he had yet to see a single white man. He saw the Native Enforcers, cracking their whips and yelling, but he saw none of their masters.

He couldn't understand it. Did the British soldiers just go away? Then it dawned on him.

It was late in the day when he saw the white men that first time. Maybe they only came out at night, or, when the sun was low in the sky.

This time, he settled in for a long wait instead of going back to camp. Six hours later, the white men emerged. He counted sixty-five of them. Most of them had Native women standing beside them. Some of the women had infants in their arms.

They were all tall, with light hair and pale faces--not the pale faces his forefathers talked about, but pale like one of those glowing white masks mime actors wore sometimes. He didn't remember them looking like that the first time he saw them. Were the changes in the earth affecting them that drastically? They looked weaker too, than they did to him the first time he saw them, but the arrogance they

exuded in the way they moved, held their heads, and looked at the Natives was more evident than ever. They were growing into their roles as gods over these people.

All the Natives were sitting on the ground in rows. There were about 300 of them and each of them had their heads bowed.

"You!" Chako saw one of the Enforcers pointing the handle of his whip at an old man in the first row. A woman screamed "Nooooo!" A tall, skinny Enforcer ran up to her and starting whaling at her with his whip as if he was attempting to kill her.

"That's enough!" One of the white men put up his hand. The Enforcer stopped in mid-stroke and stepped back.  
The old man stood up.

"What the fuck did you call him for, Kaffir?" One of the younger British soldiers said. "He's too goddamn old." He pointed his spear towards the group of Natives. "Bring her up."

"No! No!" Hands reached up to hold the old man down. "Yuh nuh gwan drink mi Dawta! You nuh gwan drink mi Dawta," The old man wailed.

"Hush father, fore dey bun yuh too." A strong woman--one of the six rebel women--put her hand over his mouth as she whispered in the old man's ear.

Two Enforcers moved into the crowd and started dragging the screaming woman into the clearing between the white men and the crowd of natives.

"Faddah!...hep mi, Faddah!"

The Enforcers began tying the young woman's arms and feet.

Chako crouched hidden, watching, as the Enforcers lifted the woman and carried her to a pole. They turned her upside down, pressed her against the pole and began to wrap rope around her legs. An old woman walked up carrying a large silver bowl. She put it beneath the

bound girl's head.

A fat man, clearly native, judging by his facial features, but with his face and upper body painted as white as the Soldiers, approached the scene. He was carrying a gleaming machete.

That's when Chako Morningsky raised his bow. It took every ounce of will he possessed not to let the arrow fly. He lowered the bow and turned, started running as quietly and swiftly as a wolf.

## Chapter fifty-eight



*Mike...Mike...can you read me?*

*Oh god...oh god. Damian. Yes...yes. I've been trying so hard. Oh god...oh god.*

*Mike...where are you. Are you ok?*

*I'm on a boat. With Antonio and his soldiers...I--*

*Antonio?* Damian got a sinking feeling in the pit of his gut.

*What happened to Lee... Janet...Mike, is Janet alright?*

Damian read deep anguish from Mike.

*Janet's alive. But Damian, we're being held as slaves. Lee and all his people are dead.*

He knew it. He felt like he was going to vomit. An old memory flashed across his mind.

*"You're chickenshit, Lee. That's why in the end you always lose."*

*Mike we're in the west Indies. How far are you from us?*

*About four days.*

*You need to resupply?*

*Yes.*

*Just tell me when you set anchor. We'll come to get you.*

*Damian, I have to tell you. Antonio and his people--they are bigger and stronger than before--much stronger. They beat Lee and all his soldiers to death. They beat Sha--*

The emissions hit Damian like a wall of grief.

Damian's heart felt like broken glass. They beat Shakira to death. He read from Mike's emissions that the only reason Mike was still living is for Janet's sake. He had no true inkling of what Mike was going through but he could easily imagine the pain. What if he was being held enslaved by the people who beat Chandra to death?

*I understand. Just stay safe. Tell Janet to hold on. Mike...don't give up. Will you promise me you won't do anything to get yourself killed when we come?*

*I promise.*

*We'll help you through this Mike. We're a team and always will be.*

*Ok...Damian...?*

*Yeah, Mike...?*

*I--we'll hold on.*

*"Thank you."*





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## Chapter fifty-nine



"You mean *sacrifice, sacrifice?*" Steve asked for the tenth time. Chako stopped responding after the fourth time.

Damian, Chandra, Bruce, Feifong, Ada, Chako, Steve, Sheree, Patrick, Jane, Elizabeth, and Michelle, were armed with bows, spears and knives as they advanced on the compound. Their faces were painted dark as Bruce instructed.

Chako told Damian about his observation that the soldiers only came out at night. There was at least four more hours of darkness left. Damian expected to be through with this night's work long before then.

He, Steve and Ada, theorized that the soldiers were probably weak even if they did try to project an image of strength to the Natives. That's why they had Native enforcers. They didn't want to risk getting into physical fights with even the women and shatter the illusion by losing, or not being overwhelmingly dominant. They were drinking the blood of the Natives, in hopes of building up their systems. It wasn't going to work--not for them. But the children they were having with

the Natives would probably benefit from the ghoulish act.

Steve could hardly be contained, and Damian could only hope that he didn't rush in and ruin the battle strategy. The soldiers may--or may not be as strong as they would have been before the breach, but they still had their skills and they still had weapons.

The plan was to take out the Enforcers first with the bow and arrows. Chako estimated that there were about twenty of them. Then they will send arrows after the white men, but they figured the soldiers will be into full combat mode and few arrows will catch them. They will have to catch them, chase them down before they retreated to their underground stronghold. The big cat was the essential part of this phase of the plan and Damian was sure she'll know what to do. He wanted the big cat to stand between the soldiers and their bunkers. She will buy them precious moments as well serve as a source of disorientation.

The first phase of the plan went perfectly. Even Ada was expert with a bow, and they got the Enforcers.

The Soldiers didn't panic when the arrows started flying. As one, they dropped into a crouch and began an orderly retreat.

