

# MASS OF TANGLES

*by* Jackie Bole

Not a pretty sight. The jungle tangled around my ankles pulling my feet down into what felt like a mushy pile of shit left behind by some prehistoric beast. Catching myself just above an anthill, all I could think was, I hope these aren't fire ants.

Sweat dripped from my chin and nose and my clothes clung as if they were a part of me. Taking them off, I would become a blood-sucker's smorgasbord... By then, though, I don't believe I cared as I climbed a massive hill to its top. Just to see over the crest - to catch a glimpse of what lay on the other side - to die there with that image burned into my mind... That was all I wanted now... The sting and venom sank me to my knees. Stinging. Gnawing. By the time the first bite was administered I figured there was no chance of making it over the edge. Still, I managed to smile at the wonder my eyes had seen before falling back... My tongue filled my mouth. There was no air. I could not swallow. I choked on my own spit. Everything became grey... Fading to smoky blackness... Fire...? Blurred vision brought forth a myriad of color - red, black, firelight... I wished I had been dreaming. My hand fell upon thick fleece. "My God, get these things off of me!" If this was my last adventure - to die from the stings of fire ants was not my vision. I thought it was the end... This was not how it was supposed to end... Trails of blood ran down my legs and arms. The ants biting at my neck and face were dowsed with a great splash of water before I felt myself being lifted and carried to, where, I had no idea. My breath was forced out with every step that my, shall I say savior, took; the sound of babbling water growing ever nearer... It did not seem to matter where their hands landed before they tossed me, headlong, into the lagoon - cool and oh so welcome! Those little bastard ants had no choice now. They hung on and bit harder but their fate had been sealed by the water. I stayed under, all the time a lyric from a song from the early 70's

repeating itself: "Ball of Confusion...!" Don't ask me why, it was just stuck there. The things one's mind thinks when it believes it's dying... My lungs felt as if they were going to burst when I followed the bubbles... Breaking the surface, I took in a great breath of air, the sound, so alien in my new surroundings it stilled nature as if I had disturbed some great God. Who cared. The fire ants were off of me and my bites no longer burned. Something far more menacing did, now. Hitching and gasping, I lunged for the beach, loose sand beneath my feet sank away in a sudden drop off. My pleas for help were drowned as I reached out. Sinking, there was no choice but to disperse of my burden;ie, my survival pack, all-the-while steadily descending. Ohmygod... I feel like a character from a Jules Verne novel...! The lack of air reminded me that this was not a fictional story and that there was no escape. The Nautilus was not going to suck me up from a murky death... Discarding all but the watch on my wrist and my bare essentials, I stabbed for the surface. Breaking through once again, I took in a breath and thanked God for a second chance just as I bashed my chin against a rock, biting my tongue hard. The taste of blood filled my mouth and I spit into the water gagging and gasping for air. It was one unforgiving nightmare fighting to reach the shore when from nowhere it felt as if I had been lifted by a boom crane and hoisted at least four feet from the water's surface, the backpack I had discarded lying next to me... Log: I'm bruised and scraped and my mouth feels like I ate a blow fish but I found myself on the beach several yards from the water's edge. My watch is broken so I cannot record the time but by the set of the... Ohmygod... There are two suns! Shadows are triplicate now that I actually look around. My thought pattern is still shaky. My words are not flowing normally. I don't know how I got up here... (blinkblinkblink) Log off for now...

Digging through the backpack I found my cigarettes - soaking wet. Shit. I sure could have used one about thirty minutes ago. Carefully removing the soggy cigs from the pack I laid them in the hot sand and watched as they dried, savoring how that one was

going to taste once they were smokeable again... "I could use a drink." I said aloud. My head pounded as every muscle in my body screamed rejection from what they had recently endured promising cramps when I finally slept or at least tried to... F u k ! The keyboard s waterlogged:! My cigarettes were beached except for maybe five and I took the best one. After several tries from the lighter the old Bic finally lit long enough and I inhaled the smoke deeply. Stretching, my ribs stitched sending a spasm which forced me immediately upright - the longed for smoke flying from my fingers as I searched for a quick pose from the hitch knotting along my side. I found no relief in the effort... Goddamn this expedition! Searching my water logged lap top, most of the music once stored there was cryptic and unreadable. A few notes of Van Morrison, followed by Van Halen.... A coughing reprise brought little hope as I hacked for air on my last smokable cigarette, spitting it on the sandy beach with a hack... Watching the cigarette smolder in the sand I knew it was to be my last and I threw the remainders out to sea... "Fuck you ..."I coughed, and I knew there were to be no more from that point on. This was a new beginning. I didn't have to answer to no one and there was no one to answer to me. At last, for the first time, I felt free... I sat back and watched the pack of Marlboros' float out into the sea. Oh sure there was a moment of panic to recapture them but I just sat there and watched feeling the urge to jump only to resign to that fact of knowing if I did save them and smoke them they'd still be gone. Then what? When they were gone what would I do? Feel as I did then, that's what... There was plenty to explore to keep my mind occupied... To leave that sublime lagoon and it's beauty was like leaving a loved one behind.

#### DAY 4 ...

A mark every so many feet would lead me back to my El Dorado... Relying on my senses was a whole new dimension since my sudden "cold turkey" cigarette break. The smells were delicious and filled my lungs. I could almost taste the scents wafting around me. I was almost always hungry and the berries

growing along the path were recognizable as edible... Somewhere in one of those patches, though, I believe I had gotten hold of some that were not so "user-friendly" when my head began to swim. Maybe it had something to do with the sting in my side, I don't know, but I went down like a ton of bricks in a field of tall grass... Falling back, the old man from the "Six Flags" commercial was dancing and flagging me toward his magical mystery tour. A flailing smile fought for space across my mouth and I went to rise. No way. There was no way I was going to stand. Falling back, my eyes closed and the ache in my back spazzed.

\* \* \* My own scratching awoke me to a most serene sunset, all of the colors of the world melting into the horizon. Looking at my shins, they were as colorful as the sunset - all blue and red. Damned ants! The breeze grew cooler as the sun disappeared behind a vast field of nothing... There was nowhere to go. Foraging for dry timber, night sounds crept and they were not the normal sounds I was used to hearing - and I had camped on the very outbacks of the Continents. These were not the call of wild beasts. The sooner the fire was lit the better. There was not much sleep captured that night.

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The amber glow warmed me and I stayed as close as I could, the sounds seeming to be all around my little camp ground, now. Clutching the campfire, I stayed close without singeing my eyebrows even though my nose hairs felt the burn. I opened the laptop: power at half... Log: If anyone finds this, I'm really scared right now. There's a lot of strange noises and I do not recognize them... d e a... l o d g... scrolllll... o fffffff red...

Where is my laptop... Half life left I have time to -----  
-----

(((((((((O))))))))))++++++00000000000000 999999 9883333333  
jjjj Edd ...

sjkdhfoeijfwm ...

\* \* \*

Through drugged eyes, I watched my faithful pc go sailing into thick gloved hands. 'Wha...?' What they observed was imitated hap hazardously, sending a loaded message to whomever received it, if it was received at all... 'No...' I latched out drunkenly, still under the influence of whatever weed I had eaten in the berries. 'Ssh---t-o-pp...' Shlop, snoop, slop... The laptop flickered and went blank as the screen was bent back, severing the wires and boards of information. 'Sshhit...' At least my Id understood what had happened even though I held no captives...

I felt the undergrowth swat my ass and was helpless to prevent it. Fuck this shit! The shiver of adrenalin shook my senses and to fight for survival became instinctual... But "More Than A Feeling" by "Boston" was the only thought ringing in my head as my butt bounced off the sand... Somebody, please itch my bites!

The last thing I could remember was a buzz. Last thing in sight, the mangled lap top, its monitor dangling precariously from its wires. Why, now, did a past chat line bager me? Waking under the madness of the insect bites, my words were well pronounced before a field of knit hands fell across my face - the filth there felling me back, nulling my curses to no more than mumbo-jumbo... I saw my lap top and its tangled wires beyond the bars and the fear-scaped glaze from the other cages... I so wanted to get my hands on what was left of my life...Please don't destroy it...

This fog... I shook my head and felt the water globe of what was left of my brains swirl in my head. My feet would not stand under

me and my voice was like a bleating sheep... What had I ingested?! Obviously something that my college year friends used to enjoy. Now I knew why they enjoyed it so. Nothing was important. I, being enrolled in the ROTC, could not divulge in the chemical brotherhood, but had a helluva good time drowning every time former President Bush uttered the words, "Weapons of mass destruction". Cheap thirty packs of beer and the Address was on... Throw back a can every time...

"how many half gallons do you want?" Although my eyes were open, the words just did not fit this situation because I was flat on my back and really out of it. "Want it orange?" Shit. This was not going to work. My cheeks burned. I felt rubbery all over. Tick Tick Tick ... "Put that down before you kill it!" Did I say that out loud?

By the drawn look of awe, I guess I had...

My P.C. hit the ground solidly...

I watched the choppy blue screen go black. Shaking my head, I knew it was over as tears ran down my nose. "You all act like you don't have a clue! God Damn it! I'm fucked up but not as much as you all are!" All noises stopped. The buzz was wearing off and I was not a happy camper in its aftermath... "What?! I want to speak to someone in authority here! " Judas Priest! What was I asking? WHO was I asking? No...It was a WHAT... My head was pounding and all I wanted was two Excedrins and a nice cup of tea and the morning sun rising outside of my living room window. That's what this is: a dream, and I'm gonna wake up and sit on my couch with that steaming cup of green tea before me, remote in hand, and be searching for a morning movie...

"Where is this hybrid...?" A gruff voice scratched.

I was still staring at the mangled lap top when my concentration was broken by a rattle of the cage door. By the expression worn by my captor, I was not welcome and for sure there was to be an inquisition... Their nose wrinkled with disgust as they backed away. "What is that?" their finger shaking at the pc. The screen was fast fading when I lurched forward catching on a few wires and drawing it in quickly. Clutching it against my body I huddled in the far corner. No... It's all I have. You can't have it...! Slamming the case closed I hugged it to my chest, clawing out madly for the hands to leave me be. "STOP! I' TS MINE!"

