

FUTILE FANTASY CREATIONS PRESENT...

A LONG, LONG WAY FROM CAPSWAY ISLAND.

(New Capsway Island. Six months after the opening of the new military teaching academy.

Walking the short distance between her army base and the local military teaching academy on New Capsway Island, Major Kasira Ashwood couldn't stop smiling. Strolling forth with her best friend, Brigadier Cayley Avanti, at her side, she couldn't help but feel this was going to be a good day. The air was warm, yet not stifling, the birds were singing and best of all she'd just enjoyed the rare delight of eating her breakfast in peace. As the leader of the 123rd Wraith Containment Unit, such an event was rare. She spent most mornings supervising her loud, boisterous subordinates. Today had been different. Today, all four of them had slept in, only waking up as herself and Cayley were leaving the building. Taking it as a sign that good things were ahead, she glanced to her side and exhaled.)

KASIRA: Don't get me wrong, Cayley, I love Ambre, Nivea, Sika and Soapy to bits, but to eat breakfast in peace this morning, with you, that was wonderful. It almost felt...

CAYLEY: Dignified?

KASIRA: That's the word. No yelling at Sika to stop teasing Ambre; no listening to Sika brag about how great she thinks she is and best of all, we didn't have to listen to Sika whinge that Ambre's slice of toast is slightly bigger than hers.

(She then grimaced uncomfortably.)

KASIRA: Come to think of it, the only thing stopping us have a peaceful breakfast *every* morning is Sika!

CAYLEY: Yup. She's a lively one.

KASIRA: She's maddening. If she wasn't such fun to be with, I'd have strangled the little bugger by now.

(She then forced a smile back onto her face.)

KASIRA: Nope. No more negative thoughts; today is gonna be a good day, Cayley. I can feel it in my bones.

CAYLEY: Optimistic about this fortnight's student intake, are we?

KASIRA: Well, they can't be any worse than last fortnight's.

CAYLEY: Good point. They were unusually clueless, weren't they?

KASIRA: Yup. And that was the last thing we needed. It's hard enough being full time instructors at the academy while trying to run a wraith containment unit at the same time, without having stupid, unruly students to run around after. Nope. There's no way this coming fortnight can be anywhere near as bad as the last one.

CAYLEY: Right? I just want to get home and relax after my shifts, but for the last two weeks, we've had to come home exhausted from our extra efforts then do our wraith patrol. We really didn't need that.

KASIRA: No, we didn't. I mean, it wouldn't have been so bad if we still had eight members to our unit; we wouldn't need to patrol at all then. But no, for some reason the army decided we had to send Eksi and Lycia to work at the gatehouse, checking ID's. They could have employed a civilian to do that!

CAYLEY: They could have, yes, but you know what the army's like. Cheapskates.

KASIRA: And then some.

(She then glanced ahead and smiled.)

KASIRA: Speaking of which, we're at the gatehouse.

CAYLEY: That were are.

(With that, they paced up to the booth where the gatehouse keepers, Eksi and Lycia were stationed. Smiling, Kasira approached the window to the booth and waved inside.)

KASIRA: Morning.

(Eksi glanced up from her seat then smiled.)

EKSI: Hey! Hiya.

(She and Lycia then approached the window.)

EKSI: You look really happy this morning, Kasira. What happened?

KASIRA: What's that supposed to mean?

EKSI: Nothing. I'm just saying.

KASIRA: Right. Fair enough.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: Look, I'll come and talk to you later, okay? I have things to prepare for this morning's new intake.

EKSI: Okay. Show me your ID and you can go in.

KASIRA: Well, obviously.

(She then delved into her bag. Moments later, however, an uncomfortable grimace appeared on her face.)

KASIRA: Shit! I left it in my office at the base.

(She then shrugged it off and laughed.)

KASIRA: Oh, well. I'll show you it twice tomorrow.

(She then attempted to pass through the gate.)

EKSI: No ID, no admittance, Kasira, you know the rules.

(Kasira looked through her coldly.)

KASIRA: Excuse me?

EKSI: I need to see your ID before I can let you in.

KASIRA: Why? In case I'm not who I say I am?

EKSI: Exactly.

KASIRA: Eksi, you *know* who I am!

EKSI: Do I though?

KASIRA: Yes! I'm your bloody sister!

LYCIA: She can't take your word for that; she needs to see your ID.

KASIRA: She can't take my word that I'm her sister??? What are you saying? Maybe one of us was adopted?

EKSI: No, it's just...

KASIRA: And even if one of us *was* adopted, you still know who I am. You've known me all your life.

EKSI: That makes no difference. You taught me to be the consummate professional. To always follow the army's strict rules and keep my nose clean.

CAYLEY: She's right, you did teach her that.

EKSI: See? It's advice I take very seriously. As such, I'd be letting you down, letting the army down and letting myself down if I let you pass without an ID.

LYCIA: Yup. She's right.

KASIRA: Do you want a black eye, Lycia?

(Lycia whimpered and leant back.)

LYCIA: No, thanks.

CAYLEY: Kasira, calm down.

KASIRA: Calm down?

EKSI: Yes. Calm down.

(She shrugged.)

EKSI: Or I'll have to report you to HQ for aggressive and threatening conduct.

(Kasira stared through her in astonishment then placed her hands on her hips.)

KASIRA: I see. Like that, is it? You wait until I get you home, missy.

EKSI: Home? I live here in the dorms now, Kasira. You won't *be* getting me home.

KASIRA: Shit. That's true.

EKSI: Look, just do us both a favour and go back to the base for your ID card.

KASIRA: Don't tell *me* what to do. So help me god, Eksi, I'll slap you into the middle of next week.

EKSI: Then I'd definitely have to report you to HQ.

KASIRA: Yeah, right. Like you'd report your own sister to HQ.

EKSI: I would actually! If someone uses aggressive or threatening behaviour, it's my *job* to report them, no matter *who* they are! My sister, you, taught me to do things by the book, you see? I can't give you special treatment just because we're related. You taught me that when I first joined your unit, remember?

(Kasira stared at her emptily for a moment then nodded.)

KASIRA: Very well. If that's how you want to play it, fine. Just don't expect to be invited to our next barbeque.

CAYLEY: Wow.

KASIRA: What do you mean, wow?

CAYLEY: She's supposed to be the pouty, teenage, little sister; not you.

KASIRA: I'm not pouting!

(Realising she was very much pouting, she then sucked her lips in and furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: Fine. Whatever.

(She then minced away nonchalantly, back towards the base to get her ID card. Watching her go, Cayley bit her lip.)

CAYLEY: Oh, boy. Here endeth her good mood.

EKSI: I'm only doing my job, Cayley.

CAYLEY: I know, love.

LYCIA: She wouldn't really give me a black eye, would she?

(Cayley just smiled sympathetically.)

LYCIA: She would???

CAYLEY: Anyway, I should get going.

(She then flashed her ID card at them and strutted into the compound, chuckling quietly to herself. Watching her go, Lycia could only tremble.)

LYCIA: Oh, boy. I bet Kasira's slaps really hurt.

EKSI: Lycia?

LYCIA: Yeah?

EKSI: Just how gullible are you? Of course Kasira wouldn't hit you.

LYCIA: But, Cayley...

EKSI: Exactly, my point. Cayley! You just got pranked by Cayley of all people. The least mischievous woman in the world. You total plank.

(Lycia looked to her emptily for a moment then furrowed her brow.)

LYCIA: Shut up.

Inside the 123rd Wraith Containment Unit's base, at this time, Captain Nivea, Captain Soapy, Corporal Ambre and Corporal Sika were all seated around the kitchen table. All but Soapy were staring down at their plates with a horrified look on their faces. Tucking into her breakfast quite merrily, Soapy hadn't even noticed. It wasn't until Nivea made a very audible cringing sound that she even glanced up.

SOAPY: You okay there, Nivea?

(Wearing special darkened goggles that allowed her to see in daylight, Nivea glanced across at her and furrowed her brow.)

NIVEA: Am I okay? No, I'm bloody not okay.

SIKA: She's mortified.

NIVEA: And so's Ambre; she's just too polite to say anything.

SOAPY: About what?

(Nivea gestured to her plate.)

NIVEA: This... thing!

SOAPY: Your breakfast?

SIKA: Is that what it is? I thought you'd just shoved a lump of coal under our noses.

SOAPY: What do you mean?

NIVEA: It's burnt!

SOAPY: No, it isn't.

(She shrugged.)

SOAPY: It's just well done.

SIKA: Well done? It's bloody cremated.

NIVEA: It's jet fucking black.

SOAPY: No, it isn't!

(Nivea held up a black slice of bread and sneered.)

NIVEA: What is it then?

SIKA: Charcoal grey?

(Soapy rolled her eyes.)

SOAPY: Look, I admit, I may not be the best chef in the world...

NIVEA: You think? Ambre tried really hard to eat hers, just to be nice, but even *she* couldn't stomach it.

