

Waystone: Circus of Stones

By Alps Sarsis

Chapter 2

Hyenas, Power Cores, and Misfortune

The rain finally fully let up as the silver moon gleamed brightly well over the horizon. The mid-month found much rain but the moonlight made moving through the somewhat cluttered streets of the shantytown a little easier for the three plus Djinn. The cramped lanes through the shantytown alternated between being cobblestone, paved, and outright mud and gravel. There were puddles in places wide enough that it made one wonder if a creek had once run there and it had simply been paved over, only to become a creek once more any time it rained. The water was standing which gave the impression that it was dammed up with debris and rocks further down.

Unadi had calmed a bit in the time that the hyenas were getting ready because she was out of the watchful eye of pretty much everyone else. However, being outside when the rain was not hammering down on them was a good reminder that they were, in fact, wide open and could be seen from all around. Still, no one expected to see Unadi here, right? She did not suspect that the local chapter of the Keepers here in Horizon would be interested in trying to find her. Patrolling late at night in a place where there was nothing worth taking was more than likely not considered a priority. If they were given word to be on the look-out, they might not even know she was already in their country. There was certainly no attempt to screen the cargo on the ship where she had stowed away.

The air had turned cooler in the night, which not uncommon at their altitude once the sun went down. Thankfully the clothing that she was wearing had mostly dried by the time the two males had proven that a 'go-bag' was not something they kept stocked continuously and they had to practically pack from scratch. There was not much they *needed* to take, but what they *could* take went with them.

At first Unadi thought that this was because they wanted to prepare for contingencies, but it became clear as she watched them put things together that they just wanted to keep their most valuable things *with* them. It was perhaps a given that their conglomerate shed they lived in would be picked clean or have collapsed completely by the time they returned. If it took too long, someone else might even be living there. They took, for instance, every single one of the djinni-charged power cells that they had in the little shack. The djinn was far less active at night and Unadi wondered if they even needed sleep. Perhaps he just knew that others *did* and kept quiet. He buzzed along above Unadi's head for a while.

Originally, the Keeper girl believed that they were going to walk out of the city and then find some means of transport, a train or another more short-range cargo shuttle to take them to the north and west but it turned out that Siele had his own truck. Well, it was *something* like a truck.

After a couple hours of walking, they stood before it. It was obvious that this was at least three vehicles mashed together almost as recklessly as their home was. It had three wheels,

with two in front and one in back. It was red, green, black, white and silver. There wasn't even an obvious pattern to the coloration... it appeared that it was just taken from junk that was that color. The back of the truck was a large silvery metal crate and looked like it could hold a month's worth of groceries without threatening to flip the small but working vehicle over. The cab was cramped, appearing as if it was originally made to go on a two wheeled scooter to keep the driver dry in the rain, but there were two narrow seats that had been crammed into it. The windscreen was some kind of hazy resin, and not treated glass. It was kind of milky and hard to see through.

"Paying last respects before leaving it behind?" asked the djinn in a whisper. He landed on the back tailgate. Unadi half expected the thing to explode when the somewhat plump and robust cricket thumped down onto it. There was a long, slow groan as the vehicle tilted ever so slightly.

"Nope, this is Truck, our truck," Crisod stated.

"It's named...Truck?" inquired Unadi skeptically. She was doomed.

"The one and only Truck," Siele piped, slapping the roof. The windscreen fell into the cab. Unadi covered her lips with her fingertips with concern.

"A little finicky, but that's never been a problem," Crisod encouraged.

"It seats two," said Mihr. Both Siele and Crisod spoke simultaneously.

"I'll ride in the back."

"No," Crisod rumbled, "You drive it better; I'll be in the back." He glared sternly at his son.

"Yeah, just 'cause you can jump clear if we..." The two hyenas looked at Unadi and Mihr as they watched the argument with more than a little worry.

"Mihr can fly above 'Truck'," the djinn stated, gazing piteously at Unadi who frowned back at him, bottom lip quivering.

"It ain't that bad, stop cryin' about it." Crisod hopped into the back, and positioned himself immediately in a way that was intent on making sure he didn't flip the thing over. The bluish-green reptile sighed a bit and opened the door.

"Do we have to get in at the same time?" she asked, looking at the two narrow seats.

"No, it's balanced in front well enough - get in." Siele slipped in, refastened the windscreen with leather straps and patted the somewhat battered seat. It was as if it had not even been a seat before it was made into one. There was wide, garish seam-work down the center in orange yarn. Unadi sat down. Her ass was immediately wet.

"Ugh..." she grumbled.

"Yeah, rain kinda gets in," he remarked. Unadi gave him an icy stare. She had just gotten mostly dried off. She felt the cart begin to move. He didn't even seem to start it up. It

then occurred to her that it ran on an electric motor. The reason for him bringing all of those power cells became clear. They would need them to get any kind of distance. Unadi wondered if they had a converter with them as well so that in a rough spot Mihr would be able to recharge a few. The djinn likely would not enjoy *that* becoming his main purpose, but it was better than making him fly along with them slowly the whole way while they walked.

"Smooth ride, yes?" prompted the younger male in the cab. His father remained fairly still in the back. It was actually a pretty smooth ride, save for the occasional deeper pothole. It was, she felt, probably better than walking. At least it was harder to see that a Mitanni girl was running around in case people started asking questions. The vehicle wasn't very fast, like most power-cell vehicles, but it went nearly two miles on a single cell. They had quite a few in the back with Crisod, who was able to switch them out from where he was. Once they got out of the shantytown, there was little need for its unstable turning, but they had to run along the shoulder of the road because the large combustion engine vehicles tended to be much faster, and quite a bit larger. No one seemed to care about the little 'Truck' running along the roadside however, and paid them little mind. Under cover of darkness it was likely that no one could really see the cricket-djinn who flew above the truck. There was no concern from Unadi that he'd lose sight of them though, since all he had to do was find the *worst, slowest possible vehicle* and there they would be.

They managed to get completely out of the city with about an hour of this slow but unwavering travel. It was obvious that the two went around like this pretty often. They stopped twice in their exit from the city to let the motor cool, which was its only major shortcoming for what could be expected of it. As they whirled along the road, Unadi learned a little more about the younger hyena. He was born in Aurora, which she had left to come to Horizon City, and his father's habits were originally exciting to his mother. However, the fact that they did not change when they took to one another made it so her interest waned, and eventually it waned so much she blotted herself out of their lives forever. He had found out fairly recently that she had settled down with a wealthier merchant in the southern part of Aurora, while he and his father resumed their somewhat reckless lives. He wasn't really sad about it, but it made him feel a little wary about females in general. He didn't consider them the fairer sex, if anything they were far more cunning and vicious than their more honest and hard-working counterparts. Unadi responded to this.

"You'll never have more than your father if you feel that way. Not all of them... girls I mean... want to screw you over. It's about choosing the right one. If your father had done that, he might very well still be with her. It sounded like your mother was not the right one for him. Sometimes it's hard to pick..." She trailed off as Siele shot her a cold glance.

"Don't criticize my dad, false-Keeper," he grumbled. "Girls like to make this his fault, but she knew what he was when they got involved. You didn't think about that did you? She knew, and he hid nothing from her. He didn't change for her, true enough... but she took him on knowing what he was. Girls like to change boys. They pretend to like who and what you are to hook you, and then they train you and manipulate you until you don't even know who you are anymore. That didn't work on my dad though." The younger hyena grinned with pride.

Unadi nodded reluctantly. "Well, there's obviously got to be some give and take. She would have to change too, and accept, you're right."

Siele continued, "He wasn't going to bend. He was happy with what he was and if she wanted something different, she'd have to find it in someone else. It wasn't going to be him. He

might not be perfect, he's got all kinds of faults, but he won't sit there and hate himself for them. They are *his* faults, just like his strengths are *his* strengths. They are who he is and he's not going to just switch them out like power cells for someone else who will want more and more change until he's miserable."

"I rather doubt someone who really loved him would want him to be miserable," the smooth-skinned lady responded.

The hyena folded his ears back a bit, scowling at the interruption. Unadi rolled her eyes a bit and just listened. "He's fine with what he is, he's fine with who I am, even though maybe I won't be doing this product-running scheme for him for very long. I want to build things. I want to fix things." Unadi felt like a heel for making Crisod the bad guy in her attempt to try to make the boy soften to his mother. She had to admit the way he said it made it right. Both chose the wrong person, perhaps. But, if what he was saying was true, Crisod made it known what he was before they became lovers. It was Siele's mother who demanded the change that would not happen. It was a little unfair of Unadi, not knowing this, to assume that Crisod's 'bad life choices' were strictly to blame.

"What kind of things do you want to fix, Siele?" the girl inquired, just wanting to change the subject away from her jumping to conclusions about his dad's choice of life-path. She would have to be more cautious about sounding so judgmental.

"I want to fix little things," the boy announced calmly as he drove. This seemed to be his happy place.

"Little things? So not trucks?" she asked. "Did you make this? Put it together I mean?"

"I did make it, yes, and compared to other things that need fixing, this truck's a little thing. But mostly even smaller things," he explained. "Like, just the motor for Truck, for instance. I would like to work on the converters for Djinn-based power cells too. I bet they are nowhere near as efficient as they could be, if you got right down to how they were made. People just expect the Djinn to serve and fill those things up, but they don't think about how much more they could get with the kind of power they have," he explained knowingly.

"I know all about the Djinn - and the war... and why they have to serve, being as how they offended the gods something awful back in the day..." She looked up at the roof of the cab of the truck, knowing that Mihr was flying high above. She doubted he was even involved with that war for how calm and unconcerned with mortal things as he was. "I don't know much about Djinn *energy* though," she expressed with some embarrassment. This was not something one needed to learn to work in a circus at the performer level.

"Well, it gets awfully technical, so the short-story on it is basically this..." He reflected a moment, perhaps to figure out the best and shortest way to say what he wanted to say. "... The Djinn kind of exist between two places at once. Getting here takes a lot of power, but once they are here, there's a kind of... friction between worlds and that builds in them as the power we use as electricity. Mostly, that energy just gets bled off on the other side," he remarked.

"Other side of what?" Unadi responded. "You mean the realm where they come from?"