Steve yelled at the top of his lungs and rushed forward. Damian and the others followed, all screaming at the top of their lungs like Bruce instructed. The soldiers turned and started running. Suddenly Sheba was in front of them snarling and snapping like a vision from hell.

The Natives scrambled, fleeing like rabbits into the brush.

Damian saw Steve run up on one soldier. The man bravely stood up and thrust his spear out before him. Steve snatched it out of his hand. He grabbed the wide-eyed man's arm and picked him up high over his

head. Then he threw him, bowling over two other Soldiers who had turned, preferring to face down 11 screaming people rather than a snarling Tiger.

Chako ran up and speared both white men to death.

A tall, stocky soldier swung at Damian with a machete. Damian ducked and punched him in the face. The man crumbled like an Egyptian mummy. One punched killed him deader than a Pharaoh.

He looked around for Chandra just to see how she was doing. He wasn't worried because he knew she could use the spear and if she was in trouble he'd know it from their psychic connection.

He saw a leering Soldier lunge at her and watched with pride as she sidestepped and got behind him. She kicked him in the back of the knees and he fell down on the ground face first. She brought her spear down into his back with all her might.

There were four dying men lying on the ground in Bruce's wake and he hadn't even broken a sweat.

Chako was using his knife, getting up close and personal.

Damian saw Jane chasing one soldier down. Her eyes were wild and her hands were already bloody. She was taller than the man and she had already speared him in the gut. He fell on the ground and did a leg maneuver, causing Jane to fall down hard. He plunged at her with his knife and she rolled, scrambling to her feet in the same motion. Then she kicked him in the face as hard as she could. She picked up her spear and walked over to him but he was already dead.

Like Damian thought, the Soldiers were shells of what they were before the breach. Their four year stay underground and the changed

earth had weakened them probably more than even they knew.

He watched Michelle, and like Steve, she was without a weapon, but she was merely practicing with her opponents. They had no wind and no real strength. She was easily breaking legs and arms before she broke their necks.

Nobody got by the big cat. She would swiftly chase down any man who tried to, and maul them.

Damian told Ada, Feifong and Sheree that they didn't have to fight unless they were needed. All three stood on the sidelines watching.

Elizabeth was with one particular soldier. He was not as pale as the others. In fact, even though he was white-skinned, he had the facial features of a Negro. Damian knew he probably was blacker than midnight four years ago. He seemed stronger than the other soldiers but it was easy to see it was Elizabeth herself who was dragging the fight out, not the Soldier. Finally she jumped up and scissor kicked him in the throat. He fell to his knees, choking. She took her knife from her band and cut him a new passageway--from ear to ear.

"He hurt me," she said, as if someone was asking for an explanation.

They killed half of the soldiers. The other half surrendered--at least that's what Patrick called it. He and Steve were arguing like they were going to kill each other. Steve wasn't ready to quit.

Damian counted about twenty white men, with Negro facial features. Half of them were dead but along with the ten live ones, were about twenty paler white men with Caucasian facial features. Some of the Native Enforcers were also still alive.

They were huddled together in the middle of the compound with their

heads bowed.

The big cat was still snarling and growling and when one of them so much as lifted a finger, she lunged.

Jane, Sheree, Elizabeth, Chandra, Chako, Bruce, and Ada stood over them with spears.

For the first time Damian noticed the woman, Chako said had been bound and beheaded. She was hanging naked upside down, her head was missing and her flesh was almost transparent. He could see almost every vein in her body.

Damian walked over and cut her down.

Steve swore loudly.

" Get the fuck out of the way Patrick." "They're

unarmed and surrendered Steve."

" Then arm them if you want to, and tell them to fight because this is not going to be over until every one of them is as dead as that young girl over there."

" I can't let you do that."

" You listen to me--"

Steve's eyes narrowed, his tone was low, like an undercurrent of hot lava.

"As far as I'm concerned there are only two kinds of people left in the world, Predators who can somehow twist their animal, degenerate

minds into believing they can walk the face of this earth raping, robbing and lording it over other people with impunity-- and the rest of us. I could never do anything about it in the old world, but in this world--right here and now-- *I'm* goddamn king of the jungle. And I have zero tolerance for two legged Predators, or any body's who's so greedy, selfish, or ethnocentric that they can't recognize two-legged Predators. Get the fuck out of my way."

Patrick stood his ground. Steve reached out quicker than a rattler strike and grabbed him by the neck, lifted him off the ground.

"Put him down Steve." Bruce warned. He shifted his stance.

Damian shifted in his own stance.

Chako put a hand on Bruce's shoulder. "Relax, he's not going to hurt him. Damian...", Chako called out, "you decide. You're our leader. What do we do with them?"

Damian looked over at the huddled, beaten British soldiers. His eyes then ran over the headless woman. The Natives were streaming back into the compound. He saw faces that were so battered he wondered how they survived their beating. He looked at the women; most of them were naked from the waist up. Nearly all of them had stripes on their backs. He looked over at the Mistresses and their children. Some were sobbing, most weren't. He took in the little mixed infants--the next generation of what Lee called Drakes. In his mind he saw a future, and in his memory a snippet of the past.

"You're chickenshit Lee, that's why in the end you always lose." He recalled what Mike said happened to Lee and his people. " Steve knows what to do."

"Damian...no...show some mercy!" Patrick begged.

"I am showing mercy, but to those who deserve it."

Steve glared at the pale men.

"You want weapons?"

Most of the men nodded.

"Shelly, get them their spears."

Jane, Ada and Elizabeth helped Michelle gather up the men some weapons. They threw them to the Soldiers. Most of the Soldiers grabbed the spears and stood up.

Chako and Bruce joined Jane, Elizabeth, Michelle and Steve.

"Janie, don't be a part of this. It's murder. Bruce...Chako." Patrick's eyes were feverish. "You know Colonel Robertson, would never allow this."