(Not wanting any trouble, Ambre spoke in a small voice.)

AMBRE: No, it's okay. The nibble I had was really nice; I'm just not hungry.

SOAPY: Ha! See? She's not hungry.

SIKA: Is that so? Would you rather have a cheese sandwich, Ambre?

AMBRE: Ooh, yes please. I'm really hungry.

SOAPY: But you just said you weren't!

(Ambre whimpered and hung her head.)

AMBRE: I don't know.

NIVEA: See, Soapy? This toast is so shit, Ambre was even willing to lie about it. And she hardly ever lies!

SIKA: Busted!

NIVEA: You're a disgrace to the army. Well, the catering corps, anyway.

SOAPY: We're not in the catering corps.

NIVEA: And you never *will* be, if this is anything to go by. Good god, woman!

(Soapy furrowed her brow at her.)

SOAPY: Leave me alone, Nivea. We *all* missed breakfast this morning, so one of us had to step up to the plate and cook something. I didn't hear any of you complain when I volunteered.

(She shrugged.)

SOAPY: And I told you at the time, don't blame me if it's horrible. I'm a bad cook. Okay, not as bad as Kasira, but still. You were warned. If you want to get grumpy with anyone, you should get grumpy with Sika.

SIKA: Me??? What did *I* do?

SOAPY: What did you do? You know damn well what you did! Or didn't we yell it at you loud enough earlier??? It was *your* turn to wake us all up in time for breakfast.

NIVEA: Yes, it was. Where were you???

(Sika pouted.)

SIKA: You've already moaned at me for that once. Let it go.

NIVEA: No. You were meant to wake us up. Now where were you? What happened? Explain yourself!

(Sika ruffled her neck indignantly.)

SIKA: It wasn't my fault. My alarm clock didn't go off.

AMBRE: Yes, it did!

SIKA: Oh, how would you know?

AMBRE: We share a room.

SIKA: Oh, yeah. Shit.

(Nivea growled at her.)

NIVEA: For fuck sake, Sika. When it's your turn, as soon as you hear the cuckoo, you're supposed to get out bed, check in with Cayley then wake us up when she says breakfast is almost ready.

SIKA: I did!

(She then tapped her forefingers together nervously.)

SIKA: Or at least I planned to. Then something weird happened.

SOAPY: What?

SIKA: I fell asleep again.

NIVEA: I'm gonna clobber you!

SIKA: Hey, it was an innocent mistake, okay? And besides, Ambre heard the cuckoos, why didn't *she* get up?

AMBRE: I did! Yesterday; when it was *my* turn. I nodded off again, because I thought *you* were gonna get up.

SIKA: See? How irresponsible is that? Leaving it to everyone else; shame on you.

AMBRE: But...

NIVEA: Ignore that, Ambre. You did nothing wrong.

SIKA: Wow. So it's all my fault again, is it?

SOAPY: Yes!

SIKA: Harsh!

(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: Thanks to you, I barely got to see Kasira and Cayley this morning. And I didn't get my breakfast.

(She looked down at the burnt offerings on her plate then smiled at Soapy.)

AMBRE: Until now. Yum.

(She then glanced away innocently.)

AMBRE: I'll eat it later.

NIVEA: No, you can shove it in the bin where it belongs.

AMBRE: I can? Yay!

(She grimaced.)

AMBRE: No offence, Soapy.

SOAPY: None taken, actually. It's like eating an ashtray.

NIVEA: Yes, well, never mind that. You gather up the plates and bin the food, Ambre. I'm going to punish Sika.

(Sika shrieked.)

SIKA: You stay away from my boobs!

NIVEA: Agreed. This calls for a proper punishment. Soapy?

SOAPY: Yeah?

NIVEA: Grab her!

(Outside the base at this time, Kasira was stomping forth with a grumpy expression on her face. Having had to return to the base because her own sister insisted on seeing her ID, her cheery disposition had completely evaporated. Airing her anger to herself with every step, her face bore a look of thunder.)

KASIRA: Fucking stupid sister. When did she become such a bureaucratic idiot?

Unbelievable! My own sister refused to believe I'm me without an ID card! I mean, like the army would have minded her letting me in without it. They might be bureaucrats but even *they're* not so ridiculous that someone you grew up with isn't allowed to accept you're who you say you are. She's definitely getting a clump later.

(She growled.)

KASIRA: I can't believe she tried to turn it back on me. I didn't teach to be like that! I never once told her to be a bureaucratic airhead. I just said I wouldn't treat her differently because she's my sister. I meant in a disciplinary sense. Not once did I say, show me your ID or move to another family. Stupid girl. She's getting cheap crap for her birthday! And no fucking card.

(She then stamped through the gates to the base and into the forecourt, still complaining under her breath. *Inside* the base, meanwhile, Nivea had Sika in a headlock, and Soapy was standing just behind them, smirking menacingly as she prepared to kick her up the backside. Wanting nothing to do with it, Ambre was sitting at the kitchen table, trembling nervously.)

AMBRE: Too mean!

SIKA: Way too mean!!! Let me go!

NIVEA: Not until you learn your lesson.

(She nodded.)

NIVEA: This'll teach you to neglect your duties and make us miss our breakfast.

SIKA: It was an innocent mistake.

SOAPY: One you won't make again.

SIKA: Shut up, you.

(She growled.)

SIKA: I swear to god, I'll shoot you with my magic in a minute, if you don't let me up.

NIVEA: And risk life in the brig, I doubt it.

SIKA: Just let me up, Nivea!

NIVEA: Nope. Not until Soapy's booted you.

(She beamed.)

NIVEA: Go for it, Soapy.

SOAPY: Righto.

(With that, Soapy took one step back in readiness to kick her, when an angry voice rung out from the doorway.)

KASIRA: What the bloody hell are you lot doing???

(At once, everyone froze and stared at her uneasily. For several seconds, not a single sound was made, until Nivea offered her a cheesy grimace.)

NIVEA: Playing?

SIKA: I'm being bullied!

NIVEA: Don't be silly, we're just messing about.

AMBRE: They were going to kick her up the bum for making us miss breakfast.

(Silence then descended again.)

SOAPY: Uh-oh.

KASIRA: Seriously, girls? You were going kick Sika up the bum?

NIVEA: Um... well... yeah, wouldn't you?

KASIRA: Absolutely.

(She smiled.)

KASIRA: Carry on.

(She then paced through the room and headed for her office. Left behind, Sika was devastated.)

SIKA: Seriously? Kasira!!!

SOAPY: Hold her still, Nivea!

SIKA: Don't! Look, I'm really, really sorry, okay?

NIVEA: We know. A kick up the bum will do that to a girl.

SIKA: This is bullying! A breach of my civil rights! I'm being violated as a human being!

NIVEA: Yeah, but on the upside, at least you'll remember next time; then you won't have to eat Soapy's toast.

SOAPY: Which is quite the upside.

NIVEA: Yes, but let's forget about *upsides* now, and focus on Sika's *backside*. Whenever you're ready, Soapy.

SOAPY: I'm always ready.

NIVEA: Then you may commence.

SOAPY: Woohoo.

(Just then, Kasira came pacing back through with her ID card in her hand.)

KASIRA: Have fun, team. Just remember, if you *do* kick her, it'll go in your reports and you'll be getting a large fine. One you can't afford. Later.

SIKA: Ha! That told you! Now let me go!

(As Kasira headed away, Nivea whimpered.)

NIVEA: But... her punishment...

KASIRA: What about it? If you want to make her pay for making you miss breakfast, just leave her out of your rota. Then she'll miss breakfast every day and you won't.

SIKA: *Too* mean! I'd rather have the kick up the arse!

(Kasira then left then room. As she did so, Nivea let go of her neck and smiled.)

NIVEA: Get up, silly. We're not gonna kick you, you're our friend.

SIKA: Good! Stupid ape.

NIVEA: We'll just do what Kasira said and stop waking you up when it's our turn to get up first.

SIKA: No! Anything but that!

(She then jumped forward and held her paining backside.)

SIKA: Ow!!! What did you do that for Soapy?

NIVEA: What?

SIKA: She kicked me!!!

SOAPY: Sorry, I slipped.

SIKA: Slipped?

(She growled.)

SIKA: I can't believe you did that!

SOAPY: It was an accident.

SIKA: The hell it was.

SOAPY: It was!

SIKA: Yeah? Like that, is it? Well, you're not the only accident prone one here, missy. Come here!

(She then proceeded to chase her around the room, determined to kick her back. Within seconds, they were both giggling as they ran around in circles.)

SOAPY: Too slow!

SIKA: I'm waiting for the right moment.

SOAPY: Yeah, right.

(Watching them, Nivea chuckled then sat down next to Ambre.)