"Right!" the hyena agreed. "So, like, they exist in kind of a weird figure eight loop with their energy forms rooted on the other side and the physical form on this side, and there's

always energy available. The bigger and older they are, typically the more power they have. They can even produce odd effects in this world, as you already know, based on what reality they have in their own.” Unadi nodded at this, still not really understanding.

She finally interjected, “They can change into objects and stuff to be useful for their Maestros too, if they are so inclined.” Unadi wanted to make it clear she at least knew a little about something.

“Right, and even a weapon if it’s needed. I knew a guy that carried a knife around all the time, and it was like... a year before I even knew it was a Djinn. He got busted because he didn’t have a license and there was no registry for it... which means someone’s out there cranking these guys out even though it’s a serious offense to do that.” This perked Unadi up because it reminded her of her normal duties.

“This was around here somewhere?” she asked.

“Yep. How about your Djinn? Where did you get him?” he countered.

“He’s...not mine,” Unadi replied, knowing that would become more obvious the longer they stayed together. “He’s helping me help someone else. That’s why I’m going out here. A...friend... ran into a bit of trouble and landed on wrong side of the Keepers.”

She was telling the truth, after all, and she knew that her voice sounded all the more genuine for it. She didn’t have to tell him that the ‘friend’ was also a Keeper.

“Ahh, I gotcha. You didn’t seem real bonded, so I get that. I won’t pry too much about why you’re going where you are going, but you *do* know what Ibians do to girls from outside the country if they can get a bit of debt, real or imagined, under them, right?” he inquired.

“Err... I’ve been told,” she commented. She didn’t really know, but assumed, she felt rightly, that it was pretty bad, and likely had to do with the bunny girl she saw sullied so bad as she was in that magazine.

“Alright. Just so you know,” he remarked in a helpful tone. There was suddenly a jarring jolt of the little vehicle, and they almost went onto the highway and into traffic. However, there was no danger of a vehicle on the motorway actually hitting them, because the thing that jolted them nearly into the road was a vehicle moving slowly in their lane, and it wasn’t going around them or stopping. Crisod pounded on the back window, sounding a bit panicked.

“Fuck, Fuck, Fuckity-Fuck!” barked the younger hyena.

“What? Did they just hit you? Pull over, let them get around you!” Unadi was exasperated. ‘Truck’ could not win in a fight with the larger vehicle that was trailing so closely behind them.

“They did it on purpose. Dad’s pissed someone off, I’d wager!” Siele jerked the wheel, coming off the road and into grass for a little bit as the vehicle made another run at them. His father was hanging on tight in the back. “Looks like two cars, actually, the other one’s pulling back a little more to keep other traffic from coming forward. Damn...they’re trying to disable us!!” He was obviously driving as fast as the vehicle would go, but it wouldn’t last much longer. They would have to stop, even if just for a few seconds to switch out power cells sooner or later.

That was if they could even evade the vehicle by driving on the grass. It was too dark to see far off the road to know if there was a way to get off of it and get away.

"What did he do?!" cried Unadi as Truck got tagged again. The vehicle lurched again but this time it was not because of being hit by the other truck, it was because of a small explosion behind them which sent the other vehicle careening off the road. Siele cried out his side window.

"Hell yeah, Dad! Great job!" He punched his steering wheel excitedly.

"Your dad just wasted a truck full of people!" Unadi shouted incredulously. She cursed at herself immediately for forgetting that she was running with a small smuggling gang now, not with strictly law abiding citizens. She was culpable. She could be arrested for even sitting beside him during this!

"Calm down, girl!" snapped the young hyena, "It was a booze-bomb. It didn't give them an audience with Anubis, it just knocked them off the road. I'll bet they're fine. *Dad, you got another one!?*" he called back to his father. The other vehicle had sped up and was closing in on them.

"No! I didn't even think that one was gonna work! Get some distance boy, before-" It was too late. They were stuck hard from behind. Apparently the original intent to stop them and take them alive wasn't on the table anymore, since someone got blown up. Unadi remembered thinking that was fair. The much harder 'tap' from behind made them suddenly slow with a loud grinding noise.

"Fuck!" shouted Crisod.

"What?! What?!" Siele was obvious rattled. They didn't have the actual training for dealing with horrible situations, and even *with* that training Unadi was fighting panic.

"They got the wheel. It's gone. We're *fucked!*" shouted Crisod. The vehicle was slowing more and more. They veered entirely off the road, Siele obviously knowing another direct hit would end their lives, not just their run. He misjudged how far the disabled vehicle would get off the road, however, as he hit a rut that ran along the edge.

Unadi was instantly ejected through the thankfully not well attached windscreen and Siele was cast hard chest first against the steering wheel. Unadi was a bit dazed but they hadn't been traveling very fast and, as an acrobat, she tumbled easily in the soft grass. Even more fortuitous, the ground was still spongy from the rain. She got to her feet in time to see that two people had already gotten out of the truck, a third working to get the vehicle back on the shoulder of the road and ready to go.

The lady Keeper called out to Siele, but he appeared utterly frozen, his eyes wide with horror, not daring to even look back. Crisod screamed in rather undignified fashion as he was pulled out of the truck and the two dark figures began to kick and stomp the older hyena into the wet ground. Unadi regretted not travelling with any kind of weapon while on her way here. She didn't expect that she'd need one so soon, and getting caught in the hold with a weapon would have made things a lot worse for her. The girl looked around frantically, found a large stick and rushed in. She took a heavy swing at the first guy she got to and the rain-decayed branch disintegrated uselessly, bits flying everywhere with no real damage done. The large fellow she

broke her stick on turned around, glaring. It was obvious that she had just made a target of herself to a much larger Mitanni male. The lizard jerked his frills a little to show how perturbed he was.

"You should have ne'r got mixed up with these fools!" he growled threateningly at Unadi.

"Leave him alone! Stop this! There must be another way to sort this out!" She pointed at his partner, a heavysset canine of some kind who was continuing to viciously stomp on a whimpering, suffering old hyena.

"He took over our client without cuttin' us in. He *ain't* doing it again. Now you're gonna get worse than he does, I promise. Shoulda been a good little girl and stayed in your truck like the boy!" He pointed at the hyena who was still kind of blankly staring forward, appearing detached from reality as his father was being murdered outside. She could only guess what was going to be worse than that. She would never invite such a fate. She was trained for this far more than the smugglers. The thought that they obviously were not fighters only made her even angrier. They were out here *helping* her, regardless of reason. The Mitanni girl suddenly remembered that they were not alone out there. She glanced up into the starry sky and shouted.

"Mihr! Get down here *now!*" Right at her feet between her and the now advancing other reptilian landed a long heavy-looking object. She immediately snatched it, not caring what Mihr had found for her, she would use it to defend herself. She was shocked to find out that it was a cricket bat. Its weight was exquisite in her hand. She didn't take long to marvel at it. Her opponent jumped forward to try to snatch it from her, surprised to find his quarry suddenly armed. She thrust it forward just as he grabbed for it, rather than trying to predictably pull it away, putting it right in his gut. She then stepped back slightly and turned her whole body into the swing as she stepped forward again. The flat board of a cricket bat connected with the guy's jaw and Unadi felt hardly any shock through the weapon as it connected.

Down opponent one went.

The canine, slack-jawed and lumbering, immediately stopped attacking the helpless and seemingly unconscious hyena. He rushed Unadi, who darted to the side and went on the offensive. She leapt forward twice to gain momentum and then once more, planting both her feet upon the startled dog's shoulders. She vaulted over him easily before just spinning as her feet hit the ground. She brought that bat to the back of his skull. He slammed the wet, muddy ground as if he were a hinged door, face first with a satisfying splat. Unadi peered outward at the driver of the vehicle. His face was white, possibly cervine of some kind, or maybe even bovine, but he was a bit small. Eyes round, he backed up a bit more onto the road and then sped off, tires screaming against the pavement as he rocketed away. He wasn't interested in ending up on the wrong side Unadi's bat. As the girl turned around to deal with the two who got left behind she found that they had opted to remain unconscious. However, Siele was out of his vehicle to check on his father.

"Dad! You aren't dead! You *can't* be dead!" Unadi approached cautiously. She wasn't looking forward to the task ahead. She felt like Crisod was old enough that a sound stomping by that dog probably would have been enough. However, he rolled onto his side and vomited profusely. The Mitanni girl looked away from that. He sputtered a bit more and sat up. He had a cut on his arm that was bleeding significantly. His leg was also twisted enough that it was obvious that it was probably broken.

"I'm okay, I think I'm okay. Ra's eye, everything hurts..." He doubled over again, panting. The boy hugged his father even with the shape he was in. Unadi found a knife on the ground. It was apparently just two knives pieced together. She went with her suspicion on who it actually belonged to and picked it up.

"You dropped this." She offered it back to the older male.

"Aye, that I did... ohhoh..." He held his bleeding left arm. "They stabbed me with my own fucking knife? What's wrong with them?!" He looked at the two who were face down. "Siele, my son...You helped yer dad, eh? There's a good lad!" he beamed. Siele glanced away shamefully. The bat was still in Unadi's hand and Crisod realized that right after he said it. "Ah... Yes. I know you don't like the violence thing, Siele; don't ye' feel bad. You just aren't supposed to be for that is all." He obviously felt rotten about the younger hyena obviously feeling useless over it.

"We need to get you out of here." Unadi kept her mind about her. "One of them got away and he might be circling back to get the guys you blew up. We don't want to be here when they get back." The girl moved quickly over to the vehicle. The whole back wheel was missing. "Crap. Can this even be fixed?" she asked. The younger hyena, still freaking out a bit, inspected damage frantically. Fixing things seem to calm his nerves a little, but he was visibly shaking. He finally answered, breathless, as he opened the passenger side door.

"I can fix it, but I need to find the wheel. I've got my tools under the seat in the cab." Unadi nodded at this and checked around the immediate area.