Bruce said: "You know Midnite, the thing that gets me about all this begging for mercy is that you know that we are going to be pushing on. And there isn't enough room on our boat for a fraction of these people. You've seen what they did to that girl over there. Bruce nodded to the headless woman. You heard what Elizabeth said was done to all the young men of this island, and how women were raped and tortured. These people were in slavery when we came here and what I want to know is how come they can't get some of that justice and mercy you're wanting for this scum? You really want us to leave 30 of these bastards alive on this Island with these women and children?"

"They can't fight, Bruce. The Natives has seen how weak they are. All we have to do is kill all the Native Enforcers and the people can handle these men."

Chako's eyes clouded over and a knowing look came over his face.

" You finish wasting your breath, yet?" Steve said to Bruce.

All the others had just learned about Patrick everything they needed to know, but Patrick and Bruce had been best friends for a long time. He thought he knew the man. He couldn't close the book on ten years of friendship, yet. He wanted clarification. Maybe Patrick, misspoke.

"So you don't mind killing all the Native slave drivers, but it's murder



to kill the white ones?" Bruce spat in Patrick's direction, then turned and started walking back towards the camp.

Steve, Chako, Michelle, Elizabeth, and Jane started moving in on the soldiers.

"Wait a minute." Damian said. "I have a better idea."

## Chapter sixty



*Damian...*

*I'm here Mike.*

*We're anchored, off the coast of the Island of Trinidad.*

*How long will you be there?*

*I was put in charge of logistics. I think I can stall them for three days.*

*Good enough. We can get there in two. You hanging in there?*

*Yeah, feel better than I have in a long time. Looking forward to seeing everyone again.*

*How's Janet holding up?*

*I told her I was in contact with you and that you were coming. Damian, it's almost impossible for her to hide her joy. Come as soon as you can because Antonio is getting suspicious.*

*We're on our way.*

*We should've stayed with you Damian and I knew it.*

*You were in love with Shakira.*

*I should've made her go.*

*You couldn't have done that Mike. She would have never got on the boat.*

*I loved her so much.*

*I know.*

*Can you beat them, Damian?*

*I think so.*

*It's like whatever was injected in them to perfect their looks, is starting to turn them into super men and woman.*

*There was a silence between the two men until Mike spoke again.*

*How's Fei?*

*She's fine.*

*Will you tell her that I'm sorry for the way I treated her?*

*Mike, that's something you could and should tell her yourself. You're not planning to renege on your promise are you?*

*Damian sensed in Mike's pause, that he had.*

*What have I got to live for, Damian? The only woman I'd ever loved is dead. I've been beaten to within an inch of my life and it'll show forever.*

*You've got the future to live for. You've got us to live for. You know*

*Feifong, she will always care about you. We all care about you, because we've seen when the chips are down, how much you care about us. Damian sensed sobbing*

*Mike, listen to me. How hard will it be for you and Janet to sneak off?*

*Impossible during the day but at night I think we can slip away.*

*Good. When we arrive Mike, I want you and Janet to run to the north side of the Island. We'll be moving towards you.*

*I can't run, Damian, but I'll send Janet ahead.*

*No, that won't work. I don't think Janet will run ahead of you.*

There was a long pause in the telekinetic conversation. Then Damian said:

*Listen Mike, here's how we'll do this. I don't want Antonio to know we're on the Island until you and Janet are out of his clutches. If you can get away at night, find a place in the bush to hide. They won't be able to track you easily in the dark.*

*There is a tiger with us, Mike. She's tame and her name is Sheba. We'll send her ahead of us. She'll be looking for you. If you see or hear her, don't be frightened, just whisper her name. She'll stand guard over you. When you're secure, let me know, we'll arrive quickly.*

*I got it.*

*Alright, be careful.*

*Don't worry we will.*



## Chapter sixty-one



When they left the slave Island, Elizabeth was with them. She didn't want to part from Sheree and she could no longer stomach the idea of spending the rest of her life on the Island where she had been so terrorized.

All the "ghouls"(Steve's word) were executed. In the end Damian decided to let the Islanders do it, so they would realize their own strength and stop being so superstitious, passive and in awe of everything that was different from themselves.

The thirty-five men were all hung by the neck from the same pole they beheaded the young woman on.

The strong woman, who had hushed the old man, stood up to take a leadership role. Her name was Harriet. She officiated over the executions with relish. All the other Natives cheered each time the box the condemned men stood on, was kicked away from under them. Under the exhortations of Harriet, some of them grabbed spears and ran up on the corpses in a fury.

Damian talked to the old man whose daughter had been crucified and bled. He was an exalted Elder. The old man assured Damian that the soldier's Mistresses and their infants were considered valued members of the community and were in no danger.

And so Damian and his crew loaded up the boat and left the Island and its people behind.

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They had named the schooner "Liberty." She was a magnificent piece of design and workmanship. Damian was more and more pleased with her each time he lifted her anchor. He thought she would do well when he helped pick her out, but the lean little vessel was weathering the test of time and action like it was getting better and stronger from the wash of the ocean.

They have still yet to hoist her sails. She was still knifing through the water like an Olympics swimming champ. They were now adrift aboard the Liberty again.

They were heading back to the Island of Trinidad to get their two friends.

## Chapter sixty-two



Mike told Janet what Damian and he planned to do, and couldn't help smiling himself as he watched her face light up. She was looking nothing like the beauty she used to be. She was never beaten during their captivity but she had been raped daily for almost two months. Something inside her had fled during those months of helplessness. Before the moment he told her they were escaping, she looked like someone who had lost their spark; tired, old, going through the motions of living only because to kill herself took a passion for accomplishing something that she just did not have. But suddenly she was charged with a new energy, the faded beauty was already beginning to shine through again in the way the color had come back into her pallid complexion.

Mike didn't dare talk to her long, so he moved on, to work on the tasks he had been assigned.

Antonio had set up the camp about a mile inland. Mike warned him about staying in the buildings so they were set up in a park-like area that had once been cleared but was now growing into woods again.