Never minding the rattling of the barred door, I lifted the screen and hit the button... "Good morning..." the electronic voice greeted... I shivered with glee to see the thing still had enough wire-sense to know it had been logged onto. My fingers swam over the keys in search of memory and for the most part it all seemed to recall everything I had put in. "Rec.Commander Sever. Coord. 150-ten/six-two-six:Alpha to I.S.S. Mayday..." The screen shook and jiggled before it brought up my last recorded coordinates. "Coordinates Sent..." flashed, and I relaxed as best as I could before those Goddamned hands sent me flying... Stars were dancing when I hit the wall...

The son-of-a-bitch relaid! Like a satellite, it went, and I let the machine fall just as those massive hands took hold of my forearms. 'It's all yours.' Blackness...

\* \* \*

The insect bites to my ankles couldn't equal the pain and swelling of my lip as I ran my tongue over my teeth on the left side. Some were permanently dislodged and parked at different angles thanks to me and my indignation. Never could keep my mouth shut. It didn't matter. I knew the distress signal had been sent and it was just a matter of time till I was off this rock. Yeah, time... Distant music

roused me and it was nighttime now. Mingling among the familiar sounds of ancient Egypt; was it Parsley, Sage, Rosemary, or Thyme? It was the pungent aroma of Opium. My teeth throbbed as I rose and stretched to peer through the ten-by-ten barred window. The city was scarlet. Lamps, torches, and lanterns struck up along a twisted avenue and the smoke was thick. Great, high captors... I could use some of that about now! I never did believe any of them heard me. It was warm and humid and where I was was not in the heart of their community. It was the "Poky". The "Slammer". "Cooler." I laughed at the last entry - cooler... I could almost hear the sweat hit the floor as it dripped from my forehead... No breeze. No breath. Oh, God, are you there? My lips were stuck to my teeth. I could barely make enough spit to swallow without a hollow click in my throat. Shit... by the time that message reached space they'd maybe find my bones and a belated email message: "You're Late" ... Falling back in the rancid straw I had one thought in my head and it sprang from many years ago when I was a student in college. Don't ask me why, but "Queen" and Freddy Mercury's voice sung true - If any snot remained in my nose it would have announced itself on that note, but I know where I am. They chose husbands, I chose rocket science; Uh, hello, Mr. Sagan? "Your best bet is to just shut up..." The sultry voice did not quite register. I was too busy trying to figure out just how I was going to sever those iron bars and spring free. "That's fruitless..." With a last ditch effort I yanked on the bars swaying to and fro as if on a breeze. "You're a lot of help." I muttered letting go and falling into a heap of damp straw. "Tried to tell you." their voice recanted. The torch lights were burning out but I could still make out the face pressed against the bars, their skin glowing bronze with eyes like Onyx and a voice as smooth as the best Mezcal in Mexico... "What do you know?!" I demanded charging forth. They reclined, stretching out on the straw, cradling their head comfortably in the crook of their arms. "I know how to keep my mouth shut." Turning on my side I stared at the image. How at home they seemed to be. As if they'd been down this shit hill a few times. Rising up



on one elbow, I peered through the bars. "You sure talk a lot for someone to advise me to be silent." I heard a sigh and saw the silhouette roll gently to face me. "Shut the hell up and we'll get out of here." My tolerance was at its peak with this fellow prisoner when I grasped the bars separating us. "Your riddles are not helping me. I'm outta here in a matter of ..." "Days?" he quickly finished with a chuckle. "Yeah, me too..." The fucker really needed to offer me a smoke now. My curiosity was nigh and a cigarette was due. "Okay, spill the beans." my explicitness reached through the bars - like I was in any way, shape, or form to pursue my heated ambition. His lackluster smile belittled any idea of escape before disappearing beneath an arm - "okay... just don't mention me." I leapt up to retaliate when the clang of a distant door quieted my retesance. Shit, why am I so popular? I guess it was my turn to be thrown around like the guy in the Hotdog suit on the corner... Don't shoot the "Hotdog" guy... Please, please don't shoot the "Hotdog guy"...? I didn't ask to be here, my ship sunk and left me here... It's a real lonely feeling to stand and watch your ride sink and realize you're never getting off this rock... The sound of shuffling feet and gruff conversation sent me to the back of my cell but not before I gave my sweaty inmate a scowl along with a single significant digit for which I was sure was Universal...

Lucky me. Really. They passed by with nary a glance. HEY! Got a smoke? Just by the way they both stopped as if to oblige only to realize their action was enough to satisfy my curiosity as to just how far I could push my captors. At least these two gave it a passing thought in that matter between their ears called a brain. Needless-to-say, I didn't get my tobacco - just a scowl accompanied by a burst of haughty laughter. A swift burst of lightning followed by her earth-shaking brother stopped all of our follies. Never had I heard such a roar. The sharp darts outside that little window certainly caught my attention and that of my captors as they quickly turned and bee-lined back toward the entrance. Braving the storm, I pressed into the bars and searched the sky. It was a sick green color

and I knew what that was and I began to yell: "It's a tornado! Get away! Duck! Go for cover!!!" All loose items became air-borne. "Get away from the windows! Don't go out there!" Did I really tell them NOT to go out there?! My own fear sent words of caution to "thine enemies" before collapsing into a tight ball furthest from the barred window. Fuck them... Never mind, go on out there... Whatever those walls were made of, they heaved and swayed, sucking air through the tiny windows from across the way with such force my hair lifted straight up and to one side, caught up in the vacuum as the freight train bore down. Any particle not nailed down became a projectile. Even the straw struck like needles penetrating like a hundred bee stings... We're not in Kansas anymore... Toto????!!

As suddenly as it had approached, the storm passed, and when I dared a look through that port-hole-of-a-window it took everything inside of me just to stop from yelling out. Structures leaned precariously to one side threatening collapse if tampered with, and the shrieks of those trapped within - no matter who or what they were- sent me into Civil Defense Mode... "You're wasting your time...." Ohhh! If we had not been seperated by bars I would have socked him in the jaw... "Okay, since you claim to know all the details, tell me how to get out of here?" "Same way you got in." I snarled at him and his bullshit reply. "Who do you think you are, the Riddler? I just landed here! I woke up here!" A stained smile greeted my query as he rose and neared the bars. "Anylyze that." was all he said.

It was times like that I wished to read in a journal. I never thought it would be my own and now I wished I had backed it all up! Jimmy Buffett take me away! Gingerly, I opened the lap top and twisted wires until the blue screen appeared. An encryption of letters and numbers scrawled over the screen:  
119en0ter69c0de3accsess10374-99999.comply8-to00... yeah yeah  
just get me to the sweet spot... Logue: It's Not sogood now.. No

more shits and giggles and if I don't record what just happened I'll lose it forever. Got this dummy starin at me through bars. All I can figure is that he's trying to tell me to retrace my steps -----  
 ----shit what was  
 th++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++=====775643209v  
 00453fgg000 444 see35 a abf..... Kboard .....  
 Trying to recor ..... d It was  
 useless. Without the tools to repair the lap top, it slipped and slid into modes I couldn't translate, thus leaving my log a jumble of unintelligable garble... Shit... "ERRORERRORERROR..."

"You!" The deep baritone voice seemed to shake the very cell I sat in. "My, you must have a lovely singing voice." I don't think that helped matters much but I did get a snicker out of the adjacent cells. I was caught like a deer in the headlights, though, once I met that threateneing glare, I was the Pinata and he was the big stick... Resting the lap top on the straw I moved slowly to the bars, my brow arched inquisitively, and wearing my best shit eatin' grin. The hostler started as if repulsed and took a step back. "That's close enough." he barked, melting my Chesire smile. Close enough... Let me tell you about "close enough" buddy... 'Go clean up your mess. I'm not sticking around here much longer.' I admired the way his expression recognized suspicion and that our trust was a mutual misunderstanding. At least we both realized that I was not one to reckon with. I have my defenses. Just a matter of applying them after the third warning... "You revealed your knowledge of the storm and I am to escort you to the Council." Keys jingled at his hip as he pulled the collection forth foraging for the one to my cell as if he had done it a thousand times. The door swung open and I began my warning: I am a Black Belt in Tai Kwon Do and I will defend myself... One, two, three... It was a straw-strewn round-house kick but my right foot landed squarely upside his head... He went down like a ton of bricks. I could have went ahead and ran but I couldn't resist the fun of letting all the others out. Especially my sagacious neighbor with the bad teeth and

spirited breath. Unlocking his door, I said, "you're going to show me the way out of this monkey house." He looked at me as if I were nuts. "I'm not a tour guide." I felt my brow tighten. This S.O.B. knew something and I was going to use him to the full extent. "Get your ass out now!" and I grabbed his shirt. "If you mislead me we're both dead. So make sure you take me back to the beach." Shoving him through the main doors his stagger came dangerously close to a full belly flop before I Caught him. "you're not going to kick me too, are you?" "Only if I have to," I warned. "Lead...!" The Simian City was a wreck. There was debris strewn from one end to the other. Whole buildings were levelled and the pitiful cries of those trapped beneath rose under the grey sky. My escort stopped short, his eyes staring at one particular pile of rubble. "You're going to have to find your own way back." he declared, pulling free from my grasp. I knew how to ditch and obviously he did too. He went one way and I went the other. Whistles blew shrilly as the town came alive but I was already in the thick of the bush and there was no way they were going to get me out without a flashlight and a shovel.