"Mihr! Help me find the wheel, you can look from above!" She glanced around, having not realized that she hadn't seen the djinn during that entire ordeal. "Mihr, where did you go?" Unadi then cried out in surprise when she felt the cricket bat in her hand vibrate. She finally took a better look at it. The thing was light-colored wood-like material with three green gems faceted into it, an impossibly beautiful thing for a sports implement. The handle was wrapped in what looked like purple leather to complete the valuable feel to it. The colors used finally suddenly clicked with Unadi as it vibrated again. "Oh! Sorry! I forgot you could do that!" she shouted, tossing the bat. It flickered as if it were a view-screen switching channels, and there was a cricket again. He buzzed upward without a word, eager to get right to the business of getting Unadi out of there. The Mitanni Keeper moved to help Siele if she could. He wiped his eyes, trying to pretend that his distress was not catching up with him.

"It's alright, Siele, it's not too bad, we will get him some help, and then it'll be fine." There was a long sigh as he leaned back

"I could have lost him. Hell, I bet they would have killed all of us if you hadn't-" He was interrupted.

"Found it! Follow Mihr!" The cricket flew into Unadi's face again, making her blow at him with aggravation, which he definitely didn't like. He flew on ahead and Unadi followed, grateful actually not to have to listen to the young hyena lament. She found the wheel, which was surprisingly in decent shape. It was not encouraging to find that it simply popped off because damn near nothing had been holding it on in the first place. She had assumed terrible damage had caused it to come off, but that was not the case. She brought the wheel back hastily and overheard the conversation transpiring with a grunting, agonizing Crisod and his son.

"Ye see there boy? Ya doubt me too much. You doubt me. I told ya she was a'ight, and there you go. She's jist fine. So you kin stop crappin on her now. She ain't yer mom. She coulda turned tail and run, but what did she do? She stayed en whupped up on some Scarrabs." Unadi paused, not wanting to interrupt when she was the topic of conversation.

"I know that dad, but look at you now. If we hadn't gone out like this, you wouldn't be in this mess. We can't possibly finish taking her to Ibia. No way! I'm being serious." He sounded at least a little regretful about that, but Unadi certainly understood. The boy needed to be there for his dad, and there was no telling how many other people would be after him now. The chance that he'd go back to that beat up shack was pretty low. Crisod spoke again.

"I can't take her there, but you can. You know full well that she was just the poke in the right direction. We were gonna have to leave anyway, she just chose the 'which direction' part of it." He winced a bit as his son checked on his leg.

"Dad, there's no freaking way I'm leaving you. Not for her. I will thank her for saving you, but she's got to understand." Unadi approached finally.

Unadi finally interrupted. "It's alright, really." She gave the wheel to Siele who immediately set to work reattaching it. It was tough to say if the little cart would get them far at all. It was missing a few other parts, probably, but she wasn't entirely sure what they were. "I won't ask for further assistance. I was unaware of your quarrel with your colleagues...or rivals. I'd not have had you out in the open like that if I knew. They seemed really angry for just weaseling in on their supplier." She sat down by the old spotted male. He sniffed a bit, his eyes wet. Unadi sighed. These two were impossible.

"I didn't mean to get ya mixed up in all o' this, girl. I honestly didn't think they even knew where to look, much less what we'd be driving. I cost those guys a lot of money, and it was ultimately for nothing." He hung his head.

"The contact didn't pan out?" suggested Unadi.

Crisod shook his dark muzzle slowly. "No, it did... they had a lot o' power cores... the things that go into th' power cells, and my boy got 'em all installed so we were set up to make a ton of cash... but I guess they thought we was gonna just sell them power cores off to th' next higher bidder. They didn't guess we'd actually make cells out of them, because we found out they was duds. Them crystals in them was just sand. If we had sold those to one o' our sources it would have been a right disaster. Unfortunate like, I found out about that contact from listening to those other guys talking at a wine market, an' they musta saw me leaving after I picked up the power cores in Truck, I guess. I didn't realize they was looking for me until one of my other contacts told me about the guys asking around about me. I wish I had just let them have those dud cores." He explained all of this to Unadi, who suddenly had a deeper suspicion that criminals must have had to deal with this underhanded kind of business all the time.

The girl shook her head. "Well, taking Crisod home is a bad idea. Is there anywhere you might be able to go to recover from this? I don't want to leave you on your own out in the open somewhere. I don't bust open heads for nothing." She looked at the two prone individuals, wondering if she did serious damage. She didn't feel like checking either of them. They were going to kill an unarmed senior over money. One even intended worse than that,

whatever that would be, for her. This close to Ibia, she might have gotten herself sold over the border. There was no telling. They probably deserved the injuries.

"I got somewhere I can go, if she still cares." Crisod sat up.

Siele protested loudly, "Oh no way. Not a chance. She'll break your other leg!" Unadi arched an eyebrow. The fact that it was a woman made her think that it could not possibly be that bad. It was more likely a negative opinion that Siele had of her because she was female.

"Is it close?" she queried, unconcerned with what the boy felt about it. They needed help. They needed to get the older hyena safe and she likely needed to rest for the night as well.

"It's maybe two hours with Truck," Crisod stated with a groan. "Siele, we don't have much of a choice. It's the only place we can make it to and you know it. She's even a dab hand with a med kit so it's decided." There was a grunt and some swearing from behind the truck, but it was obvious to Unadi that the older one called the shots. Mihr remained quiet, perhaps having little of value to offer to the situation. This was exactly the kind of toil and stress that probably made no sense to the creature, but he knew enough of how they might react to not make light of it either. He rested in the bed of the truck while it was being worked on.

They moved the vehicle once the wheel was attached much further off the road so as to be hidden and then continued to quietly work after that. With around half an hour more of the younger of the two working on the vehicle, they got the wheel completely back on. He got into the vehicle and with Unadi's help, got the fairly light truck back onto the shoulder of the now much more quiet road. It was terribly late. Crisod was helped to the vehicle and put into the passenger seat. Unadi volunteered to sit in the back after being shown how to switch the power cells. She got in, feeling especially tired. It had, to her, been the longest day she could remember. The vehicle started moving. It moved at nearly half the speed as before. Unadi heard Siele groan from the cab.

"Fuck... Everything... Ever..."

The trip took twice as long, since they moved only half as fast. A lot of the time outside of just how slow the vehicle moved was trying to ease Crisod's pain. This was achieved with ale which allowed him ultimately to sleep. They gave him nearly all that they had brought. Once this was done, the trip was a little more uneventful. The huge cricket-djinn landed on the corner of the crate-like bed of the little truck. Unadi looked at him and smiled.

"Some fun, huh?" she smirked, flicking her slender, muscular tail. The cricket chirped a bit at that. It was hard for her to tell if that was supposed to be some kind of laughter.

"This is living up to be every single thing Mihr warned you about and you still intend to push on. It won't get better, you know." The cricket did not appear angry about this, instead he sounded a bit smug. Even djinn liked to be right, perhaps. Unadi smiled at him.

"You aren't afraid are you?" she asked.

"Of course Mihr is afraid," The djinn chirped.

"Aren't you guys pretty much immortal?" she replied.

"Mihr can take their worst, surely, but Unadi considers this... Mortals can only be hurt so much. If you hurt them enough, their mortality ends the pain. They have a way out, even though this end frightens mortals. Regardless of that fear, the pain stops. Mihr can experience pain, Unadi Singh. And Mihr can hurt more than Unadi would survive. It is okay for Mihr to be fearful." Still, he sounded sage and unafraid even as he said that. Unadi stared at her feet, wet from tromping around in the grass and loamy roadside mud.

"I'm afraid too Mihr. Don't think I'm not. But I can't turn away. Especially now if there's uncontrolled Djinn contracting going on. Thank you for helping me earlier. I'm very impressed how well you worked as a bat. We really knocked those guys out."

"Djinni hit hard." Another happy chirp. He was not feeling bad about the fight.

"Think they're dead?" she verbally pondered somewhat casually. Maybe Djinn had a better way of knowing. She felt silly for being afraid to check if they were. She was not a Keeper to go out and kill people.

"They will live. Unadi hits hard but their heads were harder." He nodded as much as his carapace would allow. Unadi felt a little better, but was sure it would eventually come to blood again where she was going. This was not going to be easy in any way for her.

The ride continued pretty uneventfully and quietly for Unadi and she found herself drifting to sleep now and again, but a jarring motion would always wake her. She would jump, startled, thinking they were being attacked again only to realize it was a pothole or other road feature that the little truck had some difficulty dealing with. Finally, as the sun began to peek over the horizon enough that it was safe to say she'd lived an entire night in this land, they turned in at a long dirt drive, rolling along it between trees through a dense orchard and up to a two-story cottage. It was perhaps the nicest house that Unadi had actually seen since getting here. Her experience has been pretty filtered however. Once the vehicle stopped, she got out and stretched her legs a little. The djinn looked up at Unadi blankly. She stared back at him, not sure what he was waiting for.

"Coming?" she asked.

"It is better if Mihr stays outside. You are going to need to know if someone else shows up." The lizard felt silly for not considering that, but she was utterly exhausted and gave herself a pass. Leaving Mihr outside to watch was the better thing to do. Getting the old hyena inside was the immediately necessary thing to do. It took some work getting Crisod out, but they ultimately did. He needed both Unadi and Siele to help him but they got him on the porch and up to the door. Unadi rapped on it loudly. It took a little while as the occupant of the house was probably asleep but there came an answer at the other side of the door.

"Go away, I've got nothing for you." The voice was that of an older female. Crisod called to the speaker.

"It's me! It's Crisod!" he shouted.

"I know darn well who it is. Anubis can have ya, I don't need ya." Her answer was blunt. Unadi sighed and rolled her eyes. She was *not* terribly surprised.

"I'm injured. I need help!" the older hyena shouted back.

"That's not surprising. Cheatin' honest folk will get you a name. Cheatin' dishonest folk will apply that name to a headstone." She kicked the door from inside.

"Please, Shandhi, we really need help!" It was Siele who called this time. The door was jerked open, causing all three to nearly fall into the house.

"Siele! Why didn't you say your boy was with you - come! Come!" Unadi could see now that the occupant of the house was a rather stately gazelle lady more typical to Pryyus. She was more than a head taller than any of the other three. She wore a very embarrassingly fuzzy baby blue house robe of some kind. Her markings were still vibrant suggesting she was not as old as Crisod, but she was certainly much older than Siele. She looked with some skepticism with her warm brown eyes at Unadi who was a long way from her home as well. She then turned her attention to Crisod.