NIVEA: When they're done playing silly buggers, I'll make us all a sandwich.
AMBRE: Yay. You're the best.
(In that moment, Sika and Soapy both arrived in their seats.)
SIKA: We're done.
SOAPY: Yup!
SIKA: Extra mayonnaise on mine, please.
SOAPY: And some onion.
NIVEA: Why, you cheeky...
SIKA: Just go, ape hands.
SOAPY: Yeah, come on; hop to it.
(Nivea started to chuckle.)
NIVEA: Boy, are you two going to regret that!
(With that, Soapy and Sika raced away with Nivea in hot pursuit, the three of them giggling like children. Sat alone at the table, Ambre could only sigh.)
AMBRE: Every day it's the same. Since when was I the grown up one?
(She then shook her head in defeat.)

Over at the academy, a short while later, Kasira led her new students to their classroom then politely asked them all to take a seat. Some did so with smiles on their faces; others stepped into the room looking as if they'd rather be anywhere else in the world. Caring very little for their thoughts on the academy, however, Kasira merely paced to the front of the class and sat on her desk. She then began her lecture.)

KASIRA: Welcome to New Capsway Island Academy, everyone. If you weren't paying attention before, I'm Major Kasira Ashwood; the head of this institute.
(She nodded.)

KASIRA: Over the next two weeks, you'll be learning how to get the most out of your subordinates using simple man-management techniques. Should you pass, the army will consider you qualified to assume the role of leader within a unit. Should you fail, well, quite simply, they won't. Passing this course is mandatory for all squad leaders.
(She smiled.)

KASIRA: Now, let me tell you a little bit about myself before we begin.
(Just then, one of the students spoke up in a sneering tone.)

CRAIG: And who gets to decide whether we pass or not? You?

KASIRA: That's right.

CRAIG: Literally just you?

KASIRA: Yes. Is that a problem?

CRAIG: So let me get this straight? I now need the approval of a woman, before I can lead a unit of soldiers?

(Kasira glowered back at him.)

KASIRA: Not just *any* woman. Your superior!

CRAIG: Surely that's an oxymoron. How can a member of the inferior gender be my superior?

KASIRA: Excuse me?

CRAIG: You heard.

(He scoffed.)

CRAIG: Get a man in here to teach us, will you? Someone capable of being a *proper* soldier. Then you can make us all a sandwich.

(The girls in the class all glowered at him.)

CRAIG: Don't be jealous, girls. You can *all* make me one.

KASIRA: Listen, Sergeant...

CRAIG: Please, call me master.

KASIRA: I don't think you quite understand where you are, chummy.

CRAIG: Chummy?

KASIRA: This is a military institute and I'm your superior. Therefore, any insubordination can and will go down on your record. And may I remind you, if you fail this course, any ambitions you may of had in regard to being promoted through the ranks will be completely forfeited! Is that clear?

CRAIG: I think so. You're saying that some bitch is standing in between me and success.

KASIRA: That's right. *This* bitch! Now shut the fuck up or I'll eject you and fail you right now.

(Craig snarled at her coldly for a moment then climbed to his feet.)

CRAIG: You fucking do that then.

KASIRA: As you wish.

CRAIG: I'm not being dictated to by some bit of skirt. I've got standards. I'm a man; a soldier. And soldiers don't get ordered around by wenches.

(He nodded.)

CRAIG: Fuck you. And fuck this academy.

(He then looked to the two lads sitting behind him.)

CRAIG: What about you two? Are you men or pussies?

KASIRA: Never mind what *they're* doing! Get out. You failed. And this gross insubordination *will* be going on your record, directly to HQ.

CRAIG: Shut up, bitch. I'm talking.

(He snarled at the two lads behind him.)

CRAIG: Where's your dignity, lads? Are you really gonna let some bitch order you around? What would your fathers think? Have some self-respect.

KASIRA: Are you leaving or aren't you?

CRAIG: In a fucking minute, you cunt!

KASIRA: Excuse me?

CRAIG: You heard! Well, lads? What's it gonna be? Pander to some tart or stand up for your manhood? Well?

(The two lads looked to one another nervously then stood up.)

DANIEL: Sorry, Major. He's right. Men shouldn't have to take orders from women. It goes against nature.

KASIRA: Clearly you've never had a girlfriend.

DANIEL: Correct.

(The other lad then stood up.)

ELLIS: Angry bloke is right. I'm out too.

KASIRA: Fine. Then go. Be out! Don't just stand there *saying* you are. Be men and have the courage of your convictions. Leave and accept whatever punishment HQ decide to throw at you. Go on.

CRAIG: In a minute.

(He then looked to one of the other lads who was sitting across the room.)

CRAIG: You coming?

(The lad looked to him coldly and emotionlessly.)

STEVE: I came here to learn from a distinguished high-ranking officer. I don't care if that high-ranking officer has a twelve inch cock or a gaping gash between the legs. I want to leave here a better soldier. So why don't you fuck off and leave the rest of us to get on with the lesson?

(He then received a rapturous round of applause from the rest of the class. Disgusted by it, Craig, Daniel and Ellis all snarled then stormed towards the door. On his way out, Craig aimed a volley of phlegm in Kasira's direction. Watching it land on the floor, Kasira could only shake a disgusted head. Moments later, the door slammed shut again.)

KASIRA: Wow.

(With that, she cleared up the phlegm with a tissue then lobbed it in the bin.)

KASIRA: Now, where was I?

(Steve raised his hand.)

KASIRA: Yes?

STEVE: Before we go any further, I just want to apologise for that, on behalf of my entire gender. We're not *all* dickheads.

KASIRA: Thank you, but you don't need to apologise on *their* behalf. I refuse to take a dim view of all men just because *some* hold views like those idiots.

(One of the girls then sighed and spoke up.)

SARA: I think those three were all from Guevina.

KASIRA: I'm not familiar with it.

SARA: They're very backward down there, especially when it comes to women. Women are second class citizens. They've even stopped sending female units to that part of the world because they were being raped and murdered.

STEVE: Then set on fire.

SARA: You read that article too, huh?

STEVE: Yeah. Nasty business.

KASIRA: Wow. Guevina sounds like a horrible place.

SARA: It is. It's so backward. If you get a chance to read the article in Globe News about it, you should, ma'am.

KASIRA: I will. Thank you.

(She smiled.)

KASIRA: Now...

(Steve then raised his hand again.)

KASIRA: Yes?

STEVE: Sorry, ma'am. Before you carry on, I'd just like to point out that when I mentioned a gaping gash, I wasn't implying that you've got a cunt like a bucket...

(Everyone gasped.)

STEVE: What? What's wrong?

KASIRA: It's fine, soldier. I know you were just using artistic licence.

STEVE: Well, that's a relief.

(He smirked then glanced at Sara.)

STEVE: The bit about having a massive cock, however, that was based entirely on me.

SARA: I'm a lesbian.

STEVE: Shit.

(Kasira looked to him in disbelief.)

KASIRA: Are you done?

STEVE: What? Oh, god. Yes! Sorry, ma'am.

KASIRA: It's fine.

(She smiled.)

KASIRA: Now... man-management. I know some like to make it sound like there's a science behind it, or a special methodology, but it really is much simpler than that. Those of you who are comfortable with communicating with others will find it extremely easy. Those of you who tend to be quite passive and quiet, it's going to require some adjustment on your part.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: You see. An order can be given in two ways. It can be done forcefully, creating an environment of fear. Or it can be done calmly, creating an atmosphere of trust.

(Sara raised her hand.)

SARA: Won't there be disrespect issues if you're too calm?

KASIRA: There doesn't have to be. You see, you should always start by *asking* your subordinate to do the task in hand. If asking doesn't work, then you have to tell them sternly. If they still don't do it, that's when you calmly dish out a punishment. They need to know there are consequences for disobedience. Once such an understanding is attained, you'll never have to be forceful again. And that creates a far better atmosphere in the base.

SARA: Makes sense.

KASIRA: Yes, it does. I mean, you have to live and work with your subordinates every day for years. You can't be a tyrant all that time. Nurture a calm atmosphere in your base, where everyone knows where they stand, and you'll be making the lives of everyone a lot easier. Just, never forget that your unit are people before they're soldiers. And people thrive on good morale. And in turn it makes them, what?

STEVE: Better soldiers?

KASIRA: Exactly!

On a bench in the exercise yard, an hour or so later, during a break in class, Craig, Daniel and Ellis sat watching the building with bitter expressions on their faces. Utterly furious at being expected to take orders from a woman, they could barely contain their rage. Not that they'd even tried. In their culture this was an outrage and they simply refused to let it go.

DANIEL: What a first class bitch.

ELLIS: Yeah!

(He then smirked.)

ELLIS: Still, *I'd* fuck it.

CRAIG: This is no time for jokes, mate. That fucking bitch is about to ruin our careers.

DANIEL: Yeah, once her report reaches HQ, that's it. We're done for.

ELLIS: Done for?

DANIEL: Yeah. Back to being a private with no hope of ever being promoted again.

ELLIS: For just refusing to accept orders from a wench? Nah, they wouldn't do that, would they?