Their words were cutting and crewd. Stepping on my back in the heavy brush, I couldn't have objected if I wanted - having been made one with the soft loam. I so only wanted to blend in - not become a part of it. Taking a deep breath before the next leather-laden foot flexed along the small of my back - only to be followed by the next which sent my face straight into the soggy ground, I was on the verge of panic assuming their instincts would surly lock and load and I'd be - shit - I hate to say it - mud... Their heavy steps ventured into the ruined city. Releasing from the ground was like pulling the plug from a filled bathtub. I was so exhausted. All I wanted was sleep, but to slurk( new word for mud soaked) away was all I could do. Fuck those mother fuckers and their beseech for help. There was no help and no way back to the beautiful lagoon I so carefully laid a trail back to. I wanted one of those nasty cigarettes and a snort of Cabo. Shit... Looks like the Sin Fairy

missed this world. If I lose a tooth can I barter for a hit off one of those Opium Hookas?

Hitting the outskirts a steady rain began to fall and I went face first into the tall grass where I was found...

blinkblinkblink....

OHMYGOD is there no rest? To sleep is to dream. This was no dream and there was no sleep. It was more like a closing of the eyes and a shuddering alertness therein. Like resting on a bed of coral, I dared not move. Dare I post on this beaten lap top of the arrows and bollos? Time is of the essence and the thin blue line tells me there is little time left to note...

It was ninety-seven degrees and all I wanted to do was go. From judgement, I could tell these neanderthals did little during the hottest time of the day, so I figured it was a good time to move on. The mud that had once cooled me now felt like armor - hot and cumbersome and I peeled it off as I went. Each piece representing a choice word I had found for the treatment I had recieved during my brief captivity. It was best that I left my animosity behind me than carry it along. And if those pieces could record and recover, well, I'd rather they just remain nice and quiet thankyouverymuch... Trodding along amidst very tall grass I knew my footsteps and knew that I was being followed too. Proof having it when I felt a stone slam into the middle of my back... Oh goody, another bruise... Taking a couple leaps ahead I crouched and hid within the grass. Waiting. Holding my breath. Holding that fart in I so wanted to rip just for shits and giggles. Biting my lower lip I waited and listened as the swish of feet through the thick undergrowth grew closer. Their sudden cry in surprise stunned the natural sounds to silence and I hung on like a leach until they toppled. You sonofabitch! My arms pumped like pistons as I pounded their head and shoulders. I heard their teeth grind and a low growl like distant

thunder. Oh shit I got a wildcat! The next thing I knew I was attempting to restrain; what seemed to be, a (pardon the pun) monkey. Now I've seen my share of monkeys here and I had my fun on Earth with them too but this was uncanny! The damned thing was as big as me and rather than having five times the strength of a man this things strength was crushing. My blows were like taunts - what are ya tryin to do tickle me? I managed to land a right hook along their jaw and that only pissed them off, thus sending me into orbit with one mighty arm. I was slung like a ball at the fat kid in a game of dodgeball. The only difference was all I had to soften the landing was the ground. Not good. No, the long grass did not cushion me and I hit the ground with a breath taking jolt that left me stunned and amazed at the same time. Wait, I was only kidding! No kidding. This was mortal combat and I was feeling pretty mortal when I sat up to see this mean-ass simian storming toward me. Awe shit, I was in a tight spot. Run? I'd be chased and probably caught. Stand and fight? Don't think so. Like a dummy, I stood and held my ground. They rushed me and our noses almost touched. 'You're a big one, aren't you?' Although my words were firm, inside I was jello. Spine? What spine? I don't need no stinking spine! That wasn't what was holding me there as we stared each other down. I was petrified. To look them in the eye was considered a threat, and from the looks of this one, they were alpha-male - all tricked out in some wild military uniform. In an attempt to grasp hold, My hand fondled across some part of that uniform - a string of beads of some sort or other hanging from his shoulder - hence I held firmly, like a Rosary... 'You treasure these?' They scattered like seed in a Spring planting. The hollow sound as they flung through the grass. I pissed him off... There was no need for the low rumble vibrating there in his chest to let me know I had done something sacrilegious. It was his fault though! If he wouldn't have moved...! As if in slow motion we watched - together- those beads as they flew in the air and I knew I had crossed a boundary - as he knew I had. What could I say: 'It was an accident! You should have stayed still!' I couldn't help it. It just happened. And I never felt so

helpless as I did there. The way his eyes swept back to me; I was either meat or target practice and the latter weighed far heavier. His knees dug into my arms as he rose, and he released a shrill whistle from between a fierce set of canines. The ground began to shake and a team of horses soon surrounded us saddled with the biggest apes I'd ever seen! Their words were not in english. It was almost a form of ancient Egyption and I could catch a few phrases here and there. All I knew was I was heading back to where I had escaped from, but as a slave. Give me a minute and I'll collect those loose beads my fine furry friend...! Did I really sign on for this adventure?As my ass bumped along the path, I wondered where NASA was in this journey - if they even knew where THIS was. And if they cared at all anymore. My ass was long grass stained now but I didn't care. Just give me a place to sleep and I promise I won't put up a fight... One mighty shove through a heavy wooden door and I was back to square one. Typical... But, to my eyes, there was the most magnificent natural hot spring built right into the room. As if the whole complex had been built around this bubbling soul catcher. My words were perceptible if not forgiving as I dipped my foot into the hot water. Ohhhh this was going to be nice. 'I forgive you all' I remember saying as I sunk into the water to my chin. A long forgotten language - one I thought I'd never actually hear spoken - rattled my senses more than the fingers that strung my hair back could - speaking in Aramaic so fluently I lost myself translating those ancient words, saying each one, that I could interpret, to myself, in english, with slow intent. There was no way I could reply. I had enough trouble with my own language. The pungent odor of Opium wafted under my nose from a den somewhere close by. It mingled with menthol and eucalyptus making it easy to inhale, fogging any sense of time or consequence. I could've cared less...

SIGNAL... S.O.S. Coordinates: 150,000 dsdbt H 200,000 dhrt.....

"COME AND GET ME!!!" \* \* \*

"SIR!!!" The urgent call from the lieutenant over a digital voice of distress - an S.O.S. - was Larsens.  
"Comeandgetmecomeandgetme!" Captain Sanderson leaned over and punched in the coordinates. The console lit up.

\* \* \*

Something was up. I knew it. I can't think of one species that goes from kill-mode to "sorry about that". For some reason, I looked up at my keeper and asked, 'you wouldn't happen to know where my lap top is, would you?' Was it the look in their eyes or the pursing of their lips that made my heart do a double beat? 'You're a female, right?' I queried, although I really couldn't tell. "Last time I checked I was!" 'Good, then you can understand how important it is that I have what I want.' I flashed my best "bad-girl" smile and leaned back. 'There's this toy I had and it's really special. It's something my Daddy gave me on my birthday. Now you surly have a daddy and I can bet...' She threw the sponge in the tub, declaring, "My father's dead!" Great... I have to admit I felt pretty bad when she began to sob. Grabbing a towel, I rose, wrapping it around as I went. 'I know what it's like to lose a loved one and I didn't mean to make you cry.' Her tear-soaked eyes beamed up to mine as she ran a long hairy finger beneath her nose, but she still managed to smile. "I'm sorry," she said. "it's just hard for me right now." I sat down next to her, tucking my towel under my knees, and nudged her with my shoulder. 'You weren't always a servent girl were you?' She shot a sideways glance my way then gave a little chuckle. "It still shows?" and she let go with a hardy "HA!" It figures I would end up with a neurotic has-been. Still, if I wanted to regain my lap top, I knew I'd have to play big sister and help her out. I asked, 'So, what were you before and how can I help you to regain that stance once more?' She sunk her chin in the palm of her hand and sighed as she glanced my way. "Well, I was once a prominent



figure and your boob's hangin out." What the hell? 'OH!' I wrangled my towel up and tucked it tightly under my arm. 'Can't keep the girls corraled.' She fell back laughing, knowing what it was like to have a boob pop out unexpectedly, or something similar to it before coming around one-hundred-eighty degrees gravity. "I am the daughter of a senator." she revealed. "I held many titles once. The one I held closest to my heart was "Good Will Ambassador." She wrapped her arms around her knees and clenched her jaw. "That all ended when Father suddenly died. They swarmed the house like a pack of dogs and..." "They" who? That rat-pack of an army?' She leaned away and stared at me as if I farted. "Don't say that so loud!" she warned. Okay, I got the message. I needed to submit and play harmless. But I also had to get my lap top back, too. 'Do you know where my toy is?' I asked as nicely as I could. She tucked her chin into her chest and eyed me before muttering, "yes." 'Is it somewhere you or I could get to it? I promise it will be worth the effort.' She sighed heavily and looked around the room. "It's in..." Before I could say "DAMN!" the door burst open and three big dudes came strollin in followed by a short muscular one. They split up and each one took a post; one by the window and two on either side of the door. "You..." and the short one stabbed a finger at my new friend. "You have no business here!" "And you do?" she responded. "I'm sure there's a village or something out there you could be pillaging right now." His face contorted with rage and he made a quick gesture with his hand. I was expecting the finger. He swung his arm down to his side. I guess that was the signal meaning "get that one out of here on the double" because they were on her. As she was escorted away, she looked back to me and smiled and winked before passing the stocky one who she puckered up at. I saw him try not to smile. He was still stuck in his little daydream when I asked, 'I suppose you want to talk to me?' How he tried to gather his composure was kind of cute - if he had not chosen to be so menacing. "I ask the questions!" I can still hear those words. What could I do? 'Okay. Fire away, Captain.' His face turned crimson with fury before he slammed the door. "I AM A GENERAL!"