"Shandhi, his leg's broke, he's been cut," the younger hyena complained. He helped his father sit down on the couch.

"Whoa! Some manners, you two!" The gazelle pitched a thick towel onto the couch before the injured spotted male could even be stretched out. She grumbled something about men and went to get water and more towels from her kitchen.

"Is there anything I can do to help?" Unadi asked.

"Who's that one?" Shandhi demanded of Crisod accusingly.

"She ain't mine – ow!" He cried out as she pulled and turned his broken leg. The reptilian female winced at that. This lady was not gentle at all. The way she seemed to show aggravation over the other female in the room made her think that there might have been a thing between them at one time that went sour.

"Is she the one that's getting you into trouble? How has she not arrested you yet?" the gazelle wondered, wrapping the leg and splinting it carefully.

"No, she's the one that saved me! She's not a Keeper, she just dresses like that to keep folks at distance!" he barked in agony.

"Well, she's no judge of character!" laughed the lady gazelle. Unadi frowned at that. She was giving the older male such a hard time, but was obviously actually helping him. It was a little confusing to watch. She then turned to the younger hyena and pulled him by the cheeks up against her to give him a hug which mashed his face right into fuzzy-robe-covered breasts. He struggled a bit but she gripped him tight, seeming to delight in his embarrassment. She then released him finally and moved back into the kitchen. It was hard to see what she was doing. She had a knife, and she was heating it up.

"They were escorting me north." She indicated the hyenas as she leaned against a wall a little, not wanting to sit her wet butt down on anything. "Some of Crisod's old acquaintances wanted to negotiate some things about dead hyenas and the like, and it got out of hand. He needs to rest and recover somewhere before he gets away from this area and hopefully things calm down. They won't be happy with any of us for a while."

"Why am I not surprised?" she groaned. She came back in and unwrapped the older vulpine's arm. "Cris, baby, this is going to hurt your arm, bite on this." She picked up his other arm and put it in his mouth. He removed his arm and then roared with pain as a very, very hot knife was pressed to his split flesh to disinfect the outside before a cleansing oil was poured into the deep gash, making the wound begin bleeding freely again. Siele helped hold the older hyena down. He had been right; she seemed to know what she was doing. After a lot of swearing and a bit more alcohol and some rest breaks, they had everything in order as best it could be and Crisod was left on the couch. Unadi found herself starting to drift where she was actually standing in the living room of the house. The lady gazelle took the reptilian girl by the arm, leading her out of the kitchen. She stumbled along.

"Oh, sorry about that... been a long night, as you can tell." Unadi mumbled as she gazed blearily back in the direction of the two hyenas. She worried that she was going to get the third degree from the very obviously protective and matronly gazelle. She pushed Unadi back against the wall hard, knocking a picture down.

"Girl, I don't know where you think you are going, but things are getting bad around here, even this far south. You would be well advised to go back where you came from. I don't like to seem mean, but it's getting dangerous. There's bad things happening around and the Magistrate isn't sending patrols outwards like they used to. People are getting worried and they got reason. If you really did save their lives, I don't want you throwing yours away, you understand?" she grunted.

"What kind of bad things are happening?" Unadi whispered cautiously.

"They said you weren't no Keeper, but you shore ask questions like one." She narrowed her eyes at the girl who felt her heart fall to her feet.

"Keepers aren't the only ones who want to know what's going on around them." Unadi looked sternly back at her.

"Very well, I will tell you what I *do* know. People heading South. A lot of 'em. And some of those people are in pretty bad shape." Unadi widened her eyes at that.

"Folks fleeing Ibia? I thought they had things under control with the war. Are things falling apart internally there?" she pressed.

"These ain't Ibians, love." She leaned back again. "These are Altaan natives, from the north by the river. No one's sayin' Ibian invasion, but there's someone out there causing real trouble and taking advantage of the fear about Ibia keeping any real guard force back away from the border. Altaan doesn't want to provoke war so nothing's getting done. This trouble's gonna spread. It's not good." Unadi glanced down. She was not expecting to run into real trouble without even getting into Ibia. She wondered if she could make it there without help. That was certainly what she was going to need to do. Still, for the moment...

"I will have to use caution, but I still have to head north. It's very, very important. It's worth the risk, I assure you." She looked away, feeling bad that she could not talk about it.

"What is it; I will tell you if it's worth the risk." Shandhi's words were very confident. Unadi went to answer to simply say that she could not talk about the issue.

"I am sorry, but you must understand what I have to do - ...". She got cut off.

"Oh, that ain't worth the risk." The stern look from the lady gazelle made it obvious she was going to interrupt no matter what the Mitanni girl stated.

"Would it be alright if I stayed for a little while and rested here before heading on my way?" Unadi asked this reverently to show that she did not want to impose, but she was not going to argue whether she should or should not continue. She would continue no matter what. She would do it even if she were alone. Things were getting out of hand, even in this place, and people were suffering or afraid. Everything that Unadi believed in strongly was threatened by the fact that the Keepers were not involved. There was a pause while Shandhi gave the girl a very long look, seeming to try to appraise her. She finally sighed softly and nodded to the door just to Unadi's right.

"Guest bed is there. Family hasn't been to visit in a year, might as well let someone roll around on the spiders. Enjoy. I'll check on your spotty friends." She turned and left Unadi in the hall. She reluctantly turned and opened the door, really expecting to see a very horrible scene of an unkempt bedroom inside, but it was on par with some of the nicer inns where she had stayed. The gazelle was being cheeky about it. Still, the wary lizard girl did check for spiders, feeling silly with how clean everything had been kept. She felt bad for imposing as she slipped out of her soiled clothes and into the bed. She felt guilty for knowing that the hyenas who tried to help her were going to have it rough for a while when she was just going to leave them and continue north. She felt sad that Shandhi, who had just met her would worry at all about her. And then, Unadi felt absolutely nothing as she fell fast asleep.

There was a very gentle tap at the door that woke Unadi. At first, she felt like she was back in her small and simple quarters in Aurora, but the plushness of that bed reminded her that she was certainly not at home. She rolled into the soft, puffy down, feeling quite warm, relaxed and safe. She suddenly wondered to herself if continuing north right away was really necessary. Surely it would be understandable for a Keeper to keep watch over the two hyenas for just a bit.

She then sat up and rubbed her eyes a little, finding the room was a bit dark. She had slept all day? She shook her head.

"I'm up!" she called out, pulling her blanket up to her chest for modesty as the door clicked and opened. She was glad she had done so - it was Siele.

"You've been traveling a bit before you even ran into us, huh?" he asked. She nodded at that. "Still wanting to go north? I've been hearing some rotten things about it." He sat on the edge of the bed.

"I have to. I don't particularly fancy the thought, but it's what I have to do." She stared at the window. The sun was still up, but just barely.

"I'm gonna take you the rest of the way to Ibia, as promised. My father insisted." He leaned back a little.

"Someone needs to take care of him. I can continue on my own. It won't be as easy, but so far it's not been easy to begin with," Unadi admitted.

"I turned into a pup when I should have been protecting my dad, Unadi. I need to get away from him a little and get my head straight. You are a fighter, I saw you. You stay cool and you don't back down. You travel with a damned djinni for Ra's sake. Maybe you will say this stuff doesn't come easy for you, but it's easier for you than it is for me. I don't think you will ever know what it feels like to fail someone as bad as I did back there. I can't even look at him lying there all busted up, Unadi. I need to finish this mission. Not for you. Not for him. For me."

"Siele, you have to know that there's a reason I've not been sharing much information about this with you."

"Because you figure if I knew, I wouldn't have been willing to take you," he answered darkly.

"Well, you assume right," Unadi replied, her tone even more blunt.

The hyena shook his head and stood up. "Please let me come with you. I doubt we're likely to have to fight those guys again, they have no idea where we are going and even if they knew... they sure as hell won't be following us in." He looked hopeful. Unadi rubbed her temples a bit before realizing the blanket was shifting down. She pulled it back in place before anything of interest could be revealed. She was normally not so shy but Siele acted almost naïve, so she felt she needed to be more modest around him. He also appeared to dislike women in general. No need to be repulsive to him. She would try one more time to discourage him..

"You are not likely to have much fun traveling with me. I know you don't particularly like me." She crossed her arms over the top of her knees as she sat up a bit more. "We won't always get along and the trip probably still won't be easy, if we're dodging detection." He nodded. "If you *really* want to do this, if you really need to do this, I will have you escort me. I don't know the way and I do need the help. But if at any time things really, really go bad, I will have you head back. I am not going to risk your blood over my just not knowing the way. I'm suited to this sort of thing; I obviously have done these dangerous things before," she lied openly. "We can take Truck a bit further, but we will not want to be on any open roads. Back roads and farm roads only for a bit at least, alright?" Siele nodded. Unadi thought a bit. "And your father? Do you trust your father will be okay here?" she inquired.

"Shandhi's scarier than you are!" he laughed nervously. "She and dad are friends from back before he even met my mom. We came out here with her originally, but the farm life was just not for dad. So while she gets mad at him all the time, I know it's because she cares. She won't make it easy on him here and I bet he'll be ready to have those other smugglers finish the job by the time I come back for him, but he will be safe here, I think." The younger hyena nodded at this. Unadi pointed to the door.

"Well, if you intend to go, get out so I can get dressed. We will get some supplies if we can, and we can head out under cover of darkness tonight." She gave a sleepy smile at Siele and he held up his hands and turned around, moving to the door.

"I won't put you out, I promise. I will do better if we run into trouble. I'm sorry if it's stressful." He opened the door.

"Siele," The Mitanni girl called out to him.

"Yes?" he asked.

"If you apologize to me again... You are going to run into trouble." Siele gritted his teeth and ducked into the hall. Unadi got dressed hastily, happy to find out that in over 12 hours of slumber her clothing was completely dry. It did not possess the most floral fragrance at this point, but it was tolerable. She opened the door and went into the hallway and was almost bowled over by the smell of food. She figured that was why Siele was not in the hall waiting for her. When she got downstairs she found everyone sitting at the table munching on what appeared to be a creamy soup. She did not care what was in it, it smelled absolutely amazing. The fact that she'd eaten nothing since leaving Aurora had a lot to do with her opinion of food at that moment.