(Just then, another soldier, a strapping giant of a lad from the swift human race, spoke up from behind them.)

REX: They fucking would.

(Unaware that he'd even been standing there, Craig, Daniel and Ellis all glanced over their shoulders.

CRAIG: How long have you been standing there?

REX: Not long. I was doing my warm-ups, before going on a run.

CRAIG: Right...

REX: So, disrespected a female officer, did you?

DANIEL: Yeah.

REX: Which one?

ELLIS: Major Ashwood.

(Rex snarled.)

REX: *That* cunt? She fucked my brother's career!

ELLIS: She did?

REX: Yeah. He told her bitches get stitches and took a swing at her. He was drunk, of course.

(He shrugged.)

REX: During class.

DANIEL: Ouch.

REX: Right? She reported it and he got sent back to the basic training academy. He was humiliated. He was a fucking captain until he crossed paths with her. One fucking mistake and it was all over.

CRAIG: That's a pretty huge mistake, to be fair.

REX: Well, maybe. But she didn't even accept his apology. Just had him ejected and arrested.

DANIEL: Bitch. Like she has that right.

REX: I know. Fucking woman. Who does she think she is?

ELLIS: That's what we were saying.

REX: Yeah, but you say that about *all* women. You're from that weird place where they treat women like pond scum.

CRAIG: Woman *are* pond scum.

REX: Nah, that's a ridiculous attitude.

(He then growled.)

REX: I don't have a problem with female officers as a concept, but that fucking Major Ashwood bitch needs to be brought down a peg or two.

CRAIG: I couldn't agree more.

DANIEL: We should do something to her. You know, to remind her who's fucking boss.

REX: I'll be in that.

(He growled.)

REX: I was raised never to hit a woman, but for her I'd make an exception.

ELLIS: We'll end up in the brig if we hit her. I don't fancy that.

REX: Nah, me either.

DANIEL: There must be something we can do though, surely.

CRAIG: Actually, there is. We can make an exhibition of how shit women are. Especially her unit.

REX: She has a unit?

CRAIG: Yeah. Didn't you listen to her speech when we were in the main hall?

REX: No. I was too busy seething.

CRAIG: She's the headmistress here by day and heads up the local wraith containment unit by night.

DANIEL: Interesting.

CRAIG: It is. I say we revolt. If we run amuck, we can show the army that women are weak and can't keep control.

ELLIS: And end up in the brig. Great idea.

CRAIG: Not necessarily.

(He smirked.)

CRAIG: If we're subtle, can make her unit look silly without even letting on it was us. That way she might get fired and her reports on our behaviour would be considered invalid.

REX: They would?

CRAIG: Yeah, they'd just consider her report a whinge. A whinge made because she's got no control over her students. Or her island.

(Daniel shrugged.)

DANIEL: If you've got something in mind, I reckon it could be worth a go. As things stand, we're in deep shit. Unless we do something, that bitch will report us and that's our careers up in smoke.

ELLIS: He's right. Even a long shot is worth a punt right now.

REX: I'm in too. I don't care about the consequence, I just want that bitch to pay for what she did to my brother.

CRAIG: Okay, well, here's what I'm thinking...

REX: Wait, wait, before you explain, there's a few other blokes in my class who might want in. They're from misogyny-land like you lads.

CRAIG: Then fucking fetch them over, mate; the more the merrier.

(He snarled.)

CRAIG: That bitch is going down.

ELLIS: Yeah. On my cock!

(He then sat there, silently and slowly shrinking as his friends despaired of him.)

ELLIS: Right...

REX: You twat!

ELLIS: That's a bit harsh.

REX: Is it though? I mean, why are you even here? Why do *you* hate women so much? You're not even *from* woman-hater-land; you're an airborne.

ELLIS: Not originally, no. I was posted there!

(He ruffled his neck.)

ELLIS: And I happen to agree with their philosophy.

REX: Fair enough. I don't actually care for your reasons, to be honest. *Any* enemy of Major Ashwood's is fine by me; no matter how shit their reasoning.

(He nodded.)

REX: That bitch is gonna get what's coming to her, lads. And I can't fucking wait.

That evening, at the top of the hill that dominated the island, Kasira, Sika and Cayley set about culling the evening's wraith spawn. Nivea, Ambre and Soapy had taken care of the daytime shift, now it was the turn of these three. Having blown her wraith whistle to attract the attention of the wraiths, Kasira was busying despatching them with her blades, aided by Cayley's healing hands. Standing at Cayley's side, Sika was carefully using her magic to despatch as many wraiths as possible before they even reached Kasira, just to lighten her load. Having once lost concentration and blown Kasira skywards, Sika took the job extremely seriously. It had almost cost her a place in the unit and she wasn't about to risk making that mistake again.

CAYLEY: Incoming, Sika. A group to your right.

SIKA: Ma'am!

(Sika turned and refocused her wrath on the group Cayley had alluded to. Battling on, several feet away, Kasira smirked.)

KASIRA: She sounds so professional right now. It's kinda weird.

CAYLEY: Right? Who are you and what did you do with Sika?

SIKA: Can't talk; concentrating.

(Cayley grimaced uncomfortably.)

CAYLEY: This has to be a clone, surely.

KASIRA: Not a very good one then. Sika's never been *that* professional.

SIKA: Go ahead, mock. I won't apologise for being awesome.

KASIRA: There she is!

CAYLEY: Yup, that's our Sika.

(They shared a giggle then Kasira stepped forward into the wraiths to polish off the final few in her path.)

KASIRA: Die, you horrible little bastards.

(Moments later, once they were despatched, she glanced to one side, just in time to see Sika polish off the last advancing wraith.)

KASIRA: Nice.

SIKA: I know, right? I'm so amazing. Well, you saw me. How perfect was I?

CAYLEY: You were fine.

SIKA: Fine? Fine? I was like a goddess!

KASIRA: You did well, Sika; good work.

SIKA: Thank you. See, Cayley? That wasn't hard.

CAYLEY: Right...

SIKA: Yeah, I was pretty great. I reckon I've definitely earned next Tuesday off.

(Kasira looked enlightened.)

KASIRA: Oh, so that's why you've been so professional these last few days. You're after something.

SIKA: No. I just figured I'd earned a night off, that's all. That night being next Tuesday.

CAYLEY: Why next Tuesday?

SIKA: No reason. I mean it's not like there's an event on the mainland I want to go to or anything, I just fancied a rest.

(Cayley furrowed her brow.)

CAYLEY: You rest all the time!

KASIRA: Yeah, you... wait! Hang on!

CAYLEY: What?

KASIRA: Isn't that male stripper group coming to the mainland next Tuesday?

(Sika gasped in horror.)

SIKA: I don't know. Going to see them certainly wasn't in *my* plans, anyway.

KASIRA: Then you can stay here on your own. The rest of us are going.

SIKA: You are?

KASIRA: Fucking right.

SIKA: Cool.

(She then flinched before glancing away innocently.)

SIKA: Fine. I suppose I don't mind joining you, if you insist on going.

CAYLEY: You don't *have* to.

SIKA: Shut up! Yes, I do!

(Cayley and Kasira chuckled.)

SIKA: Oh, stop it.

(She then beamed.)

SIKA: So, how awesome was *I* tonight? Did you see that shot I did? Took three out in one blast!

CAYLEY: Let's head back.

KASIRA: Let's.

(The two of them then headed away. Not about to ignored, Sika charged after them.)

SIKA: Well, did you? Did you see it?

(She nodded sternly.)

SIKA: I'd like to see Soapy hit three with one blast.

CAYLEY: She wiped out nearly a thousand with one blast during the haze break.

SIKA: That was different.

KASIRA: Yeah, by about nine hundred and ninety-seven.

SIKA: No, I mean, that was a *special* skill. I was talking about a run of the mill patrol. A one off shot. Three is no mean feat. You have to be pretty amazing to do that. Like me.

CAYLEY: It was a good shot.

SIKA: Thank you. That's all I wanted to hear.

CAYLEY: I've seen a *few* good shots lately.

KASIRA: Me too. Like when Soapy took out five, blasting through them in a straight line.

CAYLEY: Yeah, that *was* a good shot.

SIKA: It was alright. A bit lucky if you ask me.

KASIRA: She didn't gloat about it either. Unlike someone.

SIKA: Probably because she knew it was fluke.

(She sighed.)

SIKA: She'd definitely have boasted otherwise. She does that a lot. It's kind of annoying.

(Kasira and Cayley shared a highly amused glance.)

SIKA: What? What's so funny?

KASIRA: You find boasting annoying?

SIKA: Yes. Don't you?

KASIRA: Very!

CAYLEY: Especially when you do it. Which is all the blooming time. Often without merit.

SIKA: That's a lie. I don't boast.

(She ruffled her neck muscles.)

SIKA: I just like to share my many successes with my friends, that's all.

CAYLEY: By pointing them out then exaggerating them?

SIKA: Exaggerating them? When do I ever exaggerate?