he charged. "and you will learn your place or you will die." He poked me in the chest with each word until I blocked him. "I got it all ready, General." He stalked across the room and leered over his shoulder suspiciously. "You are pushing your luck, human." 'Don't we all?' He stormed back and grabbed my towel and tried to pull it off. I don't think he expected me to fight back when I took him by the arm and shoved him away. 'I can defend myself.' I was on my feet then - hanging on to the cloth that seperated my vulnerability from his glare. I saw his hand go for the sabre at his side. 'Is that how you resolve your conflicts? Go for it then.' A peculiar expression crossed his face and his hand relaxed. "You're a fiesty one." he mused, staring out at me from the corner of his eye. "Get dressed! I am taking you in." I scoffed and queried sarcastically, 'Yeah you and whose army?' He let go with a shrill whistle that would curl your hair and the stairs outside of the door rumbled with footsteps. "Mine." he replied with a shit-eatin-grin. It was time to find some clothes... 'Do you mind?!' With a terse bow, he opened the door. "I have my moments. I can assure you that there are no means of escape, so I grant you your privacy." He went to leave when he stopped and turned back. "We'll be waiting." I needed something I could move in; a pair of pants and a shirt but all I found in that wardrobe were silky sari's and genie-type outfits. I dug deeper into the back and came out with a pair of black satin pants and a white caftan shirt that hid little if any. Better than nothing and I could climb a lot better in that than a dress. It was just a matter of balance to get to the top of the wardrobe and push through the roof which was a little more than broad leaves. It turned out that there was some architecture involved in the construction of this structure. And when I broke through I discovered that the room was inside of a cave... Dots of light from torches shown along a two-way path: either in or out and I had no idea which was which. Either way I knew I was to head into the Great Beyond! Scrambling across the beams I heard the broughau below when they discovered I had found an alternate exit. Stupid me to forget that monkeys could climb! It was a one,two, three measure as I scrambled over the posts

that held the satch roof and I hoped they kept the same measures all the way. Almost. Clipping along, I was almost to the end when the dimensions changed. Changed, shit! I fell through like a meteor, landing right in the midst of a large band of soldiers. 'It's okay,' I relaid painfully. "my ribs broke the fall."

blink blink blink... "I don't know why you just couldn't have left her alone..." "You know why. The human has communication devices that will have more like her coming and I am not going to just sit idly by and allow that to happen."

I do? They will? Yeah... You should have left my ass on the beach. I rather enjoyed watching my ship sink... Did I say that out loud?

I heard a scuffle before the door slammed and I focused on the face before me. 'I'd almost bet that if you back up some you'd be a lot prettier.' By the sound emanating from them I knew they were not the friendly she-ape from earlier. To laugh proved painful and I held my sides. The ape observed, tilting his head from one side to the other as he tugged at his beard. "You hurt," he said. Who let the doctor in? I was hoping for such! I waved him off tucking my chin into my chest when, out of the corner of my eye, I saw him draw the 10"x10" laptop from a duffle bag. It was still in one piece. He held it up as if it were a trophy before fingering the latch. "You really want this don't you?" The screen glowed. How he knew to push the key opening my music... Toto's "Africa" began to play. He let go with a yelp and reeled back. That's when I lunged for the pc. 'One wrong move and I'll have the whole damned fleet down here, buddy!' That sure exposed his passive side! But he had this evil looking glint in his eye as he nodded. He laughed, pointing at the laptop. "I sat with that thing for days. It told me everything. I deleted all transmissions and whiped out the "hard drive". After much study, I decided to "save" the music. It sounded far too intriguing to "shred." My hand skimmed over the keys to the

"Recycle bin" when he waved a finger: "I dumped all that too." 'Had a lot of time on your hands, hmmm?' "Well, let's just say I've had some experience." he gloated. This was bad. He wasn't stupid. In fact, he was capable of absorbing any technology presented to him. Ahhh, the open mind can work wonders... I looked into his eyes. 'Okay, Einstein, tell me the meaning of Life.' I prepared to rest and wait for a cacophony of responses... "To live..." Oh well just beat my ass and call me Betty! The silence was deafening after the song ended.

"Play another." he requested. Snapping the pc shut, I flipped it to him: 'You.' I watched his face. The way his brow rose in surprise. He popped the latch and navigated to "music". With a fanfare, he hit the "play" key and Willie Nelson began to sing "Pancho and Lefty". I think he thought he was the "bandit-boy". For all I knew then, he probably was... But at that moment, I saw him as an appreciator of music...

skip...skip...skip...

"FIX IT!" He went(excuse the pun)ape. The song skipped and paused and jumped from beginning to end before I could get the laptop back to check the properties and locate a clean download. "I order you to fix it!" I couldn't fix shit with a plumber with his ass bouncing around the room, and it didn't take long for him to realize I was not about to until he settled his ass down and watched... 'I thought you knew it all.' I chided. Perching just above my shoulder, I heard him say, "I do..." Why it made me shudder, beats me. I'll bet it was his hot breath down my back! After a time of his breathing down my neck, I knew that if I didn't say something I would do something soon. 'If you are patient enough to learn, I am patient enough to teach you.' We fought verbally. He wanted to learn the mechanics, not just the "right clicks". 'You need to calm down! Let me recall all this!' He started to pull the laptop away. 'You take it and you do not learn it.' I advised. Clutching my "life-

line" he fought for control within his own ape-made world. It was a tug-of-war between cultures and he was not about to abandon his... "Let GO!" he roared. Whatever. 'You figure it out, then.' I did let go and he fell back awkwardly - the laptop sailing over his head, end-over-end. Jumping to his feet, the ape swung his head from me to the lap top and then back to me before spewing profanities at ninety-miles-per-hour; "You did that on purpose, human! I should kill you right now!" If it worked for Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, maybe it would for me. I let go with a slap to his face and waited for the tears... uhoh... "I don't need your shit today..." he snarled through clenched teeth. I threw my arms open wide and proclaimed, 'But we could be heroes!' Yeah, right... But it did stop his rampage momentarily - a stupified expression fell over his quasi-human face, followed closely by a tempest only a seasoned soldier could withstand. My hand was moist with his snot as I wiped it, disgustedly, on my shift. 'I can't take much more of your crap. You males - no matter what or where, are all the same!' One more move and it was to be more than a slap. I tangled with the best UFs and if he had more than they, well, may the best - hmmm - gotta think here... May the best species win... I really felt like all things sucked at this time. Nothing was right, but considering where I was, well, it was still that same old feeling... Nothing was right. The ape had retrieved the laptop and was commencing to close it when he looked up quizzically. "There was a message sent," he said, carefully wrapping the wires in a loop. "You sent word to the Leoman, didn't you?" 'C'mon...' I gestured at the tangled mess. "It barely plays music let alone sends messages into the great unknown." My head hurt and my feet were wet and soggy in my boots. With a surrendering sort of wave I said, "I just need to sleep now. You take that little piece of crap with you and recall the music. If you can do that with what is left..." and I flagged the pc away. 'more power to you. As far as "messages" go, you figure it out. Leave me alone now, I'm tired.' I curled up in the soft corner of doom and closed my eyes. I could hear his undertones as he worked to close the top. He shivered like a horse and clasped the pc under his arm in closure.

"Tomorrow you will show me how to "download" this music you so treasure. Together we will try to save it." Did he just justify rock and roll? Did he just admit that he liked it? I really need a cigarette about 20 minutes ago. Where's my Letterman? My Craig Ferguson? That turn of a key in a deadbolt sent a shiver through me. No sound. Not even a slap of a sandal against floor or street. Nor a voice like the ones in the center court. It had to have been late, for it was as if the city had rolled up its streets and tucked them aside. I heard the bastard leave, though. His last orders given in a husky hushed sort of way that I was not to be disturbed. Thanks ya big jerk! And in the night, I could have sworn I heard Led Zeppelin waft into my window... Carrying across the hot humid air, "I will crawl" came liltingly through and tucked me in. Robert Plant had a way of doing that and it was never more welcome as now. And as I fell into disturbed slumber, I wondered if Bob enjoyed his real visit to India... Weather's beautiful, wish you were here, (fill in the blank).

\* \* \*

I wondered where my antagonist had gone to now that he had full reign of my laptop. He said he knew how to run it and I began to believe it after all the time that had passed. I was locked in this room and although all my needs were met, I still needed to get out and so I requested an audience with my captor. They laughed on their way out but assured me that they would pass the message along and so I waited. And waited. Waited some more. The audacious bastard kept me wondering for over a week before the door opened and he appeared with his body guards. 'It's about time!' I charged. He gave silent orders to his men and they backed out, stopping at either side of the door before he pushed it shut. Crossing his arms over his chest he waited - for what, me to bid him in? Okay, come in, and I waved him forth. He settled himself in an overstuffed chair and crossed his legs before turning to ask, "I have a very busy schedule, so you need to tell me quickly what you want." He looked so professional all tricked out in his military garb. Cut to the chase...

'I want my pc back.' His head fell back and a great laugh rose from his throat. "Oh!" he roared. "You are funny!" Rising from his seat, he took a few steps my way before looking over his shoulder secretively. "I should slash your throat right now simply for wasting my time." By the way he acted I knew he was under rule and so I used it. Throwing myself in his arms I wrapped my arms around his neck and laid a kiss square on his lips and held it there. He fought to release but I held on tighter until I felt him desist. I couldn't believe that I was actually trying to seduce an ape, but if it granted me freedom - anything goes! "What you are doing will not grant you asylum." He guaranteed beneath our embrace. "But it does promise you a place in my brothel." I stopped immediately and tried to release but he had changed the rules. His brow rose and fell with inuendo as his arms enveloped me. "Play your cards right and we can be friends and you will see your "pc" again." Aw, great! Now he thinks I like him!

\* \* \*

I wondered if rape was in their vocabulary. He did not force himself upon me but he certainly gave the impression that he wanted to. I know that they spoke Aramaic; how they achieved this ancient tongue is a mystery to me, but they used it fluently among themselves. His last words to me were spoken in that language and they were beautifully executed before he pulled away, leaving me to wonder just what he had said and why he had said them that way. 'I'll be your friend.' I don't think he heard me...

\* \* \*

In a matter of a few days I had my pc back and upon that I had a visitor. Guess who? He was back with his henchmen and a proposition: "I insist you be my assistant and teach me what I need to learn." I knew what he wanted. I wanted out of this cell and agreed. As we left I stopped him. 'I promise to teach you if you

promise me freedom to move about the city.' He was truly offset by my request. His lips pursed for words and his eyes fell to the floor and to his comrades before coming back to mine. "I cannot make that yet. You have yet to prove yourself trustworthy." 'C'mon now! I had plenty of time to plan an escape and I sat there. Do I even have a chance to run? NO! So you have no worry.' I curled up to his side and purred the last words into his ear. He tried to act repulsed but I got the best of him and he sank into my request without question. "You may have free reign within the city limits only!" He enforced. "If you venture beyond, I have no other choice than to euthanize you." 'I promise.' And I crossed my heart.