When they first arrived on Trinidad, Antonio wanted to re-supply and move on the next day, but Mike used the Island's scarce vegetation as an excuse to convince him to stay longer; to find more food in case the other Islands were just as fruitless.

That was two days ago. Damian should arrive today. He will wait for



dark and Damian's contact. Then he and Janet will make a break. The nearest woods were a quarter of a mile away.

He will go first, so Janet can make excuses for his whereabouts if need be. He needed more time than she did to reach the woods. Ten minutes later she will make her break. He will guide her to him with his mind.

If he and Janet can go missing unreported for 15 minutes, that will be time enough for Damian to arrive. He told Janet about the Tiger so she wouldn't be frightened if she ran into the cat.

"Fathead"

Mike almost jumped out of his skin. He was so lost in his thoughts, Antonio and his entire crew had walked up on him.

He struggled to calm himself, react normally.

"What?"

" I warned you not to fuck with me didn't I?"

Mike felt frantic, even though he couldn't image what the man was talking about. He heard sobbing and looked over to see Janet standing between Tameka and John Huang. His heart sunk.

"What are you talking about?"

"What am I talking about?"

Antonio pressed his index fingers to his temples and concentrated. Mike heard him speaking inside his head

*I know that you've been talking to Damian. I know all about your plans.*

Mike's face turned light green and he looked like he was going to faint.

Antonio laughed. "I was going to let you live...You and the shriveled up hag over there. A man can never have enough slaves--even gimps and

dried up whores, but you just had to betray me didn't you? You fucking Civs know absolutely nothing about truth, loyalty and honor."

Mike opened his mouth, but shut it again when he heard Janet.

" You're going to die, Fathead, but I'm going to offer you a deal. You cooperate with me, and I'll give you an easy death."

Mike burst into laughter. "An easy death...? You think I'm afraid of what you can do to me?"

Antonio smiled in the face of Mike's laughter. "No. I know if I were you, I wouldn't be. I know you're not afraid of death, me or anything I can do to you. But I also know how you feel about Janet. Let's not waste my time Mike. You know what I can do to her and you know you don't want that."

Mike sighed. "What do you want me to do?"

Antonio's eyes flashed. "I'm really going to enjoy killing you. So many games, so much bullshit. You're a bright guy, Mike. What the fuck do you *think* I want you to do? I'm getting pissed Fathead, and if you have it in your mind to waste one more second of my time, I'm going to forget all about strategy and give in to the hate I feel for you right now. John..." Antonio called out.

The Asian Soldier immediately jabbed Janet in the throat with two fingers.

She doubled over wheezing and choking like she was going to die. Mike lunged. Antonio drew his arm all the way back and backhanded him across the face.

" David..." He called out.

Bravefeather walked over to Janet who was still struggling to get her breath back. He grabbed her left arm and twisted it high behind her back. She didn't have enough wind to scream but the sound she made was worse than any cry of agony could ever be.

" Alright, alright! *Alright*...please. I'll set it up...anything. What do you want me to tell him? "

" Tell Damian you've escaped and you and Janet are waiting for him at the south end of the Island. If you or Janet tells him anything different or anything else, I'll know it, and I'll kill you. I really would like to use you as a chip, but I'll get by, and you can let your imagination run wild about what I'll do to Janet, and I swear, you'll still never get close to the reality. "

"I'll do anything you say. Just don't hurt her anymore...*please*."

>

## Chapter sixty-two



Sheree nearly blacked out from the wall of pain that suddenly exploded inside her head.

Chandra burst into tears.

Jane suddenly lost her breath.

Feifong gasped and had to grab onto Bruce to keep from falling.

Steve's head felt like his brain had been stabbed with a dagger.

Ada-- like Chandra-- started crying uncontrollably.

Damian's own brain throbbed in his skull like a strobe light.

They were less than two miles from Mike and Janet now, and her emissions were devastating to feel.

"They're torturing her," Sheree wailed.

Damian and Bruce finishing anchoring the boat. The big cat bounded off the side and swiftly disappeared.

"Let's go." Damian said grimly, he stalked ahead, as dangerous as the cat.

They all grabbed their weapons and followed him.

*Damian. We're ready. We're hiding to the south of the first woods you come to.*

Damian knew he was lying even without sensing the stress he tried so hard to contain.

*Okay, Mike. Just stay put. We're coming to get you.*

He closed his mind to Mike and said to the others:

" They've set up some kind of trap for us."

"What are we going to do, Boss?" Steve asked. "They still have our people, so they can call all the shots."

"We let them. There's nothing else we can do. But we don't lie down. We'll let them have everything they want without a fight, but our lives. At that point we go down hard, and we go down together."

Damian sensed their agreement.

" Mike said they were much stronger than they were before, didn't he?"

Bruce asked.

Damian nodded. " Yes, but so are we."

" What did Mike say about their breakdown, again?" Chako asked

Damian.

" There's Antonio, Mustafa, Rick, David, John, Tameka, Sonya and...Mesha was killed in the fight with Lee."

Bruce said: "I would say we have a clear advantage even without our arrows--especially with Sheba as a surprise weapon.

"I think they know about Sheba." Damian responded.

"How?" Michelle queried.

"The same way they found out about our plans. I think they've evolved the ability to read emissions."

"Aw shit." Steve cursed.

## Chapter sixty-four

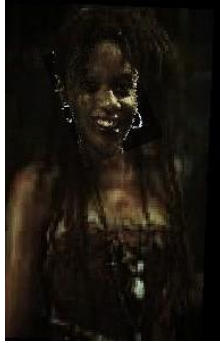


The big cat was in full stretch when she entered the woods. When she came within a few yards of the object of the scent she had been following, she stretched her fore-legs one time too many and fell into a six foot deep pit. She landed on her feet, but try as she might, she couldn't climb out of the hole.

Mustafa, David, Rick, Tameka, Sonya, and John had worked like maniacs digging that hole. Rick could almost smell Jane and Steve now, and his fractured brain was functioning normally in its single-minded intent. He wanted Jane, and he wanted to kill Steve. They had finished camouflaging the hole just ten minutes before they heard the cat streaking in their direction.