KASIRA: Last week you made lunch and told us it was a veritable banquet, fit for a queen.

SIKA: And it was!

KASIRA: You made cheese sandwiches!

CAYLEY: And forgot to butter the bread!

SIKA: Right... well, yeah; that was a mistake, obviously. I'm talking about in the field. I never exaggerate about my battle exploits.

KASIRA: Apart from yesterday when you said you'd killed hundreds of wraiths in double quick time, when the record states there were only about fifty in total.

CAYLEY: And let's not forget the time she killed that fifty foot wraith all by herself.

SIKA: What about it?

CAYLEY: The wraith was *my* height!

SIKA: Really? It looked taller from where I was. It's hard to judge height from a distance, you know? I was about half a mile away.

KASIRA: You were thirty feet away, standing next to Ambre.

SIKA: Felt like further.

CAYLEY: Just face it, Sika. You're a born embellisher. You can't help it.

SIKA: I don't embellish anything.

(She shrugged.)

SIKA: I merely make my stories interesting.

KASIRA: By embellishing them.

SIKA: Yes. I mean, no.

(Her brow then furrowed over.)

SIKA: What is this? Pick on Sika night?

CAYLEY: Don't be ridiculous.

KASIRA: Yeah, that's on Monday.

CAYLEY: Exactly.

SIKA: Very funny.

(She gave a stifled laugh.)

SIKA: I know you mock me because you love me, it's okay. You don't have to recognise my greatness. It can't be easy being in awe of someone.

KASIRA: We're in awe of you, are we?

SIKA: Isn't everyone?

CAYLEY: Sika...

SIKA: *Soapy* definitely is. That's why she gloats so much. She wants to be noticed, you see? With me around, doing my awesome attacks, she knows that if she doesn't speak up, nobody will notice her.

(She sighed.)

SIKA: She's so insecure. She needs to get over herself really.

(She then pouted bitterly.)

SIKA: Why are you laughing?

KASIRA: Because you're hilarious.

CAYLEY: Yup. We have to give you that. When it comes to comedy, you're the star of the show, babes.

SIKA: Harsh.

KASIRA: I had a feeling you'd say that.

SIKA: You're not wrong though. I am really funny. I'm pretty, sexy, hilarious and awesome in battle; the complete package. How any man could resist me, I just don't know.

CAYLEY: And yet, they seem to manage.

KASIRA: Quite well, in fact.

SIKA: Hey! Being single is my choice.

KASIRA: And a wise choice it is.

CAYLEY: Amen to that.

SIKA: Right? Though if I did want a boyfriend, I'd be spoilt for choice. They won't meet an all-round babe like me every damned day, that's for certain.

(She then exhaled and went on to elaborate liberally about how she'd be the perfect girlfriend. All Kasira and Cayley could do was smirk as her ridiculously self-indulgent speech continued all the way back to the base.)

Later that night, Kasira, Cayley, Nivea, Sika, Ambre and Soapy were all sat around the dining table, enjoying a hot cup of tea and some biscuits. Kasira was already in her nighty and could barely keep her eyes open. Sika was also oddly quiet. Ambre, on the other hand, was still full of life. She loved it when Kasira was home and never wanted to waste a second of her company. As such, she'd become something of a chatterbox in the evenings. Tonight was no different.

AMBRE: Then I drew some pictures. They were rubbish. It was fun though. Until I got bored. We did the day time patrol after that. That was fun too. And easy-peasy. Me, Fluffy, Nivea and Soapy killed lots and lots of them really fast. Then we had to come back. So I had a bath. That was nice. I couldn't stay in there forever though, so I came out and did some exercises. That made me get all sweaty though, so I had to have a bath again. Fun.

CAYLEY: You had a full day then?

AMBRE: Yeah, pretty much.

SOAPY: What about you two? The students this fortnight are better than the last bunch, I hope.

NIVEA: Yeah, that last lot sounded like a nightmare.

(Kasira furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: This lot are no better.

CAYLEY: No? Mine are.

KASIRA: Well, yeah. On the whole, this lot are a vast improvement, but there were three complete and utter morons in my class today, who refused to take orders from a woman and stormed out.

CAYLEY: I had some like that too.

KASIRA: Idiots. The stupid part is, I didn't even give them any orders! I just introduced myself and told them what the course would entail.

CAYLEY: One of them stormed out of my class, before I even got *that* far. I only said hello.

SOAPY: That sort of thing happen a lot, does it?

KASIRA: Nope. Well, once. One idiot objected, but he backed down in the end. I've never had students storm out like that before.

NIVEA: And yet you both got some on the same day?

SOAPY: Weird.

KASIRA: Apparently, they were all from Guevina.

(Sika suddenly looked alert.)

SIKA: Guevina? Is that the place where women are considered lower than cattle?

CAYLEY: So my class tell me, yeah.

SIKA: Those people suck.

(She then laid her tired head on the table.)

AMBRE: Sika's knackered.

KASIRA: She wore herself out gloating all evening without pausing for breath.

SIKA: I don't gloat!

(Everyone chuckled.)

NIVEA: Yeah, right. And I don't grope boobies.

SOAPY: We *wish* you didn't grope boobies, you bloody orang-utan.

NIVEA: And yet you keep giving me a reason.

KASIRA: Don't. Not tonight. Leave her boobs alone.

SOAPY: Ha!

KASIRA: Or at least grope her quietly.

SOAPY: Hey!

KASIRA: What? I'm tired and I'm going to bed in a minute. The last thing I want is you lot screaming and giggling all night.

(She sighed.)

KASIRA: It's been a long, long day.

CAYLEY: It has, but look on the bright side. Now those idiots from Guevina have been kicked out, tomorrow will be a better day.

KASIRA: Here's hoping.

AMBRE: I don't get it.

KASIRA: What's that love?

AMBRE: Women are lower than cattle?

(She gasped.)

AMBRE: How tall are their cattle?

SOAPY: Not in terms of height, Ambre.

KASIRA: It means women are considered less important than cattle.

AMBRE: Oh.

(She shrugged.)

AMBRE: A lot of people think that though. For a joke, my old friends from school tried to swap me for a cow once, but the farmer didn't want me.

(Soapy looked to her in dismay.)

SOAPY: How many times, Ambre; those monsters were not your friends. They weren't joking, babe; they actually tried to trade you!

AMBRE: No, they didn't.

SOAPY: Ambre...

AMBRE: You don't know. You weren't there.

SOAPY: Just trust me, okay.

NIVEA: Wait, wait, wait. These students of yours come from a place where women are less important than cattle, and walked out of the academy, potentially ruining their careers, just because they objected to having a female instructor???

KASIRA: What can I tell you, Nokia?

NIVEA: Nokia?

SOAPY: Nokia?

KASIRA: I mean, Nivea. Sorry, I really tired.

NIVEA: Yeah, but Nokia?

KASIRA: It's the name of a girl in my class.

(Sika looked up and grinned at Nivea.)

SIKA: And now it's *your* name.

SOAPY: Yup, that's definitely gonna catch on. We'll make sure of that.

NIVEA: Is that so?

SOAPY: Yes. Yes, it is.

AMBRE: I'm confused, Kasira. I thought students were nice.

KASIRA: They are. Normally.

CAYLEY: Especially to you, love. They like you.

AMBRE: Yay. I like them too. I love it when I get to go there with you, Kasira.

KASIRA: And I love taking you there.

CAYLEY: Right? Having you there makes all the difference, Ambre.

(Kasira nodded.)

KASIRA: It does. See, when the course starts some of the students are kind of sceptical about everything. You can see it in their eyes; they're not sure a calm brand of man-management works.

(She smiled.)

KASIRA: Then we bring *you* in for the demonstration, Ambre. They think you're adorable.

(Ambre beamed.)

AMBRE: I think I'm adorable too.

SOAPY: Wow. Vain much?

NIVEA: She's spent way too much time with Sika.

SIKA: Shut up, Nokia.

NIVEA: Hey!

(Kasira then raised her voice.)

KASIRA: Anyway, as I was saying. They see how happy you are, Ambre, and at that point you can tell they're starting to believe my methods may have some merit.

(Cayley smiled.)

CAYLEY: Then once they've seen you demonstrate your affinity with Fluffy, they know.

KASIRA: Yup, that's the clincher.

(She sighed.)

KASIRA: That's why today was so frustrating. Normally, after two weeks, students go back to their units with a new mind-set, because we've *proved* our methodology works. It's so fulfilling, but today... to be rejected as worthy of respect just because I have boobs... well...

CAYLEY: You can't teach people like that.

KASIRA: Nope. There's nobody as blind as those who won't listen.

NIVEA: Right... I'm pretty sure that's not the phrase, Kasira.

SOAPY: It isn't, and yet... she's hit the nail on the head.

NIVEA: Uh-huh.

(She grimaced.)

NIVEA: That sucks. You know, I can half understand why towns resent a female unit...