Was it the haze of a hot setting sun or the haze of Opium? There was a faint odor in my room when I awoke in the middle of the night. It was dark except for a lone lantern at the far end of my lavish abode, and in that light I saw the sprawled figure of my captor passed out in the chaise, a pipe in his lax fingers as his arm hung over the overstuffed arm. He looked dead to the world when I approached on numb legs to make sure he was still alive. That was all I needed, a dead ape-General in a human's abode... Rest assured, he was higher than a kite as I checked his vitals. 'You sorry sonofabitch.' He had induced the same euphoria within me after making me drunk on wine and it pissed me off. There wasn't much I could do except make sure he was okay. \* \* \*

As I lay there I could hear the earth move, it seemed. In the dark I heard him stir and his feet as they hit the floor groggily. In my mosquito-netted bed I thought I was well-hidden until his silhouette appeared and parted the film. "I know what I am doing. Do you want me here?" He asked. 'Come into my tent.' He swayed in the faint light as he disrobed before falling beneath the sheets next to me. I hoped he was only there to sleep and not to probe. But when I rolled to my side I felt his arm snake about my hip to rest as his hand fell upon my breast. His hand felt as alien to me as it did to him as it fell upon me., but if we closed our eyes we felt almost the



same - that was until he revealed, "Your skin is soft and barren of the course hair I so often feel. I like this feeling more." 'You're high and need to go to sleep.' I pushed his hand down and tucked him in. 'Talk to me when you wake up next to me.' He gave a grunt before spooning in behind me...

\* \* \*

He coughed and stirred and the knock at the door awoke us both to the fact that we had slept together. With a look of uncertainty on both our parts, we rose and threw on our robes - I, disappearing into the lavatory as he went for the door. I heard their hushed discussion about a revolt but I could not make out what it was about as they fell into their native tongue. And to me, when it resulted in a foreign language all foreign language sounded hostile. But this really sounded nasty. From what I could translate, it sounded as if they had trouble from afar and it was growing closer. And it was I that brought the trouble! He closed the door and shuffled toward the lavatory when I opened the door to him. 'It's me isn't it?' He smiled wanly and sighed as he leaned there, shaking his head morosely. "it is and it isn't." he revealed solemnly. Pushing off, he turned back, adding, "And nothing happened last night, either." 'Like it was supposed to?' "You know. I mean I could have taken advantage..." 'Highly unlikely.' By then he was dressing. Sliding his foot into his sandal he rested his hands upon his knees and slumped slightly between his shoulders before looking up. "You are the testing kind. BUT! you will not soon see your device until I am through with it." That sucked for me. He was leaving when I realized how important it was that he allow me to access a few choice files that could possibly help in this rebellion about to occur. 'I can help you.' "Indeed." And he pushed me aside. 'I don't mean in that way! I know things that your primitive ass can't even dream of.' 'Shit. Well, I had two options left, and if I had had a coin to flip it would've made it easier to decide; kill him or have him committed.

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There was no amount of beauty in that room that could block the sound of his screaming at that so-called army of his. It sounded so much like my ex that I wanted to scream back 'Shut the hell up already!' And his ideals of mastering technology - hell, he couldn't even master his temper. All I could do was sit back and wait until the winning team came to pick me up... That, right there, scared me into a bottle of wine or so. Whatever I wanted was brought and at that moment I wanted something palatable and smooth. 'Hey you! Bring me the best!' Voila! One sturdy chair against that door and the world was my oyster. It borrowed enough time to get my shit together if he decided to come back. Need I say he did? "Let me in or I'll break down the door!" 'Whatever.' That was the clumsiest entrance I ever wished recorded. Not only did he fall over the chair but so did his guards-in-tow. With nary a glance, I smiled to myself and nodded just before being forced from my "comfort zone." Yeah, I was real prepared for the confrontation. 'Where we off to?' I had to query as we scrambled along a dimly lit corridor. We trudged along in silence, our footsteps echoing off of the walls. I was not feeling so good. I fixed my thoughts on a long ago sunset and tried not to think about what was ahead for me. But that was nearly impossible. I was all alone on this quest, following, wanting to stray out into the rolling pastures beyond this hell I was confined in. Crossing through an open passage, the sun fell on us and I closed my eyes and smiled up into its rays. Arriving at our destination just beneath a foot-bridge, I heard the bustle of the people outside of this quadrant as they came and went along the streets, their quaint conversations sounding not unlike those along the busy sidewalks of Daytona. I wished upon that idea before being pushed through an open door where a large table jutted. Sitting at the far end, a tall drink to his left, my captor sat. He barely glanced up, for he was very engrossed in what laid before him. "My very popular unpopular guest." he greeted before dismissing my escorts. He rested his arms across the article and eyed me, almost, with respect

before saying "There is no doubt that you are much more serious-minded than most humans." 'Yes! But remember that I am not from this ghastly planet of yours,' I reminded. "There is a bit of truth in which you speak, but I think you should look at this," and he slid the laptop across the great divide. A lone message, the bar flashing just beyond the last word, stared me in the face. "Pretty remarkable, isn't it, that you are where you were two thousand years ago." A smile flinched across his stubborn muzzle as he reached for his beverage, lifting it in a mock-toast before taking a drink. The coordinates did not lie. They came 360 degrees and claimed to be here. Now. "I took it upon myself to make sure you realized that you are HERE." and he slammed his fist atop the table.

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He knew how this haunted me. The flame fanned by the bitter realization that there was no way back. That I WAS back, and this shaped and mutated into a huge catastrophic picture of what could have gone wrong in that millenium I had slipped past in my

journey. I was escorted back to my room and locked in. Leaning from the window, I saw the gilded heads of guards. Nope, there was no slinking from the windows and there were no rafters to sneak along. I was fucked. Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair so we can get the fuck out of here! \* \* \*

There was only so much I could take of being served day in and day out. I needed to get back to that lagoon and retrieve the powerpack. Was it fate or had my captor felt a pang of empathy? Oddly enough, it was quite obvious that my catterwhals had induced a call for silence and it was his duty to shut me the hell up... "What is it you WANT?!" His unannounced arrival was all I wanted. 'I have to get the powerpack or there won't be any more information or music from the pc.' He paced a moment before stopping in front of the laptop that lay there, the screen and keys dark. Tugging at his goatee, I could see the wheels turning in his head. He understood that the machine needed energy to work. "Very well." He murmured, pressing a few keys in hope of a response. "You will be escorted to the beach from which you emerged." He straightened and turned toward me, an irrational, almost adoring trust lying in his eyes. Almost as if I were some rare and wonderful part of his life. 'You can trust me...' He threw his head back. "I cannot trust anyone! What is this "trust" that you speak so fondly? I cannot trust a human. Never have. Never will." With that, he sacheted for the door when he stopped suddenly. "I do have a fondness for you, though." Oh great, another boyfriend...

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The plan was laid and compasses were used but I already knew the way. While they were reading their instruments, I was trekking forth with a whistle and a wave; This way, fellas! It was like leading a horse to water and this one was going to drink. My plan was to hit that water and swim to the other side, far away from my la "goons" in tow. A foreign sun sat low in the west when the call for camp was

made. The tent that was erected for me was a bit more than needed for a night, but, according to orders, it was to be - a great crimson walk-about with a fire-pit. Far more than the pup-tent I was used to or expecting. Upon entering for the night, I felt that presence. 'You gotta go.' He glanced up from a parchment and sighed heavily. "Now, before you go off on one of your tangents, I've been wondering this evening whether we go all the way with you or trust you to return?" It was hard to conceal the smile as it fought for full attention. 'Well, what's on the other side of that lake that makes you believe I wouldn't?' He rolled his eyes and shrugged, saying, "I've heard that there are cannibals and I've heard there is nothing." Pulling the flap shut, I entered cautiously. 'You mean you never investigated? YOU?! The Grand Poobah?' He threw back his head and laughed. "Of course we have! But..." 'Oh there's a "but!" I exclaimed beneath his mirth. Why was he being so nice when, on all the other occasions, there was distrust and argument? It was as if he had read my mind. As if the decision I made was already contemplated. Was I that open of a book? Shit! Taking up his glass, I took a mouthful of the godly nectar and let its spirits dance before swallowing. It was so good... This seemed to irritate him badly, for he jumped to his feet and paced past me as if on a mission, only to turn and pace back in the same manner, sizing me up with each pass, his breath coming a little faster until he stopped and gave me an angry glare. "You drank from my glass." He seethed. 'So?' "You carry disease." 'I could tell you a thing or two about that subject, my fine fuzzy friend.' Burning eyes pierced me. I do believe he had second thoughts, though. "Oblige me." he curtly replied, his gaze mystifying. Well, that was all it took to launch me into a binary number of instances which left him wandering through what was true and what was not - land. If ya can't dazzle them with brilliance, baffle them with bullshit... "Stop, stop, stop!" he ordered, waving his hands. "Your numerical language does not impress me!" He craved something a bit more tangible. He craved an answer. The frustration blushing on his cheeks was not waning as I sprang into a patter of what was and what will never be. 'You want me to tell

you but you refuse to listen.' I rose and took the goblet. I was keeping it this time...

The way he stormed out was picturesque - like an infuriated hen from the henhouse - feathers in a huff... ...Guess I offended his intelligence... I had a feeling he would be back, though... In this logue, I can only surmise how his perverse thoughts could only latch onto my inane words. Yet, in his eyes, I almost saw a gentler side - invisible to many - offered to me. I had that sonofabitch right where I wanted him...