David threw a spear down in the hole at the cat. He missed. He picked up another just as the sound of leaves rustling, echoed in the distance. John grabbed Bravefeather's arm. ["We'll kill it later. Let's go."](#)

## Chapter sixty-five



Chandra



Tameka

Antonio had all his soldiers gathered around him. His day of vengeance was nigh and he wanted to make sure they all had their roles down pact.

"Sonya, I want you to take Michelle."

"I can't kill Michelle, Tony...She's my friend."

"I don't want her killed. That's why I'm giving her to you. She'll fight you to a standstill. I just want you to keep her occupied until we defeat the rest of them. Try not to mess up her face."

"The pussy just doesn't do it for you unless you're raping it, do it Tony?"

"

Antonio ignored her.



"Tam, you take Damian's woman, but try not to mess her up too bad. Moose still wants the bitch."

Mustafa flinched at the word bitch. He asked them all not to call her that.

" I'll try, but I'm not making any promises." *Fuck Moose. She was going to kill that little Barbie and she was going to mess her up all she could first.* Antonio read her thoughts and laughed inside. *That's right Tam, fuck Moose.*

" John, how do you feel about a little fratricide?" Antonio laughed.

"I'm Chinese sir. He's Japanese."

"You're both piss stains...You take Bruce."

"Yes, sir."

"David...?"

"Sir...?"

"You want your Squaw back?"

Bravefeather laughed.

"Think you can handle him?"

"Who?"

"Who do you *think* goddammit?"

"Piece of cake."

Antonio grinned. " Now that's the kind of talk I like to hear."

Antonio looked over at Rick with distaste. When this was over, he was going to get rid of him. He was a weak link and a pain in the ass, even though in his madness he was probably the most lethal killer in the unit.

" Rick, you take Sasquatch."

"Me want Jane."

"You can have her too, but attack Sasquatch first, you hear me, screwball?"

"Gonna *kill* Sasquatch!"

"Yeah, you do that...*fucking animal*," Antonio added under his breath.

"Moose, you take the little Cockney; shouldn't take you too long. Then you come over and help me with that boy. Can't underestimate that boy, now can we?"

"Thee goth lucky."

"Yeah...right. He kicked your ass six ways to Sunday."

Antonio looked at Mustafa hard.

" You know I hate to be bullshitted nigger. Just come and help me and hurry up about it."

"Thon't worry about thith, stir. I want Thamian as muchst ast stou do. Why thon't stou thake the little cracker." Mustafa looked Antonio directly in the eyes, standing on the word cracker..."and let me thake Thamian. I mean thense stou're tho worried about losing to him and all."

Antonio lurched forward, right fist drawn back. David and John grabbed him. Mustafa grinned, but his eyes were slits, and though he never shifted into a combat stance, it was easy to see Antonio was only going to get one free shot.

" Afster thiss is over," Mustafa said, " Stou geth to call her bissh, and *me*, nigger just one more time."

" Moose...I'm sorry."

"One more time." Mustafa turned and picked up his spear.

"We going to use weapons this time?" Tameka asked.

"*Stou* thaint." Mustafa's tone was a clear threat.

"*Fuck* you, Moose! I'm going to defend myself the way I know how. If she don't give me too much fight, she won't get too much fight."

"Stir, stou better puth thom one else on, Chandie."

Antonio's entire body flared with rage. First the nigger balks up at him, now he's giving him orders. This can't stand...won't stand...Got to get rid of Rick *and* his black ass after this is over.

" Tam, you take the goddamn squaw and that other old bitch. I don't want any of the Civs killed if it's not necessary."

"Sir, this is bullshit! You're going let that lovesick motherfucker get us all killed. With Michelle and those other two soldiers with them, I doubt if any of them are just Civs now."

Antonio's words were strained and measured.

" Tam, You. Take. The. Squaw... and that old Carpetmuncher. " He turned to Mustafa." You open your mouth to me just one more time without first being spoken to, I'm going to throw it all away just to stomp your ugly face into a pancake."

He addressed them all.

" Do you want to rule this world--live like kings and queens, or not? Do you want to get our lowees back, or not? The only thing standing in our way is them and us. We can get rid of them, but not if we have to first fight against ourselves. ***Are you with me or not?***"

"Sir! With you! *sir!*" John Huang bellowed.

" With you, sir!" David Bravefeather stood up and saluted.

" Drakes, forever!" Tameka shouted.

" Swiff stou, *stir!*" Mustafa pounded his chest and stiffened like a board.

" With you," Sonya intoned, disinterestedly.

" All the way, *sir!*" Rick said, sounding like his old self, Antonio pondered whether he would have to get rid of Mustafa and Rick after all. Maybe all they needed was to get their revenge and their women back to go back to being their old selves.

"Alright then!" Antonio felt deep love and pride as he looked at his people, his chin was up." Let's go take our destiny and get the lowees back!"

"Sir, you never answered my question."

"What's that, Soldier?"

"Do we fight with weapons this time?"

"We do. They don't."

## chapter sixty-six



Antonio



Damian

Mike and Janet stumbled along, closely sandwiched between David and John. They both had their wrists tightly bound.

*Damian. Answer me boy. I can hear you thinking.*

*Antonio?*

*Yeah...And I've got a proposal for you...Maybe not really a proposal but a demand. You do what I fucking tell you or I'm going to kill me two Civs. You know how they taught us to kill at the school of the Americas don't you boy?*

*Look, cut the chatter. You're not nearly as entertaining as you think you are. What do you want us to do?*

*First, I want you to change course. Turn left and start walking. After about a quarter of a mile you'll come to a clearing. Go there and wait to*

*die... And Damian...*

*What?*

*Drop all your weapons, right now. If my advance man shows up and sees so much as a toothpick, Janet and Fathead dies the hard way.*

*What's the matter? We're just a bunch of Civs...You afraid of us Antonio?*

Damian sensed that he hit a soft spot.