SOAPY: You can?

SIKA: What a bitch!

NIVEA: Hey! I'm not saying I agree with them, but I get it. Men are physically stronger and in a traditional sense, armies always used to consist only of male soldiers. So, I can see why some towns think getting a female unit suggests their town is somehow less important. They resent it. It's silly, but I get it.

(She sneered.)

NIVEA: Guevina though, places like that with that kind of baseless, blanket misogyny, I just can't fathom. To consider your cattle more worthy than your own daughter... I mean, what the living fuck is that all about?

SIKA: It's actually frightening to think about.

SOAPY: Being considered subhuman?

SIKA: Yeah.

SOAPY: I'd have thought you were used to it, Sika. We've considered *you* subhuman since the day we met you.

SIKA: Oh, ha bloody ha.

AMBRE: *I've* never thought that!

SIKA: Nor has anyone else. She was trying to be funny. And failing. I'm the coolest person you've ever met!

AMBRE: I've never thought that either.

SIKA: Hey!

(Ambre whimpered.)

AMBRE: What? I didn't say you're not cool. I just think Kasira is cooler.

SIKA: I...

AMBRE: So is Cayley.

SIKA: You...

AMBRE: Everyone else is equally awesome.

SIKA: I'm quickly going off you, Ambre.

AMBRE: Mean!

KASIRA: Ignore her, Ambre. She loves you too bits, darling.

SIKA: Well, I *did*...

KASIRA: Stop it!

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: Just be careful tomorrow, guys. Those misogynist clowns can't get off the island until a boat comes for them, so until they've gone we'll have a group of woman-haters wandering the town. If anyone throws sexist abuse at you, ignore them and come home.

NIVEA: Will do.

KASIRA: Don't get all annoyed and call them wankers.

SOAPY: Why did you look at me when you said that?

(Everyone raised condescending eyebrows at her.)

SOAPY: Wow. Guys, that was my first day. I fucked up, okay? One mistake is allowed.

It's not like I'm going to repeat it. I'm not Sika.

SIKA: Yeah, you could only dream of being Sika.

SOAPY: And wake up sweating, shuddering in horror at the nightmare.

SIKA: Soapy...

KASIRA: Stop it. Save the bickering for later. Once I'm in bed, you can bicker all you like.

NIVEA: We can? Cool!

KASIRA: Yes, but if you wake me up, you're going to be sorry. And I mean sorry.

NIVEA: Gotcha. We'll bicker quietly then.

CAYLEY: Right, and while you're doing that, I'm gonna clean up then head to bed.

AMBRE: And I'm gonna have a bath.

SIKA: Another one?

AMBRE: I like to be clean.

(She pouted.)

AMBRE: You should try it sometime.

(Sika was aghast.)

SIKA: Ambre???

(The others laughed hysterically.)

SOAPY: You got burned!

NIVEA: Yup. Scolded by Ambre.

AMBRE: I didn't burn anybody!

SIKA: Oh, you did. I'm scarred for life.

AMBRE: But...

CAYLEY: She doesn't mean you burned her literally, Ambre. It means you put her in her place with that mean put down.

AMBRE: I don't make mean put downs. I was just saying she needs a bath. Her knees are dirty.

SIKA: They are?

(Sika glanced down at her legs then grimaced.)

SIKA: They are.

NIVEA: Who have you been kneeling in front of, you dirty bitch?

SIKA: Shut up. It must have happened when I slipped on the way up the hill earlier.

NIVEA: A likely story.

SIKA: I don't have to explain myself to you.

KASIRA: Then stop doing it.

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: I'm serious, girls. Be careful tomorrow. As you well know, misogyny isn't just sneering at women and throwing cheap shots. Sometimes these arseholes can get violent.

CAYLEY: Yeah, don't put yourselves in that position if you can help it.

KASIRA: What Cayley said. Stay away from them.

(Sika sighed.)

SIKA: I'd hoped those days were over. Being hated just because we're women.

NIVEA: I know, right? There are so *many* reasons to hate you, why choose that one.

SIKA: I'm being serious, Nokia.

NIVEA: Stop that!

SIKA: I know it doesn't happen often, but I'm trying to make a serious point here. Will that kind of misogyny *ever* go away?

NIVEA: Not as long as there are morons in the world, sadly.

KASIRA: They're beyond moronic, Nivea.

CAYLEY: Yeah, it requires a special kind of stupidity to hate for no reason.

SOAPY: That's the troubling thing. It even goes beyond hatred. Like, into the realms of absolute disdain. A refusal to even see someone as human.

AMBRE: Meanies.

SIKA: Scary, really. I mean, if people hate you, you can do something about it. You can show them they're wrong about you. Take the time to change their minds. When they fail to even acknowledge you as worthy of their time though...

SOAPY: There's nothing you can do.

KASIRA: Exactly. And that's how those people see us. As unworthy of their time. Subhuman; only there to be fucked, bear children and do housework. Our opinions are invalid and our presence is barely tolerated.

CAYLEY: Terrible.

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: But like you say, it's only total idiots who think like that. And mercifully, they're a tiny minority.

KASIRA: They are. And I honestly believe things are changing for the better. I mean, even the army are starting to realise women are capable of great things. That never used to be the case. Women were very much used to kill wraiths in tiny places nobody cared about. They didn't think we could handle anything difficult. Now they know better. Largely thanks to us.

CAYLEY: Yup. As much as he loves to annoy women, Major Miles can't speak highly enough of us. Nor can that general, the one who sent us here.

KASIRA: Right? Yup. Things are definitely changing for the better.

(Everyone nodded to acknowledge her words, then Kasira climbed to her feet.)

KASIRA: Oh which note, I'm going to bed.

AMBRE: Goodnight, Kasira. Sleep well.

KASIRA: Night, babes. And remember what I said, ladies, if you wake me, you die.

NIVEA: You never said that.

KASIRA: Well, I'm saying it now.

SIKA: Ha. You got told.

SOAPY: Unlucky, Nokia.

NIVEA: Right, you've called me that for the last time.

(With that, she pounced at Soapy, eager to grope her boobs. Fortunately for Soapy, she managed to jump up just in time and evade her.)

SOAPY: Too slow.

NIVEA: Oh, yeah?

(She then jumped up and proceeded to chase her around the room. As the two of them raced around, giggling, Kasira looked to Cayley then rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: I wasn't joking, you know? If they wake me, I *will* murder them.

CAYLEY: I wasn't joking either. I *will* help you do it.

(They then shared a brief chuckle before Kasira headed off to bed for the night.)

The following morning, Kasira, Cayley, Nivea, Ambre and Soapy were all seated around the breakfast table, enjoying a hearty meal consisting of bacon, sausages and eggs. Having enjoyed no such luxury the day before, Nivea and Soapy were especially grateful for it. Ambre, on the other hand, felt more than a little uncomfortable. Nibbling at a sausage, she glanced nervously around the table then hung her head. Having seen her do this several times, Kasira looked to her then smiled.

KASIRA: Just relax and eat your breakfast, Ambre. It'll be fine.

(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: But... Sika's going to be so upset.

NIVEA: Good. She's supposed to be. That's the whole point.

SOAPY: What she said.

NIVEA: It's a good thing.

AMBRE: But I feel really bad about it. She'd have loved this breakfast.

(She sighed.)

AMBRE: Sneaking out without waking her up feels so, so mean.

KASIRA: Well, I can see why you'd think that, love, but consider it a valuable life lesson for the girl.

CAYLEY: One she definitely needed to learn.

NIVEA: Exactly.

(She nodded.)

NIVEA: We all missed breakfast yesterday because she was irresponsible and didn't wake us up when it was her turn.

SOAPY: And now she's paying the price.

KASIRA: See? She'll be upset, yes, but at the same time, she'll realise that by being irresponsible, *she's* the one who's going to suffer the most.

CAYLEY: She might think twice about doing it again then.

AMBRE: Yeah, but... feels wrong.

SOAPY: That's because you're too nice.

AMBRE: Too nice? How can you be too nice? Nice is good.

KASIRA: Yes, but being nice wouldn't help Sika learn her lesson.

CAYLEY: Exactly. Sometimes you have to be cruel to be kind.

SOAPY: Plus the look on her face when she wakes up and realises she's missed breakfast again is gonna be priceless.

NIVEA: I know, right. I can't wait.

(Kasira furrowed her brow at them.)

KASIRA: Of course, some people like to be cruel just to be cruel.

NIVEA: She had it coming.

SOAPY: She really did. Cayley's breakfasts are awesome, and she made us miss it yesterday. That deserves to be punished.

NIVEA: And then some.

(She nodded.)

NIVEA: If you ask me, you should have kicked her bum twice as hard, Soapy.

KASIRA: Wait. What? You actually did it? You kicked her?

NIVEA: Um... no.

SOAPY: Not at all.

(She then glanced away, whistling innocently, as did Nivea.)

KASIRA: Wow. You girls are unbelievable.