"You were uninjured when you got here, but I started to think you died anyway once you got upstairs, girl," Shandhi doled out some soup into a deep earthenware bowl for Unadi. The reptilian girl grinned at that.

"Been a long trip," she offered, taking her wide, flat spoon. The gazelle spoke again warmly.

"So you said. No matter though, it gave everyone a chance to rest because I suppose you'd have darted right out the door the moment you got up otherwise. You are welcome to stay the night if you like." She was very urgent in her offer, appearing to already know what Unadi intended to do. The girl even considered it a moment. It would give their possible pursuers a harder time placing exactly where they would be on their journey, and it would give Unadi more rest, but she felt like the longer she stayed in this house, the harder facing the dangers that remained to be faced outside of the house would be. She fled Aurora knowing that she would be under pressure there, and had kept moving once here because there was nowhere for her to really stay, but this temptation might be a tough one to pass up. She shook her head at the notion.

"Sadly, I need to head out. I cannot stay long anywhere because it makes it harder to do what I have to do." The older gazelle rubbed her chin as she regarded Unadi skeptically.

"Just how far north are you going, girl?" she pushed, obviously having a sense of the weight of the story Unadi was telling.

"Too far," she stated cryptically.

"This sounds worse the more I talk to you about it, and I don't want to pry further but..." She was cut off by Crisod.

"She's going to Ibia. And it's important. And you can wind up all the conspiracies you want about it, but you make sure all those thoughts have Unadi on our side, Shandhi." He thumped the table to add the weight of punctuation on the statement. Unadi glanced back from him to Shandhi, who was openly surprised at the intensity of Crisod's defense. The gazelle looked back at Unadi and gripped her own horns like she was trying to pull them out. She spoke in exasperation.

"By Ra's golden eye, girl, do you know what Ibians do to women from other places if they can-"

"Yes, I have been given a clue to that, but I have to do this. It's more important than I am willing to discuss. Knowing about it puts you and me both at risk." She paused to continue to enjoy her delicious soup. It was good enough that even the topic of discussion did not detract from it. She wondered how long such a soup might keep on the road. It was creamy, so probably not long. She savored a bit more.

"I'm going with her," Siele deadpanned.

"*You WHAT?!*" fairly screamed the gazelle, standing up so fast she nearly tipped over her soup.

"I told him he could. Unadi doesn't know the way like we do, we been there a bunch, and he's only taking her as far as our contact there. Then that contact can help her as much as is possible from there." Crisod seemed to know that Shandhi would be opposed to his son going even if he'd been plenty of times before.

"It's alright, it's probably safer there for me than here with how much dad screws things up with the local ... businessmen." Siele rolled his eyes.

"You have got to be kidding!" Shandhi stated. "By Anubis' ears, if you think I'm gonna let you go traipsing off into that place with the shit going on in that country!" She crossed her arms as if daring him to even get up from the table. Unadi had not suspected she would be that protective of him.

"I am going to go, even if you don't care for it, Shandhi, I'm sorry but I won't break a promise. You wouldn't want me to break a promise, would you?" he asked.

"Boy, I will tie you to a bed!" She fairly shouted. Her features then mellowed a bit as she reflected on that in a way that made Crisod and Siele both visibly embarrassed.

"I really do need the help. I would not allow it at all if I did not," Unadi said.

"You get no say in this, girl!" Shandhi shouted.

"Why are you being so difficult about this, Shan?" demanded Crisod. "You know the boy's been in Ibia a dozen times or more. We traded there a lot last year.

"You mean smuggled out of there," she grunted back at the older male. "And things are deteriorating in there fast. I might have begrudgingly allowed it before, but not now." She thumped the table with her fist.

"It's no different," Siele urged her, wanting to leave on good terms since she would be caring for his father obviously.

"I... You... You haven't heard it have you?" she bemoaned incredulously. She sat down again. Unadi leaned forward. Information was a good thing. She wanted information.

"Not everything you hear out of there is true," Crisod stated, apparently already doubting whatever she was about to share.

"Maybe, but a good bit of it is too, and if you have good sources, and you know who to talk to, you can have it on pretty good authority. Now, mind you, I'm not normally given to fantastic stories about crazy things that are unlikely but..." Crisod made an expression that suggested she might be, and Siele buried his face in his folded arms on the table. "I heard that before the war started a bunch of Ibians snatched up two researchers from a university in Horizon City because they had removed some valuable things from a lost temple in the tiny peninsula in northern Euria." Crisod looked at his soup, munching, but Siele lifted his head with some interest.

"This one's pretty specific," the younger hyena stated.

"I had a good source," Shandhi replied softly, but smugly. "Anyway, the local Magistrate did not want to create unwarranted conflict with Ibia because it was clear that Ibian law had been broken by the research group. They did have items smuggled through Ibia."

"I thought that Ibia had been pretty lawless, why did they care about Eurian artifacts?" asked Unadi. This was exactly the kind of story she wanted to hear. Shandhi seemed happy that she was so intent.

"I'm getting to that, girl," Shandhi answered. "Now, you're right, most of those kind of laws they don't really jump up and down about in there, they are much deeper on the keeping the general population under control by brute force if they have to. Most know Ibia is like that, but this time, I think it's more about *what* they took. Apparently, they had a Waystone. One that was old, maybe forgotten, and unregistered." She deepened her voice as she said this. She was unaware that Unadi understood the implications all too well, and the Mitanni girl played this up.

"What does that matter? There's a bunch of old stones in government hands. I bet there must be fifty of them in Aurora." She was not kidding in the least there. "You lock them up to keep them out of the hands of crazy people. I don't blame Ibia for snatching those researchers if they were smuggling stones out without getting the governing body involved. That could be disastrous!"

She thought about the professor at the school that had been burned down. That scenario was suspiciously congruent to what was known about the incident. It may have been how such a thing happened.

"What does it matter? Girl, if the wrong people get even one stone, they can wreck an entire city. It's hard to take someone out when they have the power of a god in their hands. There are a good many stones with real destructive power that were lost after the old war, so everyone gets uncomfortable when a new stone is found. People that get them... if they aren't

good people... they tend to do really bad things with that power. This is historical fact." She took some more soup to let that sink in.

The Mitanni girl spoke again. "So... I don't see where this is making Ibia bad. They sound like they were perfectly right to get that stone back and keep it from going who knows where. They might be a bit rough for our liking, but they do keep their country under control." Unadi wanted to make it look less like she was directly interested in the stones and what was going on with them, but wanted to make sure that Shandhi told her everything she had heard. Even if there was no grain of truth in any of it, the fact that researchers, attached to some school somewhere, were smuggling stones, made her immediately and completely interested in the situation. There had to be some bit of genuine fact in it with how specific some of the information was.

"That alone don't make Ibia bad, no, but what happened after is the bigger story." Shandhi sat back. "See, kinda suspicious don't you think, that six weeks after they find an old and undiscovered stone, Emperor Suo decided, without any provocation, to stomp the absolute fluff out of the poor peaceful Eurians. Does that make much sense to you?" asked Shandhi.

"He had evidence that there were stones, possibly very dangerous ones, in their country. Maybe the researchers stated that a bunch of them were still there, taken by Euria and Suo demanded they be registered and they refused?" offered Unadi. She wanted to make sure that she seemed objective. Shandhi huffed.

"It's Euria, girl. They are as sweet and peaceful as can be. If Suo had wanted anything they would have given it to him to avoid conflict. He attacked first to keep them from being able to hide anything, you have to be sure." Unadi nodded at that. She was aware. Most who discussed the war among the Keepers spoke of it the same way. There was no good reason for Suo to attack them. The gazelle continued. "Regardless, Suo changed so quickly. He stopped caring that much about what happened in his own country and smugglers and thieves were rushing in to fill the void in the southern regions. This was evident even by the fact that Crisod seemed to have little trouble finding work there. He was obviously not a registered merchant in Ibia.

"So they are thinking that he suddenly got greedy about finding more stones?" Unadi inquired, knowing full well that was not the angle that Shandhi was approaching. To verify that suspicion, the gazelle spoke.

"No, they are saying that Suo is now mixed up with one of the Old Gods, and maybe he is not so much the one in power anymore." She somewhat whispered this last part. Unadi leaned in closer to the more quietly speaking gazelle. "Now, I don't usually talk about things that might be hearsay..." she continued in a raspy tone, "... But I hear that there's now more than one stone, and that there's real trouble there. I hear there's even djinn that are starting to emerge in Ibia. Some real dark numbers too." Unadi leaned back.

"That doesn't make sense. Ibians dislike the Djinn." She knew this for certain.

"Half true. They don't like using the Djinn for their power the way most of the eastern world does now. They don't have many qualms about using them in a fight if they have the right ones. It's just that no one's had the spine to pick a fight with those guys in so long that no one remembers that they used Djinni for that. Hell, there hasn't been a war against those dogs since Djinni power and power cells even became a thing. Everyone just knows that the energy

process was banned there and figure they merely hate Djinn.” She took another sip of her soup. That actually made a bit of sense to Unadi, as she recalled that she had not heard specifically that they banned djinn only that they would not use Djinn power. They had, in places, electricity. It was suspected that they had another way to generate it but there was little investigation into it as it was not widespread.

“So you are thinking that Suo is getting ready to start a war... a really big war because he’s being controlled by some old god?” Unadi pressed nervously. This was a lot worse possibility than the one that she had originally come out here for. She furrowed her brow a bit and her little spines flared up a bit on top of her head. This was much worse news. She hoped very deeply that it was not as bad as that. The greater likelihood was still that someone else had gotten control of one of those dark stones. That would be bad enough without the person who had gotten the stone and succumbed to a dark god being in charge of one of the largest and most powerful militaries in the world.

“Some people think that. Pretty dependable people too. You see of course why I would rather my boy Siele not go out there.” She crossed her arms again.

“I’m still going,” he stated solidly.

“Damn it Siele, do you want to be alive tomorrow?!” Shandhi shouted, holding her horns in both hands again which she seemed to do when she was upset.

“She saved dad and she saved me. Least I can do is escort her over the border. It’s the first town once you get into Ibia. My contact will be glad to help her from there.” He seemed to remain calm and collected when faced with an angry gazelle, Unadi noted.