*You have four combat Veterans with you and more people than I do.*

*You are seven elite of the elite... Are you going to fight without weapons?*

The man screamed in Damian's head, his rage as red and hot as fire.

***You, just be there like I told you!***

Antonio shut his mind to Damian. He turned to Bruce.

**"Run ahead to the spot, and wait to see if they arrive unarmed like I told them too."**

Antonio knew that what he was about to do was stupid but he couldn't get Damian's voice out of his head

*Are you afraid of us, Antonio?*

The truth is, he was afraid. All his life he'd acted to face his fears. When he was younger every Nigger scared him. So as he got bigger and stronger, he started going to Bars with his buddies and picking fights with the biggest Niggers he saw.

He was afraid of Mustafa, but he still would have carried out his threat if Mustafa had tried him. He saw what Damian did to Mustafa in their fight. He was afraid of Damian. That's why he had to fight him. He had also been afraid of Lee. And he was afraid of losing this upcoming fight.

That's why he had to prove to Damian, and himself, that he wasn't afraid--come what may.

What he often called acting with honor was nothing more than him acting to face down his myriad of fears.

*Damian?*

*I'm through talking Antonio*

*Well, I'm not.*  
Damian waited.

*How many people do you have?*

*Why?*

*Answer my questions goddammit and don't question me!*

*There's twelve of us.*

*Who joined you...?*

*...A native girl from one of the Islands.*

*She trained in fighting?*

*Yeah.*

*How about the others? And don't lie to me boy. I swear if you do--just once--  
I'll cut your friends to pieces.*

*"We've all been trained.*

*I'm not afraid of you, Damian.*

Damian didn't respond

*I'm a warrior...you hear me, boy?*

*Yeah.*

*Good. Now listen up. I live by the warrior's code and you can trust my word. You leave Jane, Chandra, Ada, Feifong, the new girl and the old woman behind, and me and my unit will fight you without weapons. That's five trained men against five... and two women against two. How about that, Damian...you and me...man to man.*

Damian couldn't believe his luck or Antonio's stupidity. He believed his crew could defeat the Drakes--with or without weapons--but until that moment of reading Antonio's emissions, he was afraid that when they started losing, Antonio would try to use Mike and Janet like he used the lowees against a full-strength, Lee. With no weapons around, he had a much better chance of preventing that. He answered Antonio:

*Sounds honorable to me, but how do I know you're coming unarmed?* Damian asked the question only for the sake of asking. He understood Antonio, even if he couldn't read his honesty in his emissions. In his perverted, sick way, the guy was an honorable man. He was a murderer, a torturer, a rapist and a psycho, but he would kill himself before he went back on his word in a fight. Fighting is what defined his existence. Warriors are who he worshiped. He was like a 15 year old video junkie, living in a fantasy world. He lived, breathed and believed every utterance of the military fairy tale glop that so many young men grew up being fed on. Damian already knew he was coming unarmed like he promised.

*Warrior's code of honor*, Antonio said in Damian's mind, answering his question just the way Damian knew he would. *Still think I'm afraid, Damian?*



*No Antonio, I definitely don't think you're afraid, now.* Damian answered, as he tried to come to grips with a feeling he suddenly got from Antonio's emissions--a feeling that Antonio, knew he was going to lose in their fight...which was the same thing as death for a man like Antonio. The man will fight to the death, but he knew he was going to lose.

Damian recalled how Antonio had literally begged Lee to kill him when he was laid up and defenseless with a severely strained neck. The man just simply could not live with physical defeat--at the same time-- he couldn't resist facing up to every single thing that made him afraid of just such an outcome.

Damian turned his thoughts back to Antonio, and realized he had been tuned out.

**"You can stop worrying now, Moose," Antonio said to Mustafa, " none of the Civs are going to be on the battlefield."**

Tameka cursed loudly.

## Chapter sixty-seven

Damian knew that if he lost the upcoming war, Chandra, Jane, Sheree, Ada, Feifong, Elizabeth and the Iowees were going to be alone at the mercy of Antonio.

But he had no intentions of losing. The Drakes were going to pay with their lives for what they did to Janet, Mike and Lee's people.

He wasn't the only one in his crew with that grim determination.

"Chandie, I want you to take, Jane, Feifong, Ada, Elizabeth and Janet back to the boat. Wait for us until morning. If we don't show up at first light, sail to one of the other Islands."

"No." She didn't say anything else, just started walking away from him.

"Chandie..."

"Yuh not gwan put me through dat again, bwoy--not knowing if yuh be dead or alive. Yuh tink I would wan to liv' on some Island without yuh? I belong with yuh. I belong to yuh. Where yuh go I gwan...even ti di boneyard."

She never gave him a chance to respond. He watched her back as she fast-walked to catch up to Steve.

It was ridiculous to feel the way he did about her. No one should love anything so much that they would instantly die, if they lost it. But that's how he loved her. There was nothing about life and living that meant anything to him without her. He couldn't do anything about her so he turned to the others he wanted to stay behind.

"Jane, it's for the sake of all of us. Don't you see that? We have been handed a gift. Help me Jane. Fei, Sheree...help me. Go back to the boat. Wait for us there."

"Ok, Damian, but please come back to us."

"I will...I promise."

"Tell Janet I wanted to come for her." Sheree said.

"I will."

"Tell Mike too...about me." Feifong looked at Damian with tears in her eyes. "Tell him how much I wanted to come."

"I'll tell him, Fei."

"Come back to us, Damian. Bring them all back to us."

"We'll come back Ada."

"Damian...?"

He gave his attention to her.

" Call me Pipsqueak?"

After all these years she could still come up with some of the most shameless and strangest requests. But he sensed her strong need to bond somehow to him at this moment, even if only by an old memory.

"No." He said softly.

"Why not?"

"Because that woman back at the lab was Pipsqueak. You're Ada, and that's who you'll always be to me from now on."

Elizabeth took the change in plans without a fuss although she was ready and willing to fight. She stood beside Sheree, as majestic as an Amazon, her long, curly hair falling across her eyes.