(With that, she popped her final bit of bacon in her mouth then climbed to her feet.)

CAYLEY: Where are you going? You haven't finished your tea yet.

(Kasira swallowed her food then replied.)

KASIRA: I know, but it's a bit stuffy in here, I'm going to open the front door a bit to let some air in.

NIVEA: Awesome idea. It's really hot today.

AMBRE: Sika's going to be so, so angry.

SOAPY: Don't worry about it, Ambre.

(As she headed for the door, Kasira glanced over her shoulder.)

KASIRA: Soapy's right. For once. Let it go, love.

SOAPY: For once?

KASIRA: Did I say that bit out loud?

(Soapy pouted.)

SOAPY: Yes, you did.

KASIRA: Oh well, sucks to be you.

(She then lifted the latch on the door and attempted to pull it open.)

KASIRA: What the hell??? It won't budge.

(She then yanked twice as hard and fell on her backside, much to Nivea's amusement.)

KASIRA: The door's stuck fast.

(She growled.)

KASIRA: It's not funny, Nivea.

NIVEA: Well, you say that...

(She then climbed to her feet and headed for the door.)

NIVEA: Allow me.

SOAPY: Good idea. If old gorilla hands there can't shift it, nobody can.

NIVEA: I'll punish you for that later.

SOAPY: Yeah, right.

(With that, Nivea grabbed the door handle and proceeded to pull on it. Much to her dismay, it still wouldn't budge.)

NIVEA: What the hell? It's stuck fast!

(She then growled and went to town on it, yanking and pulling with all her might, growling as she did so.)

KASIRA: Um... Nivea.

SOAPY: Careful, Kasira; startling an angry baboon can be dangerous.

NIVEA: I'm not deaf, Soapy!

SOAPY: Just blind.

NIVEA: Soapy...

KASIRA: Nivea, pay attention!

NIVEA: What?

KASIRA: Just bloody stop, will you?

(Nivea ceased her angry assault on the door and grimaced at her.)

NIVEA: Sorry. I don't like being defeated by inanimate objects and it became personal.

KASIRA: Yeah, well; you're not going to win this one. Look.

(She pointed to the top of the door.)

NIVEA: What?

KASIRA: There's no gap. No light whatsoever.

(Nivea glanced up and grimaced. She then looked all around the edges of the door and whimpered.)

NIVEA: Kasira?

KASIRA: Yes?

NIVEA: It's been welded shut!

KASIRA: Exactly.

(Just then, Cayley and Soapy arrived behind them, looking greatly alarmed.)

CAYLEY: Welded shut???

SOAPY: Who'd do such a thing???

(Ambre whimpered from the table.)

AMBRE: Sika must have done it. I bet she got really, really angry when she found out we didn't wake her up.

KASIRA: Sika doesn't *know* you didn't wake her yet, Ambre. She's still asleep.

AMBRE: Oh, yeah...

(She then climbed to her feet and headed over to her unit mates.)

AMBRE: But if Sika didn't do it...

(Kasira growled.)

KASIRA: Wankers!

AMBRE: What?

KASIRA: It must have been them misogynist wankers from the academy.

(Cayley sighed.)

CAYLEY: Had to be. I mean, nobody else would have done it.

AMBRE: Meanies.

(She beamed.)

AMBRE: So how do we unwell it?

NIVEA: Unwell it?

KASIRA: She meant un-weld.

SOAPY: Is that even a word?

KASIRA: Like that's even relevant! Focus! Girls, we've been welded into our base. We need to address this right now.

CAYLEY: Yes, we do. It's the only entrance, and all the windows have iron bars over them. If we can't get the door open, this place is going to be our mausoleum.

AMBRE: What does that mean?

CAYLEY: We'll run out of food and die!

(Ambre screeched.)

AMBRE: I don't want to!!!

NIVEA: And you're not going to!

(She snarled.)

NIVEA: Because I'm going to batter the bloody thing down.

KASIRA: It's several inches of solid steel, Nivea.

NIVEA: Yeah? Well, I'm several pounds of pissed off swordswoman!

SOAPY: Several *hundred* pounds.

NIVEA: Shut up you. Like I was saying, I'm several pounds of pissed off swordsman and...

KASIRA: Therefore the smart money is on the thick steel door that's been welded shut from the outside. Even Soapy's ridiculous strong magic isn't shifting that!

CAYLEY: She's right. There's no way in hell you're going to knock it down with just a sword, Nivea.

(Nivea pouted.)

NIVEA: You have no faith in me.

CAYLEY: Not in this instance, no. I'd rather put my faith in a *sensible* idea. This is no time for your caveman-like antics, Nivea. We need to figure this out intelligently.

SOAPY: Yup, intelligently. So, you sit down and leave it to Kasira, Cayley and I.

AMBRE: And me!

SOAPY: So cute.

AMBRE: Patronising!

(Kasira rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: Will you lot be quiet a minute? We need to think of a way to proceed.

NIVEA: Other than bashing our way out using Soapy's head as a battering ram?

SOAPY: Yeah, right...

KASIRA: Stop it!

(She snarled.)

KASIRA: If you're just going to bicker, piss off to the exercise room and do it. Some of us are trying to think.

NIVEA: Right. Sorry, ma'am.

SOAPY: Sorry, ma'am.

KASIRA: Now shush.

(They all then stood there musing to themselves in silence. It was a silence that lasted all of ten seconds.)

AMBRE: We should dig a tunnel.

KASIRA: No, we shouldn't.

AMBRE: I agree.

CAYLEY: Wait, why?

AMBRE: Because I *always* agree with Kasira.

CAYLEY: I mean, why shouldn't we try tunnelling out?

KASIRA: The floor is made from several feet of thick concrete. This is a military facility, babe.

CAYLEY: Right. Good point. They're built like fortresses.

KASIRA: Exactly. Even if we had the tools, it'd take weeks to tunnel out of here and we don't have that kind of time.

(A brief silence then resumed.)

NIVEA: Your sonic boom skill would do the trick, wouldn't it, Soapy?

SOAPY: It'd blow the door off, yes. And disintegrate the walls, causing the roof to cave in on our heads and kill us all.

NIVEA: Right. It'd be better if you *didn't* do that then.

KASIRA: I agree.

AMBRE: Me too.

CAYLEY: Then what *can* we do?

(Nivea mused for a moment then her brow furrowed over.)

NIVEA: I'm gonna let you girls do the thinking, because right now our only option is using increased pressure over time to knock the fucking thing down. So, I'm gonna make a start on that.

(With that, she set about whacking the door with her blade.)

SOAPY: That's never going to work, you know that right?

NIVEA: Shoot it with your magic then!

SOAPY: What for? It's solid steel, Nivea. I'm good but I'm not *that* good.

CAYLEY: She's right. It'd be a complete waste of time.

(She then ruffled her neck.)

CAYLEY: That said, if we start getting desperate for ideas later on, don't mock me if I decide to attempt it.

KASIRA: Agreed.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: Anyway, back to ideas, let's get our thinking caps on, girls. We need a way out of this base. No, suggestion is too silly.

AMBRE: Then I want to put my tunnel idea back on the table.

KASIRA: I stand corrected. Think girls; think.

NIVEA: Yeah, you do that. Just stand back; my sword and I are going to get serious in a minute.

(Kasira, Cayley, Soapy and Ambre immediately backed away.)

KASIRA: Nivea, you're wasting your time.

NIVEA: Yes, but we have to try *something*!

KASIRA: But...

CAYLEY: Just leave her to it for now, babe. When she realises how futile her efforts are, she can come and help us think of a way out.

KASIRA: Fair enough.

(With that, they all headed for the table to consider their options, leaving Nivea to batter away at the door with her blade.)

KASIRA: She's a nutter.

CAYLEY: Yeah, but she'll soon realise she's making a fool of herself and come back to us. You'll see.

24 hours later.

With sweat pouring down her brow, Nivea continued to lash frantically at the doors to the army base with her sword, desperate to get out. She'd been at it all night and her efforts had long proven to be something of a futile gesture. As Kasira and Soapy were quick to point out, it had in fact, been a complete and utter waste of time. Standing behind her, they both looked extremely bewildered.)

KASIRA: A whole fucking day. We've been trapped in here for a whole fucking day and you've been bashing at that door constantly ever since.

SOAPY: And in all that time, the door hasn't even *begun* to crack or dent, so I reckon you can stop doing that now, Nivea.

(Nivea ceased attacking the door and glowered back at her.)

NIVEA: Excuse me?

SOAPY: I'm just saying. You've been trying that all bloody night. I reckon it's safe to say it's not going to work.

(Nivea sneered.)

NIVEA: We've got to try *something*, dumb arse. Standing about twiddling our thumbs isn't going to get it done.

SOAPY: I...

NIVEA: Just leave me to it, okay? I have to keep trying. Unlike those two...

(She nodded to where Sika and Ambre were slouched at the table at the back of the room.)