“Wait... This contact of yours... Is he Ibian?” she asked bluntly.

“Yep,” Siele answered equally bluntly.

“And you will have him help Unadi?” she grunted as if with a mouthful of bile.

“That’s the plan.” The younger hyena answered with a little bit of poorly covered impatience. He turned up his soup bowl, finishing his soup. Unadi did the same. The gazelle stood up like a bolt.

“That’s a fucking *debt*, Siele!” she practically wailed, shocking all three a little.

“It would be my son’s debt, *his* favor, not hers!” Crisod corrected. “They’ll be fine. And our contact is pretty Eastern-leanin’, he will be good to ‘em both.” He finished his own soup. “I trust my son and I trust Unadi. I knows her intentions there are good. She’s gotta go, and the boy’s gonna help her, and that’s that. Siele will be right back once this is good an’ done and we can rest a little, or head for the hills, whichever you think is necessary.” He dabbed his lips with his good arm, the other aching terribly and remaining in a sling for the time being.

“I *don’t* like this. This makes me very unhappy.” The gazelle seemed hurt in saying that.

“I do not tread upon your feelings lightly, Shandhi,” Siele stated calmly. “But I gotta do this. If you knew what it meant in my heart, you’d not even ask otherwise.” There was a long

sigh from the gazelle and she nodded slowly, relenting. She got up and left the room. Unadi spoke softly.

"I'm so sorry I've caused so much friction here. I would not ask if I did not really need it." She wanted to make that known, at least that she knew the necessity and understood the meaning of the help that they were given. There was little mind given to her even saying that because the gazelle returned to the room right after she said that with a small cloth bag. She shook it a little and a light shuffling sound was made from it. Crisod inquired curiously,

"What is that?" Siele, who was closer, tilted his head up and his nostrils flared.

"Is... is that what I think it is?" he asked. The gazelle grinned warmly.

"What are you thinking it is?" she inquired with a disarmingly tender voice.

"Some of Mama Shandhi's candies." He grinned at the bag. Unadi perked right up. She was terribly fond of sweets and after what had transpired she had not considered that those would be an option for her to even suggest. The scent of sugar and chocolate hit her as well. She fished one of the candies out of the bag and gave it directly to Unadi. She held it in her hand curiously. She had not seen a candy quite like it. There was a clear crystallized sugar shell around what appeared to be dark and savory smooth chocolate. The scent of some kind of spice was present in the chocolate too, though she could not really place it. It smelled divine. She popped it in her mouth and closed her eyes as the flavor overtook her entire body, making her tense a bit. It was unduly decadent and almost sexual in its total lustful conquering of her body. She ultimately gave a full body shiver and flopped her chest upon the table, hands on both of her cheeks as she suckled what remained of the candy.

"Someone likes sweets," Crisod rumbled smugly.

"Take the bag with you. Use them sparingly, but they will give you some energy when you are feeling down, I assure you. My mom used to make these. They will be right fine for you and Spots there too," she noted. She handed the bag to Unadi. She immediately handed the cloth sack to Siele.

"Oh by the light of Ra, no, if I'm holding this they won't likely make it out the door," she laughed. Siele took the bag and placed it safely in his own pack. Unadi looked at Shandhi worshipfully. That was a hell of a gift to part with.

Nearly the next hour and a half were spent just talking about very little at all, exchanging some stories and laughing and being a bit more relaxed since the friction seemed to pass. The gazelle seemed to know a lot of rumors about public officials and the kind of things that Unadi knew were common place but that got blown out of proportion once they got down to the civilian level. She dismissed much of it but here and there Shandhi seemed to have gotten hold of information that Unadi knew to be true, and not the kind of thing that should have been common knowledge, which only worried her more.

After a few hours of talking, Shandhi was certain that it was time for Crisod to rest and for the others to head out. Siele got a lot of squeezing from the gazelle, of course. This he expected and was not disappointed by. There was a bit of tearfulness, but he assured her that he would be okay and that Unadi would not let anything happen to him either, which Shandhi was skeptical of. Finally, the two of them headed back outside and the lantern on the porch was

blown out to fully signify that it was bed time. Shandhi assured the pair that she was not likely to sleep anyway, but it would be an attempt. Siele and Unadi found the cricket djinn Mihr to be awake, sitting on top of the bed of Truck. He chirped gladly to see them, and remained in the bed of the vehicle as it started up. The long trip from where the wreck had occurred and the farm house had proven it to be a stable ride and Mihr was a little more comfortable with the thought of riding in it. Fortunately in the time that Unadi was asleep Siele was able to fix the truck so that it ran at its normal, still pretty slow pace.

The journey started out pretty quietly as Unadi was tumbling ideas around in her head about what it was that she was likely to be facing, and Siele was watching over his shoulder pretty much the whole time once they got back onto the main road. They finally reached a point where he knew that, for a time he would be able to move along on farm roads and stay out of the main traffic. This made him more comfortable and he was a bit more willing to talk. He mostly talked about his home and his former places that he lived. Obviously he was not purely used to living in a shantytown, but he appeared to have lived there long enough. He knew a lot of folks in that general area and claimed that most were pretty decent and hardworking, but there were quite a few that were not particularly interested in working, or doing much at all...which was more than likely their reason for being there. It was easily midnight by the time they got forty or fifty miles away from the house. The truck pulled into a little inlet kind of road that dead-ended between two trees. Unadi was a little wary at first as they rolled to a stop there, glancing behind her, wondering if the cautious hyena has spotted something that she had failed to. There was no one else there.

"Everything alright?" she asked curiously.

"Yeah, I need to count how many power cells we got left. We may not have enough for the full trip that are charged up because of how hot I was having to burn it when we were running, and we did run on half-speed that whole side trip to Shandhi's place. We can camp for a bit while we are here since I didn't sleep all day like you did. I'll need a little rest. You can doze while we drive but I can't," he laughed at that. Unadi nodded and got out, finding that there was a little clearing in a very dense grove where the truck had been parked. It was as if this site was routinely used for camping. The gleaming stars filled the night sky, the ground having dried a bit since it had not rained while she slept. The sun was no longer warming the land, so it was getting cooler. Mihr buzzed up to the top of a tree.

"Mihr will be lookout still. It is nice how quiet it is outside of the city," he stated. Unadi felt better that at least the Djinn was getting a little enjoyment out of it. She pondered rewarding him with candy later, but could not for the life of her think of what the Djinn might like to eat in the first place. She glanced back to find Siele making a small fire. The wood litter about was not sufficient to make a roaring bonfire and he didn't care to have it like that anyway in case folks were out being nosey. No vehicles had passed this way the entire time that they had been off the road however. The hyena moved over to 'Truck' and got a pack from the back. Untying it, he took out a thick, warm-looking bedroll. He unrolled it and poked at the fire a bit. He looked back at Unadi.

"You know... I don't think I saw you with a pack. You just like sleeping under the stars?" he posed curiously. Unadi frowned at that. She had originally intended to pick up some supplies in Horizon City but things had happened so fast that she could not justify it. She knew how to survive off the land, so a lean-to would have been sufficient for her. She liked the look of that bedroll though. Apparently, the hyenas knew how to assemble a go pack. She then inwardly chastised herself. She could have just asked for Crisod's pack and taken that. She

was so distracted by the story that the gazelle had told her that it was the farthest thing from her mind. She was not thinking about anything else for half the trip to this point. It would have been silly for her to suggest they turn back if it was already likely that they did not have enough power cells to make the full trip.

Unadi rested by the fire for a bit, watching the world around her, listening and smelling the warm scent of burning brush, but after a bit she did not care to keep dumping fuel on the fire because she had to wander around in the cooler air to find things for the fire to burn. This apparently also kept Siele awake as he finally looked up at Unadi and stated softly,

"I know Mitanni don't particularly care for colder nights. You guys come from some place warm, right? You can have my bedroll if you want. It's a bit nicer, I promise." Unadi actually considered that a moment, because she really was getting miserable. She was not aware how cool it got on this continent at night. Would it be worse where they were going? They were heading more and more away from the tropics. She could deal with cold weather, she had done it before, but she always had the ability to take a break back when she was there. It was more of a pleasure excursion than a necessity to deal with it. She then shook her head, sighing a bit.

"No, I should have brought my own, or even asked your dad for his. I won't punish you for my inability to plan this out. I'll be okay." The hyena sat up slightly.

"It's alright, I swear. I have fur, right?" he ruffled his chest a bit. Unadi had not realized he had even removed his shirt. She blushed in spite of herself when she considered what it must be like to cuddle up to someone soft and warm with fur. She was not completely without such experience with other reptilian Mitanni, but never with someone soft. She shook the idea right out of her head.

"No, I couldn't. You are already risking life and limb for escorting me out. It's enough. Please rest, I will keep watch a bit, and Mihr is up in the tree outside the circle, he's watching the road. We're fine." Unadi hugged her legs and tried to look a bit tougher. She didn't care if the hyena had cried in front of her, and completely fell apart during the fight, she did not want to seem incapable in front of him. He dropped back down reluctantly, and Unadi rested her chin on her knees. She considered what kinds of places she would see. She considered the fact that she had never even seen the Ibians face to face.

She'd seen pictures - they were almost canine...but there was something oddly Pryyan about their snouts. Large, fierce, and quite regal, but they were rumored to be wholly brutal. She pondered if she could reason with them at all, or if they might be fine with the kind of things their Emperor was doing if it turned out that he had fallen unsavory with an old god. Would they care, or would they feel they were on the righteous side? Would she be pulled apart for even asking a question about it? She found herself very noticeable in her shivering and tried to force herself to quit it but it was too late, Siele had already seen it.

"Why won't you just take the bed? You aren't used to the cold. I'm actually kind of roasting in here." He fanned himself a bit with his thick downy bedroll cover. Unadi glared at him. Was he actually bragging about how warm he was in front of her?

"I won't rob you of your bedroll, I said. Now go to sleep!" she snapped. She then sighed again, feeling worse that the cold made her irritable. A little bit of time passed before she heard Siele's voice again.