As they headed out for their showdown with Antonio and the rest of the Drakes, Damian whispered something to Steve.

## Chapter sixty-eight

Mustafa looked shocked and devastated to see Chandra waiting beside Damian.

"Moose!" Antonio thumped him hard in his broad chest with the flat of both his hands, "Get her back brother!"

Mike was right. They were bigger and stronger than what Damian remembered, but they were also slower and less disciplined in their moves - especially Rick. He kept charging at Steve like a one horned rhino. Steve kept sending him face first in the dirt with a thunderous kick or a crunching, straight right hand. Finally Rick went down and didn't get back up.

Bruce and John Huang fought at a pace that was frantic. Both Asian Soldiers were quick and both had the same level of skills. John was bigger, and unlike Antonio and Rick and Mustafa, he evidently did his wind work as diligently as the weight work. The kicks, punches, feints, leaps and counter moves came so fast, it looked like each man had at least eight arms and eight legs. Finally, John somehow managed to catch Bruce with a squatting kick, taking his legs away from him. Bruce hit the ground and rolled to all fours but John was right on top of him. He caught Bruce with a side kick that sent him sprawling flat on his back. Then he dove, elbow first at Bruce's neck.

Sonya hadn't entered into that black place of pure rage yet. Michelle hit her with a couple of hard shots that would have normally taken her there. But she didn't want to kill her friend. She loved Michelle and was so happy to see her again. She didn't know why they were fighting. Antonio gave her a pill and told her to hit Michelle. She did it, and never thought about Michelle hitting back. Michelle did, and years of training and indoctrination took over Sonya's mind and body.

She gave as good as she got and she could take more to get hers because she never felt pain. Even when someone broke a bone she never felt hurt until long after the fight was over. She didn't want to kill Michelle she just wanted to keep her occupied like Tony ordered. Then Michelle struck her full in the face, with a perfect right hand counter. After that everything went black before Sonya's eyes.

David Bravefeather was gasping for air, stumbling around like a drunkard, clutching at his throat. Chako followed him around, waiting for him to straighten up. He had caught David with two knuckles to the windpipe, and could have easily followed up with a neck hold. The man was as helpless as a baby. But he was told about how Isabella and Shakira died.

Bravefeather got some air in his lungs and stood up straight, coughing, arms weaving around like a blind man in a haunted house. Already, the defeat was in his eyes because he knew he had nothing left. Chako jumped up as high as he could. Bravefeather's head bounced against his shoulder blade and then flopped forward to rest against his chest. He turned a three quarter circle and fell to the ground.

Mustafa ran up on Patrick and the smaller man almost turned and fled; instead he dropped low and got beneath the huge Soldier, taking his legs from under him. Mustafa hit the dirt, his broken ribs nearly paralyzing him with pain. He couldn't breathe or move, but instead of taking the fight to Mustafa, Patrick was standing there in a defensive stance wondering why the smallest man from his side got the biggest, scariest man from their side. He didn't follow up his throw, too wary to be aggressive. He stood bouncing on his toes, watching as Mustafa got up, mistaking the slowness of agony, for menacing deliberation.

This time Mustafa approached him cautiously. Patrick backed up. Mustafa feinted a left hand hook and Patrick ducked only to catch a rock hard knee flush on the chin. He was already out, but Mustafa held

him up with both hands on the side of his face and head-butted him, crushing his skull down into his jawbone.

Chandra was clearly out of her league with Tameka, but she managed to fight back effectively enough to stay on her feet until Steve came over. The big man picked Tameka up and put her in a tree.

"Stay here and watch her Chandie. If she jumps down kick her as hard as you can." He then turned and stalked after Mustafa.

Tameka jumped down out of the tree, anxious to get back at Chandra, furious that she had been given such a good fight so far, by a prissy Civ like the little Barbie. She fell on all fours when she hit the ground. She looked around for Chandra and the last thing she saw was a blur of boot.

Damian hit Antonio and Antonio hit Damian.

Antonio had lost a bit of his confidence when he fought Lee, unable to give himself credit for fighting an elite warrior with a broken right arm. Now his confidence was back in full swing. He felt good. Felt he could fight all night. He swung at Damian with a muscled right arm that could have knocked down the side of a barn, and narrowly missed. Damian came back up from his duck to see Mustafa coming his way. He was having a much harder time with Antonio than he thought he would and he knew if he had to fight them both, he was going to be beat to death.

But he didn't have to. Mustafa didn't see him but Damian did. Coming up behind the big, muscle bound Soldier was the big tall johnny on the spot, and friend of Damian.

Damian exhaled with relief. Suddenly feeling lighter than a feather, he leaped and executed his best move, catching Antonio flush on the chin with a double kick. He followed that up with a series of full weight body punches that had the long haired, Conan the barbarian, out on his

feet. With one more flying, driving kick between the breast bone and the heart, Damian broke Antonio's ribs, driving the jagged edge of two of them deep into the handsome man's heart.

John Huang dove and Bruce Akimota rolled. Both men bounced to their feet and then it began again. Blow for blow, punch for punch, kick for kick, until Chako Morningsky came rushing into the fight. He, more than anyone, else was on a mission of revenge. *How did Mike say Felix was killed? Like this. No they toyed with him first.* Instead of delivering the deadly blow he could have, he kicked John in the back just hard enough to throw him into Bruce. Bruce sent John back to Chako with a standing drop kick to the chest. Chako flipped him by his neck over his shoulders deciding not to sink to the Drake's level by prolonging an uneven fight. John hit the ground dead...His spine broken in three places.

Michelle didn't mean to kill her.

She knew about the drugs and what happened to Sonya's baby. Janet told them all, how Sonya had cried after she killed Tiararay. Nobody in their group wanted to kill the disturbed woman. But hitting Sonya was like hitting an enraged Pit-bull. You *had* to kill her to stop her from killing you. Sonya's eyes were wide open and lifeless now, her face a bloody pulp. Even while in the mode, Michelle fought tears as she bent down and closed her friend's empty eyes.