(Log)

Never gave it a second thought that, perhaps, on the other side of that lake a nastier troop of primates waited. That, maybe, his threat was a warning. All I could do was tie the tethers of my tent into several knots and hope that by the time they figured out the last one I would be awake and holding a machete'. Chimps are nuts. All can be good one minute and then it's bite off your fingers and eat your liver... I am awake and aware of my surroundings. Yeah, right. I fell out as soon as my head hit the pillow never once realizing the triple knots could have been cut without a sound. Hopefully I would get a grasp of my new surroundings before I died from stupidity. (blinkblinkblink) Log off...

Well, the excursion to the lake did bring some interesting finds. My cigarettes were washed ashore. I picked them up and the pack fell apart. My hosts looked at the wilted tobacco in my hands and laughed as I tried to save some of it. "Does it taste better wet?" they chortled. 'It's all I have.' "You behave as if we have no idea what tobacco is." 'Well why the hell didn't you say you had tobacco?' "Didn't know you smoked." One of them pulled a pouch from his pack and tossed it to me. 'Papers?' They looked at each other quizzically. 'You know. Something to smoke it in? Papers?' "Here." and he tossed a long stemmed pipe. "Try not to slobber on it too

much." Shit. If that was all I had to work with I was willing to work it. It was then that I realized that I was better off without the smoke. It made me sick; made me feel tired and bogged down.

The thought of just swimming across was so close I could taste it, but I had kept my word that I would return. Toting a large metal case to the surface was trying as I struggled to shore with it. The soldiers waded in to their waists and pulled me the rest of the way up. There he stood. Reaching down, I thought it was to help me to my feet. Nah.... He took the case and headed off to his tent in a trot. The others offered a hand up but I shook them off and stood up, seething. 'Thanks for the help there!' I chided after him. Sloshing back to my tent it was up to him to figure out what was what. His snooping ass would soon be beckoning my help in translating the difficult mathematics involved to restructure the scheme of the pc and make it work again. Hah! all he really needed to do, though, was plug it in and it would take care of itself. Let him figure it out, the big meany! I changed into dry clothes and sat back in a plume of pillows and waited. It was pretty quiet outside as the soldiers gathered around the campfire for weenies and marshmallows. Not really. But it was suppertime for them. The smell of root vegetables wafted through the air, all burning to a delicious, crusted doneness. I heard his voice. They all talked in foreign tongue; that Aramaic again. "Did she come out to eat?" "No." "Have you offerd anything to her?" "No. She seemed angry so we left her alone. If she is hungry she will come out and eat." No I won't. I wanted something to read. I wanted something to do. I wanted to go home. It wasn't long before I saw a shadow approaching. "I have brought you something to eat." they said. It didn't sound like his voice and they did not simply barge in. 'Come in.' A stout soldier stooped through the flap, in his left hand, a wooden plate. "The General says that you are to eat. He says he does not wish to have to carry you back to the city." He sat the plate down and backed out. Who needed food when you had enough wine to take you clear into next week? Pulling the cork out with my teeth, I chugged a good quarter of red before taking up



the plate and heading out of the tent. All eyes watched as I marched for his tent. With one hand holding the flap, I flung the plate across his tent. 'Don't patronize ME!' I shouted. I heard him yell and heard him curse as his feet hit the floor. Storming from the tent his eyes were ablaze with fury as he pursued my steps. "I do not understand YOU! WHY do YOU make it so HARD for me to TRUST YOU?!" I stopped so suddenly and turned that he almost ran into me. 'Why? Why?! What would you ever trust me as? subservient or equal?' "Well...", "What is it?" "I - I'm not sure." he said faintly but clearly. The look in his eyes was tormented. ...Maybe I hit a nerve. I heard the cry from an officer, "Are you alright?" as he came rushing up to us. The general ushered him back as he nodded. "Everything is fine. Please escort..." he didn't even know my name and I let him squirm after it. 'c'mon, now,' I said with a grin. 'Do you know my name?' His patience grew thin. With a mighty wave of his hand I was swept off to my tent. 'It's Larsen! Sarah Larsen!' I yelled after. Two stood at attention at the door and once again I felt like a prisoner. I know it was my own fault. I lost my temper and caused a rift in the trust that was slowly forming there. Up from my door I could hear him ranting and raving to one of his equals about how he wanted to trust me, his voice eddying on the wind; one time sounding as if he were right outside my tent flap while the next as if he were ten miles away. A mix of Aramaic and English. Indeed, I had hit a nerve. Good... (Log) The cache worked. It allotted an abundant amount of stored power for me and I have my pc back. Obviously, I am no longer a threat. Nor is this machine I so fervently sit and type at. He still insists that I play Led Zeppelin, which is okay with me. "Kashmir" seems to be a song we both can relate to. His world is so like ancient India with a splash of Egypt. There is still no truce as we argue and fight, but I am gaining a foothold among my new uncivilized civilization. I realize I'll never go home. So does he. Perhaps that is why he insists on antagonizing me. For the longest time he never even made an attempt to understand what made me tick, he only wanted to make sure that I could not send a distress signal, which I was sure was not, due to his ending any out reach

from my long sunken ship. What a fantastic explosion! never knew they held so much intelligence as to re-invent dynamite. Damned near cleared the lake of its water. From many miles inland, the reverberation was felt, like an earthquake. Pots toppled from window sills down into the streets. The window was open but there was no escaping the tower. It was far too high to jump and there were no trees to climb across into for a quick shimmy to the ground several stories below. The view was amazing, though. The smoke was easily spotted rising above the tree tops and I sank into the room realizing that it was finally over. It was a matter of time until the squadron was back in the city and I could hear their voices as they announced that the threat had been eradicated. "well," he muttered, entering then dusting his hands together. "That is that. Now, what to do with you." He scratched at his bearded chin, rolling his eyes around the room before staring at me. 'You can't very well keep me penned up in here.' "No," he muttered again. "no, no, no. I think I will make you a servant." He laughed to himself, a devilish grin spanning his simian face. "You will be one of my servants. I will not tolerate insubordination. You will do what you are told to do or it's not going to be a pretty picture." He swaggered over to the sofa and fell into it folding his hands behind his head. With a nod, he said, "That machine," and he nodded toward the pc. "I want the music that it possesses. Can you do that for me?" My brow furrowed at the thought of telling him that the only way he could have the music was to have a cd player or another pc. Or, for a matter of fact, cd's to burn. 'Sorry my fine furry friend. The technology here is just too primitive.' He scowled, snorted then shot to his feet and crossed the room in a huff. "Primitive..." he mumbled before stopping at the door. "Perhaps." was all he said then flung the door wide and slammed it behind him. Guess I had touched a raw nerve there. What could I do? It was the stinging truth. Brutal honesty was the only way to get through the thick headedness due to that nasty stubborn streak that ran so deeply through his middle. Somewhere in there, though, there had to be some cream filling (heh heh heh). Finding his weakness was going to

be a trivial pursuit.

\* \* \*

It was almost like a royal procession the way I was escorted to the king's home; or what ever he was. I couldn't help but wave to the faces on the street as we paraded past the store fronts, the homes jutting from above those stores and the curious onlookers, their necks stretched long and jutting chins. Might as well make the best of it. Looking back over my log, I laughed out loud at some of the crap I wrote. There was no erasing any of it, for it all means something even though, for the most part, there is not much in here that makes any sense - to me, them, or anyone who happens upon this somewhere down the line of time. After a slow and tedious search of my person and the items I carried two of my escorts were allowed through a set of thick iron gates which squealed with resistance as they were forced open. 'Guess they don't get many visitors.' I jested, not getting even a quick grin from my escorts. Like nails across a chalkboard, the gates were forced closed with a clang and the outside world was closed to me. Free rein to roam the premises, yet no free rein to roam. As we trod up a long, pebbled path, I saw the fortress as it began to peek over the ridge. Large, looming and dark, I felt like I was heading straight for Dracula's castle. Built from ancient rock, during an era possibly before my (I gag) master was born, this monolith spanned across the land like a sleeping dragon, rolling with the hills it was erected upon and far behind in a labyrinth of rooms and passageways. Huge, intricately carved, wooden double doors stood wide. Huddled along the sides human eyes watched and waited as we made our way only to suddenly vanish at the presence of their master who took to lean casually against the jamb, his arms crossed. The escorts stopped a few feet behind and gave me a shove and I stumbled toward the sweeping stairs leading to the entry. Such a lovely place - where is my cell? I thought as I took the steps. The simian rolled off of the jamb and led me in closing the doors behind. What a sound. So

damning. He snapped his fingers and a humble human was immediately there. "Take this to the bath house and make sure she is clean and ready for work." THIS?! 'I beg your pardon?' He retorted cynically, "You can beg later." Whether he saw the snarl on my face as I was whisked away, I had no idea, but my last remark made his hair stand on end; 'Primate...' His heavy footsteps faded and a door closed heavily. The hall was like a sidewinder, twisting and turning. Passing forbidden doors along the way, I stopped before one and went to enter when my human escort slapped my hand. Shaking her head, her face was as stern as an old school teacher's; "No." was all she said and pushed me ahead. Just a look was all I wanted. What would he do to me? Uh, kill me? The air was getting humid as we made our way deeper into the castle(?). Somewhere up ahead were the bath houses. The smell of soaps and oils mingled with sweat. Lit with torches and oil lamps, I was introduced to a room that was not at all what I expected. A warm amber hue lit walls draped with silk tapestries that billowed lithely on a breeze coming from an open patio. Maybe he wasn't such a bad guy after all. My escort left with no goodbye; just backed out and quietly shut the door. Somehow, this seemed all too familiar. But, what the hell. Checking for a lock on the door, I did not find one. A sturdy chair worked. Wedging it up under the french-like handle, the latch could be turned but getting in would prove a task. Closing the patio doors, I navigated to the music saved on the pc, shed my sweaty clothes and sunk into the waiting water, the oils clinging to my skin and healing my wounded body and spirit as Robert Plant crooned about Kashmir. Closing my eyes, I went there. "How can something from somewhere else tell of a place that I have visited?" 'How did you slither in?' I demanded, covering myself with my hands. 'I expected some peep hole hidden in the wall.' His breath escaped with a hiss. "There are ways to enter that you cannot prevent." Feeling his hands take my hair and drape it along the back of the basin made me shiver. What next, a machete across my throat? 'I prefer to be alone.' "There are a few things I need to brief you on." Yeah... Sweeping the water, I created a wave that