"You don't have to rob me of it if that's all you are really worried about it. It might be a bit close, but there's enough room for both of us. Don't go being offended, but it's stupid for you to sit out there in the cold if you just don't have to." He sat up a little more. An immediate tug of war went on in Unadi's head. What he offered was a perfectly simple solution, but she did not want to impose on him worse than she already was. The trip had been disastrous for his family already; she didn't like begging more of him. On top of that, she knew how he felt about women in general and she was playing right into the stereotype he seemed to hold that they imposed on males all the time and only care about themselves.

"I know you have little reason to like me Siele. Women have kinda sucked for you growing up. I don't want me being selfish and pushing you around to add to that," she explained.

"The offer stands if you change your mind, Unadi. I... I don't hate you. You didn't do any of that stuff to me. It's wrong to act like you did." With that, he rolled over, snuggling down into the quilted bedroll. Unadi stared longingly at its puffy form over that heap of hyena-shape underneath. She made it another ten minutes at best before, shuddering heavily, she stood up. The red jacket and shorts that she had put on in the warm city of Aurora were a poor choice for where she ended up. She was such an amateur. She sighed and murmured softly.

"Scoot. I want in." The hyena turned and looked up at the greenish blue lady reptilian standing over him. He rolled onto his opposite side and held up the corner of the bedroll. She gazed at his bare chest and blushed again. She decided not to insult him by insisting that he put on a shirt. She slipped into the lightly padded bedroll. It was nothing like the bed she had been in earlier in the day. That was a dream. Still, this was immediately better than the cold. She was completely unprepared for how warm the mammal inside was, also. He was right - he was an oven in that bedroll. Unadi could not help but immediately push against him to soak up his warmth. He allowed this without a word, even as she pushed her head against his single pillow. She again wordlessly chastised herself, but she could not help it. Her entire body wanted to be warm.

"Hah..." she sighed finally, feeling a bit better. "You weren't kidding about how warm you make it. I feel stupid for sitting over there freezing my ass off as long as I did." She stretched a bit and realized that one of his arms has moved over her middle. Was he holding her? Hugging her? Were they actually cuddling there in the dark grove together? She blushed a bit but said nothing. He had a shit day of a sort he was not trained to handle. She would allow it. She could not sleep, however. This was likely because she had slept all day.

"Do you dislike Rasci folks at all, Unadi?" the spotty male finally broke the long silence. She felt bad immediately because she thought maybe her not sleeping may have kept him awake.

"Why would you ask that?" she inquired.

"You seem uncomfortable. Or restless. I dunno." He sat up a little, but his arm remained over the girl's firm middle. She made a mental note of this, but spoke anyway.

"I'm not uncomfortable, though this is different from my usual sleeping arrangements, certainly. Don't forget I slept like... all day," she noted. He chuckled a bit.

"I stayed busy, so I guess I forgot about that. Fixing Truck and all." He rested his head on his hand as he regarded Unadi. "I've never even seen a Mitanni girl like you outside of just passing on the street." She looked over at the hyena and put a hand over his upon her own tummy. Her fingers interlaced with his to make it clear she was not going to push it away as she felt him become immediately tense. Had he not consciously realized that he was holding her?

"Do I seem strange to you now that you see me close up? No soft hair for you to feel against you, bare features, no ear-flap things... Does it seem unbecoming?" she inquired curiously. She had never outright asked one of the other races directly how they felt about Mitanni, but she knew a lot of them kind of kept their distance because of how different they really were. At least most of the other races were not completely smooth to the touch. But, she couldn't really relate to, she didn't know... shedding perhaps?

"At first you did, sure, but I guess your actions paint a different picture for me now." Siele spoke softly, leaning forward, pushing his chest against Unadi's shoulder as his hand gripped hers a little tighter. She felt her heart speed up. She did not dare admit to herself what this felt like. She was not without experience, but nothing like this. Nothing that felt so taboo and surrounded by danger.

"I hope it's a prettier picture than what others of my gender have painted," she murmured, smiling at the brown and coal male beside her.

"Don't get me wrong, I've had a girlfriend before, back in Horizon. I don't hate all girls, though she turned out to be a bad idea too..." He rubbed his ear a bit thinking about that. "But it's not like I just go around hating women, Unadi. I just... don't trust easy is all." He stared into her red eyes intently. Unadi inhaled slowly, moving her hand from his upon her tummy and letting her fingertips wander through the soft, cream-toned fur along his chest. She had touched people who had fur before, sure, but not like this. Not with the intention of actually feeling them.

"Do you trust me then?" pressed Unadi. She felt she knew. And the whole time, she knew she was violating his trust. She wasn't what he thought she was. He didn't seem to care.

"Yes," he answered in a whisper, his nose moving closer to hers. She was not cold anymore, of that she was absolutely certain.

"Good. I want you to be able to trust me. I hope I never let you down," Unadi said in a similar level of whisper. There was a tense silence before a slight shuddering breath from the hyena ended in whispered speech.

"Unadi, can I kiss you?" The question seemed so innocent to her, but it made sense that he felt it might be the kind of thing he needed to get permission before he tried, he'd seen her fight. She spoke back in whisper, fingers still pushing back and forth in pillowy cream-toned chest-ruff.

"Siele, that's not the kind of thing you ask someone. It's what you do when you can." She wanted to sound sage but thought she might have dropped the ball on it.

"How do I know if I can?" he queried in full seriousness.

"You don't. You never know. That's what makes it exciting." She proved herself bolder again by lifting her head slightly, tilting it and cupping her mouth to his muzzle. His own body

pushed tighter to hers and his tongue wasted absolutely no time slipping in and becoming intimate with every corner of her slightly smaller maw. She sucked in a desperate breath through her small nostrils. Was she insane? What in the world made her do this? Was it the fact that she was in danger and might not get such a chance again? Was this a last act of living a partially normal life? She just pushed those thoughts right out of her mind completely when she felt a strong but cautious dark-toned hand clutch one of her breasts with more than mere curiosity. Well, Siele definitely did not hate Mitanni girls now.

“Err...” He seemed to pause when Unadi did, and the girl realized that she might have spooked him by stopping when he put his hand on her chest. She grinned at the hyena and leaned in close.

“See, not so difficult to find out whether or not you can, right?” she growled melodically. He inhaled deeply as he gave a rolling grip of that flesh upon her chest. She moved a powerful thigh between his own, letting her hip brush up against his swelling desire. She felt a thrill run through her with the taboo of this unexpected situation and she all but forgot the watchful djinn in the tree. He was looking outward, not inside the camp, so a little fun in the bedroll would probably not be noticed...hopefully. Siele pushed his mouth against hers and kissed hungrily again, tongue arching and grinding desperately against her own. His mouth tasted a little smoky from whatever he'd been snacking on as they drove; she hadn't asked. She felt the hem of her hoodie pulled upward a little. Her face heated in a blush as she nodded to the hyena and helped him get the garment off of her, leaving her blue and bare from the waist up.

Siele took a moment to obviously marvel at a rather athletic and sculpted female form. Her chest, while not enormous, was still quite plentiful and youthfully firm. Despite not having a great deal of experience, the Mitanni girl knew this attribute was one of her most attractive, so she arched her back a little, shoulders up to present those mammaries to the bright-eyed male hyena half beneath her as she held herself close to him. He slipped a hand gracefully over the flesh along the rise of each bosom and over the nipple of both. It was hard to tell how much experience he had from how careful and curious his touch was. He finally spoke, his eyes half closing with warm regard.

“Unadi you are so perfectly smooth...” He seemed completely unable to stop tracing her chest with claw tips. Unadi found this to be unbearably decadent and arched her back a bit more, hips pushing a little more tightly and insistently into the hyena's crotch. She liked that kind of touch even if it might not have been how he would explore a lady of his own kind in the same regard. She then lowered her head and kissed at his shoulder and bare, furry chest, nuzzling through his fur and inhaling deeply of the slightly peaking hyena-musk.

“Mmmnh.... And you, Siele, are deliciously fluffy,” she whispered. She wondered briefly if the utter pillowy softness of fur was as enjoyable to him in the opposite regard, or if it was just different to Unadi and her smoothness was exactly as captivating to him because it was different as well. The hyena chuckled a little uneasily and Unadi lifted her head. “What? Did I say something?” she murmured sensitively.

“Aheh...” he chuckled again. “You don't call boys ... fluffy. Like that. Not in this sense,” he informed. She looked down at his chest-ruff and head-tilted a bit curiously, her smooth cheek earning a loving stroke from the still-appreciative hyena.

“Why not?” she asked. That fur was most assuredly fluffy. It was as fluffy as anything she could imagine. How was fluffy bad? He spoke again, shifting his hips back and forth a little

to stroke his swollen need against her thigh. She felt the full and impressive length of it through both their clothing.

"That's more the kind of thing that you would say to a girl, is all. I mean, that would be a nice compliment to her. You would tell a boy that he's strong... or that he's tall. Or you would say he's got the sexiest spots, or whatever color his fur is, but fluffy, or anything about that is not so appealing for a guy." He spoke as if giving a lesson to the Mitanni girl in case she made it a habit of molesting the furry races on her journey. She inhaled his sweet musky scent and considered that it might become an unsavory addiction if she let it, but then grinned mischievously. She did not like being lectured on such a subject and felt a little more aggressive as a result. She leaned in and whispered to him.

"Can I call you Fluffy if I put my hand down your pants?" she tilted playfully. He arched his back, seeming to consider that a moment. Unadi knew full well that she intended to do it whether he said yes or not, but the teasing was too much for him to resist. He huffed heavily,

"You may. Only you." He swallowed a bit as her hand slipped down his chest and over his tight tummy. She felt almost obscene in how her fingers spread his pale tan pelt below his navel. How soft was it necessary to make a hyena tummy? What could possibly be the benefit? What purpose did it serve to be that plush and..." She felt a little shock through her. Pleasure? Stroking soft fur was pleasurable to her? She went scarlet and laid her head on Siele's chest. She murmured melodically.

"You are patently pillowy, you sinfully soft, fabulous focus of fluff," she alliterated with worshipful ease, feeling strangely vulgar in that.