After a brief round of sparring where Steve stopped Mustafa's heart with a roundhouse punch to the ribs, he now had Mustafa in the same neck hold Mustafa killed Alonzo (big house) Breiner, with.

Damian and all the surviving members of his unit stood watching, none of them enjoying it but all of them eager to see how Steve finished off the big man. This was combat, a fight to the finish, and they were all in the mode that they had been drilled to enter into when in combat. Steve didn't twist Mustafa's head. He choked him out and



threw him to the ground and walked away.

Chandra came over to Damian and he put an arm around her waist. She laid her head against his shoulder. "Is Tameka dead?" he asked her. She shook her head.

Everyone from Antonio's side was dead except Mustafa and Tameka.

Damian lost Patrick.

"Damian."

Damian whirled around like he had heard a bullet whiz by his head.

Mike was limping towards him with Janet by his side.

Damian almost didn't recognize him and the only thing that really identified Janet to him was her million dollar smile.

All the crew rush over to them. Damian approached slower, him and Mike holding eye contact while the others reveled in their joyous reunion. Janet was ecstatic as she hugged each of her friends. "Where is the cat you told me about?" Mike said when Damian got closer. "I'd like to meet her." Damian looked at his misshapen face, the empty left eye socket, the crushed nose, the misaligned jaw. He thought about Shakira, thought about how Mike stayed alive through all the physical and mental pain just for Janet. Thought about how even through all his own sorrows, Mike had cared enough about a friend to concentrate enough to contact him from across four days of ocean.

"Right now I don't know and I don't care. Right now, all I want to do is hug my little brother."

Mike took an unsteady step towards him and Damian went the rest of the way, enfolding him in a heartfelt embrace.

"You still with me?" Damian whispered.

"Yeah""You're going to stay with me?"

"Yeah."

"Let's go...there's somebody who's eager to see you again, back at the boat."

"What do we do about them?" Michelle pointed to Tameka and Mustafa.

"There's plenty of food on this Island for two people." Damian said. The killing mode was broken by hearing Mike's voice after so long. Damian was now tired and feeling something about the killing done this day that he never felt about the killings done at the slave compound. All he wanted to do now, was get back on the water and just sail. "Chako, you and Bruce go find Sheba. We'll be waiting for you at the boat."

" Yes, sir." Chako and Bruce started off to search the south side of the woods where the cat had entered.

## Chapter sixty-nine

When Damian and the others appeared in view of the boat, the Iowees ran to them, wild like with excitement and tears. The little persons got hugs all around from the big people who reveled in their exuberant affection.

"Where are Patrick and Bruce and Chako?" Firstshe asked, her huge eyes even wider in her tiny face.

Damian couldn't answer her. Neither could any of the others.

" Bruce dead." Firstshe said sadly.

" Is Sheba dead too." Firstshe asked.

"No, no." Damian said quickly. "Bruce isn't dead."

Just then the big cat came bounding up just ahead of Bruce and Chako.

"Sheba!" the Iowees screeched in unison and ran to the cat. They hugged the Tiger, and then each of them grabbed onto a part of their favorite Soldier. Bruce and Chako were grinning from ear to ear.

The big cat was grinning too.

Jane was devastated by the news about Patrick. Despite how all the others had come to feel about him, she loved him deeply.

Bruce and Chako each carried a memento of their fallen Comrades on a chain they wore around their necks. Along with Lee, Tiararay, Alonzo, Kiesha, Shakira, Felix, and Isabella, Patrick had his spirit permanently attached to those chains.

As he promised, Mike stayed alive long enough to get past the worse days of having to live for no one but himself. After that he grew accustomed to his life as it was.

Damian adored Feifong and he had never before been able to put his finger on exactly why. Seeing her with Mike, he finally pinpointed it. It was her ability to love without really needing or wanting to be loved in return. When she let someone in her heart, she was selfless in devotion to them. She never let Mike linger in depression.

Janet literally blossomed like a rose. She seemed to not only get taller in the weeks she was back, she also seemed to grow younger. Damian never knew anyone who smiled so much. She was like a ray of sunshine that brightened all their lives. She and Sheree were far beyond ever being lovers again, but they were now closer than ever. Sometimes he would see jealousy and anguish on Elizabeth's face, but sooner or later she would have to come to accept that she was a beloved daughter to Sheree, and Sheree loved her sons and daughters with all her heart, but Janet was a soul mate.

Bruce and Chako found the big cat in the pit. They had to dig down beside the hole to get her out. To this day she had never thanked them. Bruce laughed when he told how the big cat had walked out of the hole as aloof and regal as the queen of England. Damian felt the cat was embarrassed.

They left Tameka and Mustafa on the Island of Trinidad.

Before they began their long trip to Africa in earnest again, they stopped to check on Elizabeth's people. They had only meant to stay long enough to see if everything was well, and to say goodbye.

The dancing, singing and revelry lasted for two days. And they were held captive through it all. But there was nothing wrong with that kind

of captivity. The native women were beautiful. Nothing at all.

Finally, they were again moving towards their new Genesis. The Liberty was a mighty fine vessel, she was. And as Damian stood at her bow with his feline shadow, beside him, staring across the waters, he couldn't help feeling lucky when he reflected upon all the things a few Scientists, and a couple of teachers had made it through. They weren't supposed to be the last ones standing. But they have outlasted elite Warriors, Kings, Queens, Millionaires and Billionaires, Militias and Religious groups, Gangs and Armies.

Lucky indeed

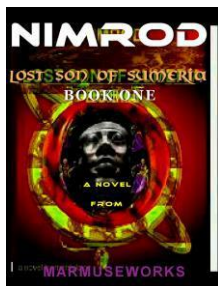
At least so far

The Journey continues....

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## A NOVEL

### About the Author

Thomas Couram /Akamardukson, is a Writer, Songwriter/ Music Producer and Painter.

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He is also what is known as a “Targeted Individual.”

The author uses his talent to peacefully protest against injustice, slavery and crimes against All Man or Womankind.

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