splashed him thoroughly. 'Get out.' He leaped back, his clothes dripping wet along with his face. "That was totally uncalled for!" 'Get a towel and take it with you.' He toweled his face pulling it down slowly only to reveal his eyes and in that flash of an instant, I saw a human face. Then I woke up. The scowl hidden behind the cloth growled menacingly. "You are such a difficult human!" and he bolted for the door throwing the chair aside as if it were weightless, the door rattling on its hinges, closing, as if on its own, after his departure. 'Thanks for shutting the door.' How in hell did he get in? Secret passageway. Yep. Knowing I would not be interrupted any more, I enjoyed my soak. I just couldn't get those eyes out of my head, though. When he peered over that towel I didn't see solid black eyeballs. There was a distinction there and the irises were colored other than the sepia brown of what I was used to observing in a simian. Chalk it up to exhaustion. Yeah, and the fact that he was speaking English along with that strange Aramaic-type language he used among his co-horts. Emerging from the bath, I reached for an over-sized towel and wrapped it around myself, tucking the corner in at my left arm pit. A wardrobe stood just to my left across the room and I went to it and pulled the doors open. These were not the clothes of a servant. Pulling a silk tunic over my head, I wrangled my hair and pulled it out of the collar before taking a pair of pants from the shelf. They seemed to fit as if tailored. Sitting in the chair, I studied the room. Somewhere was a passage and to find it was just a matter of tapping out the rhythm on the walls, listening for that distinctive hollow sound and a sliding panel. Escape route? Could be.

Log: My simian captor has a mind. I think it lingers on the perverted fringe, though. He likes naked human women, I fear. He thinks he can dominate me by scaring me with his alpha-male tactics. Yep - Gonna hafta kill 'im...

\* \* \* Going about my daily routine, I happened upon a room where its door was ajar, so I, the rogue, went in. Walls, as high as

the ceiling, were laced with books, their spines dark from time. I slid in, not making a sound, the smell of leather, ink, and parchment reminding me of my old school library back in third grade. Pulling one from the shelf I opened it. It was written in a language I did not recognize. DAMN! Somehow, I had to locate the "Rosetta Stone." That could be tricky... "If you trail back a few you will find the translations..." The voice came from above and I craned my neck up into the shadowy shelves. Standing on one of the ladders my, eh-hem, master swung out sending the ladder along its track toward me. I jumped back as it careened past to stop before a tall, narrow line of dusty records and books. He slid down the edge of the ladder and stopped half way, then commenced to wrench a very large and very old book from its spot. He waved it over my head and then let it drop. How he held that thing with one hand, I'll never know. It sent me to my knees upon catching it. 'Whatcha tryin to do, kill me?!' He pursed his lips and rolled his eyes about the room as if contemplating; "No." he sang, adding, "But now that you brought it up..." and he slid the rest of the way down and landed before me with a grunt. 'CATCH!' I threw the book to him and ran - to where? anywhere rather than there with my bi-polar captor. Speeding past one of the house humans, her voice tried to keep up as I sprinted by. "Wehaven'tfinishedour...chores." the last word falling short in frustration. 'I have!' and I kept going. Hitting the court yard, I imagined myself hurdling the sleepy garden wall, running down the street like a streaker through a sabbatical. The idea and the ambition was there but I couldn't get my ass to follow. Hanging half-way over the wall I felt the hands of doom take hold of my ankles, tugging and pulling until I had to come back or lose my fingerprints on the rough, rocky surface. Sitting in the living room, my captor bandaged my hands, a smug expression on his face as he picked pebbles and gravel from my palms. Wrapping the cloth gingerly over the gouges and abrasions, he stopped and looked up at me, a sigh of exasperation escaping. "What were you thinking?" followed, like a secret. 'Getting out.' A grunt of frustration escaped from his lips and he appeared to pout. "Now, you should know by now that escape

is impossible. Anyway, where would something with your caliber go?" Caliber?! I have caliber! 'A place where I could just start over.' He tucked the end of the bandage in on the back of my hand then pushed it toward me with a smirk. "There is no such place." and he rose and crossed the room. "Even if there were, don't you think I would have found it by now?" 'No.' I scoffed. He strode past and stopped just at my shoulder - silent and still as if contemplating what he wanted to say before continuing across the room to a set of draped double doors, pulling them open dramatically. Claspng his hands tightly behind his back he strode back, his brow knitting in thought. "You are complicated. I cannot quite put my finger on just what it is yet." 'Finger?! Don't you mean digit? Your a primate for cripe sake!' His fangs flashed in the diffused light, all long and menacing, as if to scare me. "You only add another piece to a large puzzle I am surely to complete and when I do you will no longer be of service." Scare tactic...Got it... 'Well then perhaps I can tell you that the "puzzle" you're working on already has a piece missing.' His brow rose in jest. "You seem to have all the answers but no remedy. Tell me human," and he was immediately nose-to-nose with me. "Where is the missing piece?" I sunk back and smiled the same Chesire smile as his. 'I'm not tellin till you promise to give me my freedom. And then I will only mail it to you.' His face puckered and pouted and he shook his head. "No! You will not be freed. Even if you told me I would still keep you ..." 'Ahha! You had no intention of killing me then!' Called that bluff! He spun in a huff and stormed from the room. 'Don't go away mad, just go away.' And he did. My host seemed to evaporate into the very walls, for I did not see or hear from him for days on end. His footsteps never passed the door nor did I hear his curses far in the distance. I was actually concerned. Now beat that. \* \* \*

Turns out that my mad hatter had a matter to tend to and was actually gone for a time allowing me free reign to roam the premises and search out clues or answers to this wowwee world. In a dark library I scoured the books, crouched down in a chair beneath an oil

lamp. Ancient script, scrawled in fading blue ink taunted me to translate although it was more frustration than anything that translated. Thank you for not paying attention in "ancient scripture" class! This was going to take time but I knew it was. Laying the book carefully on the table I went over to a small round table in the corner which held a caraffe and the most delicate set of stemware. The crystal stopper sparkled as I pulled it off and sniffed the contents. Fine aromas rose reminding me of port wine, and I poured some into one of the glasses. Sweet grapes followed by an almost whiskey after taste filled my olfactory as I slowly sucked air in through my mouth. So good. Intoxicating to say the least, which leads me back to the reason I entered the room in the first place: Not to find liquor - but answers. Taking the glass back with me, I lifted the book open and began to scan the pages. With the reference/rosetta Stone translations, it all began to come together as I scrawled cross references, checking and double checking the answers to make sure I recorded them correctly. Wow! Deep shit as I sat there and read what I translated. No wonder my host was so uptight! According to the text it had always been an uphill battle for them. And it all boiled down to the homosapien: I. We. Us. Granted, some of it was trivial; like having a rabbit in your cabbage patch, but for the more serious issues, it was all out war just to keep land. According to the text, there was constant struggle to raise crops. Though the species offered and taught the humans the same technique, it seemed there were a few who wanted it all and started a revolution which in turn started the wars which, by what was written in those pages, circled this world. How many - like this - were out there? How, in such a primitive civilization, did knowledge spread worldwide? That was the primordial question that purged as I stared down at the alien writings. How many glasses of the wine had I passed under my nose as time flew was tallied by the empty decanter. And the sun had slipped behind the mountain. My head heavy, I left the book where it lay and swaggered out into the corridor. Still no sign of my - dare I say - friend. Couldn't deny that he was. After all, I was allowed to wander his home after the initial



blow of distrust and belittlement. Not to mention a snarl here and there. After reading that, I really couldn't blame him. Am I really taking his side? Now I wondered what his sleeping chamber looked like. Did it have whips and chains, or was it all in pink? I hate pink! Echoing from somewhere in the back of the - well, let's just call it a castle - house humans were busy in the kitchen and by the sounds, they were preparing something pretty extravagant. Lots of metal on metal and anxious voices. Was my host returning? No matter, my quest to locate his room was prime, mate. How many doors opened and rooms peered into; it seemed like hundreds until the last one I would open. This one did not have dust covering everything nor did it look unlivable. In fact, it looked like one of the more inhabited rooms I had the good fortune to visit. It was one of the warmest feeling rooms yet. It was his chamber and it appeared as if everything he dreamed and everything he wanted to do and say reflected therein. This room had feeling. A piece he never revealed to anyone. At least not his male cohorts. Closing the door quietly behind me, I stood there, motionless, for some time before daring to venture in further. I was trespassing for sure and although I felt this, I still had to check it out. Little clusters of time were staggered painstakingly about, almost as if in chronological order as they happened. Shelves, lined with pieces from his memories, were packed and yet neat: statues, jewelry, ribbons, drawings, and artifacts. Carefully preserved and lovingly cared for. Just as I was about to pick up a piece, a noise from behind drew my attention and, with a piece in my hand, I turned nonchalantly, as if I were in my own room and holding one of my own pieces of memorabilia. "Are you enjoying yourself?" With a slight shudder, I turned and replaced the piece before turning back. "I wouldn't say that, but after seeing these things, I understand you a little bit more." He winced. Was it the wine on my breath or the fact that I may have struck a nerve he wished no one to touch? In that fleeting moment we were on equal ground. 'I had things too,' I relented. 'They told many stories. I can tell you hold close your memories.' He looked nervous. Searching for a way out. "You are not to come here

again," With that, he gestured for my exit. He was on my heels as we left, the door closing all too calmly. "Please." I turned at this and we were but a breath from each other. Neither moved. 'Can I come here if you are with me?' What?! Did I really just utter those words? His whiskers bristled and he swayed briefly...

His hand took my arm turning me toward the long walk back to where ever it was we were to go. "This place we will never venture together." he whispered.

Oh you sexy beast...