"What?!" squeaked an indignant hyena in stunned awe of the apparent attack on his masculinity. His frustration was quelled as a slender, graceful, but strong Mitanni hand slipped under the tension of his belt and found entombed in already slightly damp fabric his throbbing cock. Fingers wrapped around that very warm spire and offered a slow and undulating squeeze. Books where such things were done to a lover were a guilty pleasure of Unadi's even before her trip to Aurora, so she abused the privilege of knowledge bequeathed upon her by the more experienced words of those who cared to put their hottest dreams to parchment. His head dropped back and Unadi bit his shoulder and neck, discovering that thick fur in one's mouth was not as fun as the other entertaining possibilities of a pelt. She made sure not to spit, wiping her mouth of her forearm as she began to pull her hand back, letting a dollop of his pre spill into the cupping of her palm before stroking back down wetly. His legs parted a little and he pushed up to meet her stroke.

"It seems not all of you is so plush and soft, Siele," she crooned in tender admission. She worked her hand up and down very slowly to spoil him with her touch as best she could. This part she knew well, though stories all varied. It seemed to be working. The act was not so different across species. This appeared feel just dandy to her sprawling, undulating hyena as he squirmed and gasped at each stroke. "I still treasure the silky caress of your sweet-scented coat the most though. I cannot get enough of stroking your soft, fluffy, fluffy chest." Her other hand busied itself at exactly that as she spoke to him, but her leg hooked over his and she could not help but grind her hot, puffy need against his own thigh with some insistence. Siele was incredibly torn between embarrassment and ecstasy... dark, rounded ears flat, the bridge of his muzzle scarlet.

“Ahhah... U-Unadi, that’s v-very distracting; you don’t have to say all that...” he panted, his legs shaking a little. Unadi silently celebrated how sensitive he seemed to be to her affection. Her heart hammered as she found herself genuinely enjoying every single aspect of this. While it might have started as a bit of surrender to some primal desire, she felt quite certain that this was going to bear repeating before they parted company, and likely again on her way back if a way there was survived. She grinned mirthfully at his apparent flustered reaction to the teasing and stroking. Unadi sped up her hand a little. He was wet enough that she could hear the delicious, pleasurable-sounding slk-slk...slk-slk... of each paired stroke. She felt that twitching spire slip so easily against her palm as she milked his pre out to stroke him with more of it. He grunted a little as the sped up motion, appearing to struggle.

“Oh? You don’t like this?” she crooned. “I can’t pet you and enjoy how wonderfully voluminous and satiny soft your fur is so long as I keep this up?” She went just a little faster, and then stopped dead, feeling his cock twitch and leap madly in her still carefully gripped hand. He squirmed as if in agony.

“I... I didn’t say that, Unadiiii...” he whined. The girl grinned mirthfully. The hyena was very much in her power in this position. It was a literary theme she was used to in all the sordid stories she’d read, but nothing she had ever tried herself. She finally slipped her hand off of his cock, knowing that if she gave him another round like the one she just let him enjoy, he’d be spilling his seed all over his tummy and her arm. She didn’t want to make it so that they could not actually use the bedroll that was keeping them warm.

“Good, Siele. I am glad you feel that way. Because I want to really, really enjoy how very soft you are.” She peeled off her running shorts that she wore with the jacket, leaving her completely bare. It was dark and the angle under the blanket made it so Siele couldn’t really see anything anyway, but he shifted a bit.

“What do you want me to do?” he asked, sounding almost fearful that Unadi might not be planning what he surely wanted her to be planning.

“Take your pants off, dummy,” the Mitanni girl giggled. He wasn’t *that* innocent, she knew, but perhaps he still thought she was kidding or outright teasing him. Maybe his opinion of girls was that she would work him up and then kick him out of his own bed. Her loins positively blazed with what *she* wanted, so that was not the remotest possibility anymore. He shuffled a bit, squirming and kicking his pants into the bottom of the bedroll. Unadi slipped to the side under the quilted blanket, heavy upon her shoulders. Her smooth, toned body settled over his. When her thighs slipped over his, and she felt the hyena male’s fur slide between them, it was an indescribable symphony of sensation through her lean, silky smooth blue skin. She lowered her chest, gasping from the near over-sensation, and then pushed her puffy, nearly aching sex right down upon his cock, pinning it between her slightly parting wet folds and his cream-toned tummy. Her body shook.

“Are you okay?” Siele whispered with a slight measure of concern.

“Knkng...” Unadi could only kind of make a noise before smearing their combined wetness back and forth over his twitching member, having a full, if quiet little release right on his cock before even putting it inside her. Siele arched his back a little as she stroked him with her sex, teasing him in the hottest and most intimate way possible. His hands glided all over her body, anywhere he could reach. He stroked her backside, her shoulders, her spine, playing along the frill along the middle of her back and the base of her thick tail as she bucked slightly in

pleasure. Unadi finally got over the shock of that abrupt and unexpected little climax. She inhaled deeply and moved up a little against the hyena.

"You seem to like this," he whispered, tending his own ego a little. Unadi grinned a lopsided grin as she lowered her chest, putting her nipples in reach of his muzzle. He took the bait as the girl took what *she* wanted. Her fingertips pushed the tip of his cock upward and she nestled him neatly into her wet, hot slit. She used her fingers carefully to tease her sex in shallow undulation with that twitching wet hyena masculinity. He tried his best to hold still but acted as if it tickled from time to time. There was obviously just so much sensation. Finally, a loud groan was squeezed out of him as Unadi pushed back fully, sinking him balls-deep into her tight, bare depths. She gasped and popped her nipple from between Siele's lips and cupped a hand over his mouth, chest pushing to his own and letting her savor the downy fluff against her entire front.

"Shh-shh-shhh..." she shushed him, panting. There was a vibrating sound of rigid rapid wings. A soft thump on the log that was by the fire announced that they had gotten the attention of a djinn. Unadi held perfectly still, tightly pressed to the mail. "Hello Mihr," she puffed in irritation, trying very, very hard to modulate her breathing. She didn't even turn her head to look directly at the cricket.

"Mihr is concerned. Are we smothering the hyena now?" he droned with obvious confusion in his tone. Unadi blinked and then pulled her hand off his muzzle.

"Paaaahhh!" Siele puffed and then gasped, his cock twitching *hard* in her depths.

"N-no, Mihr, we were quarreling a bit, but it's fine. We are actually forging a *friendship*, though it might not look it," She puffed, wanting the cricket to just go back to being on lookout.

"I'm fine, honest," Siele stated with remarkable calmness. "We're kinda fighting over space in the bedroll. Unadi didn't bring one so we have to share," he added, making Unadi realize that she had not bothered to explain why she was in there in the first place.

"Mihr supposes this is good then. Traveling together means we should be friends, yes? Mihr goes back to watching the road. Sleep. The night is short and tomorrow is long." He hopped a few times away from the fire so that his wingbeats, loudly buzzing as he took to the sky, did not upset the embers too much. That was uniquely conscientious of him, Unadi thought. She wondered if he had learned that the hard way. She felt a little internal twitch from the hyena then and looked back to him, sealing his mouth with a furious kiss as her hips began to roll in a steady, eager rhythm.

The next few moments were sheer animal lust. Unadi pulled and gripped at thick warm hyena-fur, Siele clawed heavily down Unadi's back and over her tight runner's backside, gripping and pulling as she ground her hips desperately to his own. The two of them made almost no sound at all as best they could as they focused on their favorite features about each other. Siele could not get enough of how smooth and clean and pure the bare Unadi was against his willing, adoring body, and Unadi was driven nearly mad for the unbelievable sensation of downy fur gliding back and forth against her entire body as she tightly mashed herself against him. She drove her hips back and forth in a shameless mating pace.

"Hah! Unadi, you're gonna make me..." warned Siele finally, his hips having been moving a bit with hers until that point, but he suddenly held stark still, perhaps thinking she

might not really want that. He was trying to hold back. Unadi gripped him tight, her chest against his heavily enough that she could feel his powerful heart hammering.

“You better believe I’ll *make* you, now blow as hard as you can, Fluffy!” Unadi squeaked, her passion getting away from her in that instant. The word ‘Fluffy’ was growled through tightly clenched teeth. She felt his hips respond immediately, slapping hard against hers from underneath a few times. She jerked hers in a slightly uneven but rather feral pace, and finally the hyena tightened up beneath her and then relaxed *everything* suddenly save for his thighs. Those pushed upward hard, wedging that thick, throbbing spire of flesh as deeply as possible inside the Mitanni girl. He curled his somewhat short, but flexible tail around the back of her thigh and stroked her up and down over her backside underneath the bedroll in a way that Unadi was certain was intentional. She jerked hard, *knowing* he was flooding her. She could feel all that soft fur against her body, front and back. Her inner flesh convulsed hard and she milked his cock for every drop as her cry of pleasure was only barely dampened by the shirt he had been using as a pillow. He exhaled heavily, making it obvious he’d have been moaning loudly if he dared, but that was sure to attract Mihr to check on them again.

Unadi’s thighs continued to slowly roll for some time as she savored the feel of that twitchy cock bucking and kicking inside her. Siele grunted softly a few times, perhaps oversensitive as the blue-toned Keeper stroked him inside her a little longer. She finally let his cock slip out, leaving a trail of his seed over his belly and thigh as she rolled off of him and snuggled up beside him. Unadi panted quietly for a bit longer as she held the hyena, face to face with him. He looked into her red eyes with wonder that made her feel special, if perhaps suddenly a little shy. She closed her eyes as she considered that saying goodbye eventually, even if she meant to come back, just got a little harder. Still, she knew what kind of journey she was on. She was quietly thankful to the hyena for making at least *this* bit of it a good memory. It would last her however much life she might have left.

“Suddenly, smooth skin is way more appealing to me,” Siele stated in a near whisper, perhaps softer than was really needed in case the girl had dozed off with her eyes closed as they were.

“And I’m going to blush any time you wag that tail of yours, Fluffy,” Unadi growled lustfully. She grinned at the hyena.

“Oh by Hathor’s heart-scale, please do not call me that in front of my dad. I’d rather take my chances in Ibia!” he laughed. Unadi laughed too.

“Go to sleep you twittering children,” the cricket’s shrill voice called out from the treetops. Unadi and Siele kissed again, and, under the rising moon, the night and their dreams both embraced them.