Never had any thoughts that what I was thinking was considered beastiality because he was not what I considered a beast simply because he could speak. Was that enough to pass?

Not only did he stand at my height but he spoke and was prolific in languages that I could only guess at. And he was unusually handsome in his quasi-simian way. Shit! I'm attracted to an ape hybrid!

Leading me back to my room, he opened the door and gestured for me to enter. "Please do not venture any farther than the hall you are in." and he shut the door and left.

"Yeah!" I yelled. "Until you leave me alone and I go searching again!"

The door opened swiftly and he entered hastily. "Dare you go where you are not to I must forbid it if only to protect you from..."

'From what? The truth? I already know where I am. I want to know what there is for me now that I am here and there's no escape. Please, Thade. Let me know what's in store for me. Let me roam and let me see what's going on.'

I approached him cautiously, my arms reaching out - my fingers touching his hair and combing through it gently before resting my arms on his shoulders. "Now we both know that we like each other," I cooed in his ear. 'Our best chances at trusting one another is to be honest with one another first.'

I felt him shiver and his hands on my waist as his fingers lifted my shirt. Warm thick hands touched my skin and I was the one that shivered at the touch.

'Now do we want to go there or are you going to back away with revolt?' I asked.

I heard him chuckle and felt his breath on my neck. "The question should be are you sure you wish to continue what you have started."

He had a point there.

"Dare I say you are very attractive not only to your own tribe as you are to me." His grip tightened around my waist and he pulled me close, our lips but a breath apart. "If I were to take you now - here, what would you think?"

And he pressed his mouth against mine as if he wanted me to be offended. Instead, I offered my mouth to him and we fell into a great embrace that neither wanted to be the first to release from.

Stumbling, falling back to the bed, we fell together there in the heat of passion as we tore at one another's clothing, the feel of our skin against each other growing ever closer as each garment was removed.

'I thought you would be more ape than human but it turns out you are more human than ape.' I breathed as his lips kissed my skin.

I heard "Second Hand News" in my head as we tumbled about. I was back in 1977 in a field with my boyfriend and a tape player!

\* \* \*

The stars were out as we lay there on the bed in the middle of the night high in his fortress. Whether we both felt violated or vindicated didn't seem to matter. We were both satisfied beyond either's expectations and didn't seem to care that we were from two completely different worlds.

'This can't get out.' I said, taking a drag on my smoke.

"You're telling me?" He said.

I turned and looked at him. 'It has nothing to do with you. I have to stay neutral and what we just did has gone against everything I

was told not to do.'

Thade smiled up at the ceiling. "Right. You land here and seduce me..."

'Whoa, there! I think you need to review that.'

He laughed lightly as he nuzzled into my neck. "You know you liked it. I did too."

I pulled away and wrapped the sheet around myself before rolling out of the bed. "That's irrelevant. What if I get pregnant?"

And the needle scrapes across the record...

"That could never happen." He assured. "Our DNA is far too distant."

'How are you so sure? Obviously something occurred or I wouldn't be here carrying on a conversation with a primate.'

Okay so my words didn't quite meld with his ideals. In a huff, he rose and began dressing.

'Love 'em and leave 'em. You are no different than the human men back where I came from!'

His face wrinkled as if something foul had passed beneath his nose. "I can assure you that our tryst will remain concealed," Pulling on his other sandal, he hopped across the room toward me. "and I can only suggest that you will remain quiet also."

To just reach out and push him over was all too easy.

\* \* \*

Needless to say, I am still imprisoned.

\* \* \*

What is it about him?! Why do I miss him when he's gone but when he's around I can't stand him?!

It was on a beautiful evening when I heard the lock turn on my door. For the first time in - I don't know how long - I was locked in my room.

No warning. No explanation. Just *click*.

Through the halls to my door I could hear many voices. There was a gathering commencing and I was not invited. Thade's dirty little secret...

Well, I could swing from the tree branches too!

If the windows weren't barred.

It wasn't long before I heard the lock again and the little chimp girl came in.

She carried a tray filled with food, wine and tobacco.

'How thoughtful of you.' I declared.

"Oh this isn't from me although I love to pick your brain," she replied, sitting the tray on the table. "It's from the General."

'How kind.' came dryly. 'I didn't think he cared.'

The chimp stifled her laugh.

'Don't be afraid to share your feelings. I know what he did to you.'

She fixed her hair behind her ears and faced me.

'We both know he's a prick.'

And after a moment of thought we both snickered about it.

I bade her to sit. 'You're Ari, right?'

As she settled into the chair, she nodded. I could see her pride. How she was and how she once was. How that thing downstairs had tried to strip from her, her spirit.

I poured us some wine and handed her a glass. If I got her drunk I could get out of here and take a peek at what was going on.

She sipped the cup and then sat it down. "If you think you have to get me drunk to get out of here then think again."

My lips pursed as if from the tartness of the wine. ' Oh now, Ari, what...'

"I know the passages."

Remember that horse from Animal House when John Belushi shot the gun?

\* \* \*

Best friends!

I wanted to know and Ari wanted me to make it rough for Thade. She knew he would never hurt me or that I would ever reveal who let me out.

At least on purpose!

\* \* \*

I made sure she remained in my room as I snuck down the hall, instructing her to drink mightily until she passed out.

Finding the finest clothing in the closet, I dressed. Surely a human attired in the best textiles would be welcomed! HA!

Winding down the back stairs Ari had shown me, I stepped outside and worked my way to the front door. Surprisingly, there were no guards at the back or sides, just at the gates way down the lane. I stood at the door and knocked. Oh I guess they do employ primates for butlers!

I bowed tersely as I passed him in a rush, feeling his hand miss my collar.

The entrance was lit softly by candles as I made my way to the dining room - everything too surreal to even give a second thought to. Golden light filled my eyes as I stood in the arch-way.

Here an ape, there an ape, everywhere an ape ape...

But what floored me most was the female and her children poised next to the General.

He looked at me.

I looked at him.

His cheeks flushed as his eyes grew large.

With a sache', I entered, bidding, 'Good evening.'

Whoever thought! A human dressed in the finest brocade!

I was a Princess!

It was a moment frozen in time.

Not long before I was accompanied by two of the biggest gorillas I had yet to see.

"Remove this human at once!" Thade bellowed.

'Let me stay, General,' I pleaded. 'I promise I'll be good!'

Needless to say my words trailed off as I was dragged off back to

my room...

\* \* \*

Ari was slumped in the chair when my *bodyguards* dumped me onto the divan!

They departed immediately with grunts of disgust.

Well, I figured it was only a matter of time before the ol' gen'ral showed up.

'Good job, Ari!' I bestowed.

'Ari?'

She was out cold. The carafe was nearly empty!

Good luck with that hang over.

\* \* \*

'Bring another bottle or I'll raise HELL!'

Not a threat... A warning!

Before I knew it, there was a servant and the same two gorillas - the servant bringing the wine and the gorillas to take Ari out.

'Make sure she gets home safely!'

I didn't recall being put to bed.

Probably because I wasn't in *my* bed.

'I take it they were your wife and children.' I surmised.

Thade was preparing to leave once again when he stopped and sat down on the foot of the bed. "It was but it was an *arranged* marriage."

His hand massaged my calf. "I had no voice in the matter."

I pulled my legs up. 'Sure.' and rolled away from him.

As soon as I turned he threw himself next to me and forced me to face him. "I have never felt the way I feel for you toward anyone. You must believe me."

If I closed my eyes I could swear he was as human as I was...

The warmth of his kisses on my skin.  
His caresses.  
The way he made me feel.  
Fuck it.  
I was here and there was no returning.  
Gimme Opium and wine and we're all fine...

\* \* \*

Fuckin lost my whole log...

\* \* \*

Well, one thing was certain, I really had to get out of there before something happened. Yeah, another escape attempt by the one and only. If I ended up having to kill him then who knows what they'd do to me!

Even though my captor acted like a human didn't make him one and that point being made makes this wrong in all ways impossible!

Wonder if he'd just settle for holding hands...

\* \* \*

Evening fell along with the humidity. A mixed breeze of warm and cool air blew through my opened balcony. Through the canopy heat lightning speckled the blue velvet sky as distant thunder teased the city. Another storm was rolling in. Stepping out onto the bamboo floor of the balcony, I observed although I was somewhere else far away. Closing my eyes, I was back on my own patio in the Keys. Last time there and feeling this way was during the last weekend I would ever see my beloved home again. Now I'm feeling homesick.

Businesses were rolling up their awnings below as restaurants began filling with my new simian neighbors.

Is it so bad? I asked myself.



You're a PRISONER! shouted back, and my eyes opened.  
Time for politics...

\* \* \*

Despite the storm, all seemed to be normal down on the streets.  
I want to party...

There was no sign of my "friend" as I made my way to the stairs.  
Oil lamps, tucked into covey holes all along the winding stairway,  
flickered as I passed. At the bottom of the stairs the living room  
sprawled and there was no sign of anyone. Not a sound. I crept  
toward the back of the house toward the kitchen where I heard the  
sounds of dishes and pots clattering and smalltalk between a couple  
of - humans?

DETOUR...

Slipping into what seemed to be some kind of back hallway, I  
made my way along in semi-darkness. Told me this was a human  
access point; poorly lit and poorly maintained. But I could see a  
large wooden door ahead of me. Hopefully unlocked too!

As I drew closer I saw aprons hanging on pegs, like ghosts,  
moving slightly as the breeze breached the gaps in the wood of the  
door.

I grasped the metal and pushed down. The latch flipped up and  
the door creaked open as I caught it before it swung wide.

The idea that being sly by peeking is all in the mind's eye, for we  
forget we have heads...

A dirt path leading into the deep forest was ten feet away.

Could it be this easy?

I let go with a little "Ha" as I crept out and stole across into the  
blackness of the trees.

Lions and tigers and bears?

Well, maybe lions and tigers.

Looking back, I wondered if it had been such a good idea to leave  
at night. That's when the burlap bag went over my head...