NIVEA: I can't just sit on my arse and whinge that life isn't fair.

(Unsurprisingly, the two girls in question, objected to her assessment.)

SIKA: Harsh!!!

AMBRE: We're worn out.

(Kasira rolled her eyes then stepped forward to take charge.)

KASIRA: Enough of that!!!

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: Look, I know this is stressful. We woke up yesterday to find some bastard had welded our door shut. Now we're stuck in here. But let's not turn on each other, okay?

We're all in the same boat here. Thankfully we have enough food and provisions to cope for the time being, so there's no need to panic. We need to calmly think of a way out of this mess.

(At this point, they heard Cayley humming to herself joyfully in the kitchen.)

KASIRA: See? Be like Cayley. She's not letting it get to her.

(Nivea sighed.)

NIVEA: Fine. I'll be calm.

SIKA: For how long?

NIVEA: Until I've finished calmly attacking the door with my sword.

(She turned around and started to whack at the door again.)

KASIRA: You're just wasting your energy there; you know that, right?

NIVEA: No, I do not.

KASIRA: Nivea, you practically forced poor Soapy to attack it with her ridiculously strong magic last night, and even *she* couldn't budge it. Your sword doesn't have a prayer, woman.

NIVEA: Maybe, but I'm no quitter.

(Utterly worn out, she then lowered her sword and sighed in defeat.)

NIVEA: On second thoughts, yes I am. I'm shattered.

SOAPY: At last. After 24 hours the penny finally drops.

NIVEA: Don't mock me, shit face. I'm exhausted and I'm not in the mood.

AMBRE: Come and sit with *us* then. We're tired too.

(Sika growled.)

SIKA: Yeah, we are. All that effort for nothing.

AMBRE: Nothing!

SIKA: Absolutely fuck all.

(She sighed.)

SIKA: It took us hours to smash through that wall.

AMBRE: Only to find someone had built a second wall behind it.

(Sika gave her a sideways glance.)

SIKA: No they hadn't.

AMBRE: Yes, they...

SIKA: That other wall, as you call it, was the cliff behind the base.

AMBRE: It was?

SIKA: Yes! You know, where the land rises up.

AMBRE: That ramp we use to sunbathe on the roof sometimes?

SIKA: Yeah, that.

KASIRA: Sorry, girls. That must have sucked.

AMBRE: It did.

SIKA: It really did. We noticed the wall at the back wasn't made of solid concrete and thought we'd found a way to bust out.

AMBRE: So we bashed it lots and lots until it broke.

SIKA: And what a waste of time that was.

KASIRA: Yeah, well, if you'd told me what you were doing, I could have saved you the trouble. The reason the wall at the back isn't solid concrete like the others is *because* it's built into that cliff.

AMBRE: We didn't know that.

KASIRA: I know.

AMBRE: So we smashed our way through it.

KASIRA: I know.

AMBRE: We feel silly now.

KASIRA: I bet.

(Nivea plonked her backside down next to them then smiled.)

NIVEA: Well, at least you tried. Nobody can berate you for that.

AMBRE: Yay.

SIKA: Wait, Ambre, this is Nivea speaking. She's never that nice. There's bound to be a follow up comment.

NIVEA: No, there isn't. I'm genuinely grateful for your efforts.

SIKA: You are?

NIVEA: Yeah. Having at you the back of the base like that, kept the flies away from *this* end.

SIKA: I knew it!

AMBRE: I don't get it.

NIVEA: Don't worry about it, babe.

SIKA: No, do worry about it. She implied that you're smelly and attract flies.

AMBRE: That's mean! That only happens when I'm in gazelle form and I can't help that. They're dirty animals.

NIVEA: Chill, Ambre; I was talking about Sika anyway.

AMBRE: Well, you shouldn't. You lot are always being mean to each other and it makes me uncomfortable.

SIKA: We're only joking with each other, darling.

AMBRE: Yeah, but...

(She hung her head.)

AMBRE: You're all too quick-witted for me and I get left out. I don't like being left out.

NIVEA: Babe...

(Just then, Kasira plonked herself at the table and growled.)

KASIRA: This sucks.

SOAPY: Um, Kasira, we're meant to be thinking of a way to...

KASIRA: I know! And we can do it just as well sitting down.

(Soapy shrugged.)

SOAPY: Oh, okay.

(She then headed over and joined them.)

KASIRA: We're stuck in here with only a few days food left, and god only knows what's happened to Eksi and Lycia. Being part of this unit, those Neanderthals probably targeted them as well.

SIKA: With any luck, those knuckle-dragging bell-ends didn't know that and left them alone.

NIVEA: We can only hope so, yeah.

KASIRA: So what now, girls? We tried smashing through the walls, we tried getting the door to budge, we tried shifting the bars from the windows and we even tried to squeeze Cayley through that tiny skylight.

AMBRE: Her boobs were too big.

KASIRA: We know, babe.

AMBRE: Shame really.

KASIRA: Right well, let's not dwell on what didn't work. What else can we try?

SOAPY: We could always build... nothing.

AMBRE: How will that help?

SOAPY: It was a silly idea, don't worry about it.

KASIRA: Soapy, right now, there *are* no silly ideas.

AMBRE: Not even my...

KASIRA: We're not building a tunnel.

AMBRE: Aw.

KASIRA: What were you thinking, Soapy?

SIKA: Yeah, what *were* you thinking? That dress is so last year.

SOAPY: No, it isn't!

KASIRA: Girls!!!

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: Stop bickering! Now, what were you going to suggest, Soapy?

SOAPY: Well, I was going to suggest building a shelter to protect us from the roof caving-in, then letting me do my sonic blast.

NIVEA: It's not without merit.

SOAPY: Yes, it is! You'd all be safe under the shelter, yes, but whatever I'm under when I do it will be blown to smithereens. The shrapnel could kill you and the roof would definitely kill me. It's a non-starter.

KASIRA: Why mention it then?

(Soapy looked most put out.)

SOAPY: You told me to!

(She then spotted Kasira giggling and rolled her eyes.)

SOAPY: I hate you sometimes, ma'am.

KASIRA: Sorry. I couldn't resist it.

(She then tapped Ambre's hand.)

KASIRA: She didn't mean it, Ambre; calm down.
(Sure enough, Ambre was growling at Soapy, almost ready to charge and run her through with her horns.)
SOAPY: Damn, Ambre. What's that look for?
(Ambre dropped her angry stance then blushed.)
AMBRE: Sorry. Kasira haters bring out my angry side.
SIKA: You have an angry side?
KASIRA: Pray you never see it. She has horns.
AMBRE: Antlers.
NIVEA: They're horns, babe.
AMBRE: Do *you* want to see my angry side?
(Nivea gasped.)
NIVEA: Ambre...
(She then furrowed her brow, aghast at the sight of Ambre giggling.)
NIVEA: Seriously?
SIKA: Yup. You got pranked.
SOAPY: By Ambre!
(The two of them then fell about laughing.)
NIVEA: I'm gonna slap you two in a minute.
KASIRA: And I'm going to slap the lot of you!
AMBRE: Eek!
KASIRA: Not you. These three! We're trying to have a serious discussion here. We need to get out of this base somehow, before we all starve to death. Now, I suggest you all shut up and help me think of something.
SIKA: Right. Sorry.
SOAPY: Sorry.
NIVEA: What they said.
KASIRA: Whatever. Just think. There has to be something we can do. Perhaps combining our powers somehow.
SIKA: In what way?
KASIRA: I don't bloody know, do I? That's why we need to think about it. There has to be a way out of here, surely.
(Just then, the wall next to the front door literally exploded. Bricks and mortar shot across the room, causing the five occupants to dive for cover and cower down.)
KASIRA: What the fuck?
NIVEA: The wall exploded!!!
SOAPY: We know, Nivea; we're not blind.
SIKA: Unlike her.
NIVEA: Hey!!!
(Moments later, once the falling debris subsided, Kasira glanced up from the floor then performed a double take at the area where the wall used to be. Much to her delight, Eksi and Lycia were staring back at her, looking deeply concerned.)
KASIRA: Eksi!!! You saved us!!!
LYCIA: Right...
KASIRA: You too, Lycia. Thank you.
NIVEA: Yeah, thanks, afterthought.
(Lycia rolled her eyes.)
LYCIA: You're welcome.
(Eksi traipsed through all the debris to where her five comrades were all climbing to their feet, then offered them a triumphant smile.)

EKSI: I told you I was awesome.
KASIRA: And I never doubted it for a moment.
LYCIA: Right. I was just there to hold your coat, I suppose.
EKSI: Oh. Yeah. Sorry. Lycia and I are Team Awesome.
KASIRA: Yes, you are. We thought we'd be stuck in here forever.
EKSI: Not happening, Kasira. Not on my watch.
LYCIA: Really?
EKSI: Our watch.
LYCIA: Better.
(Eksi grimaced.)
EKSI: So, I guess you're wondering what went down, right?
KASIRA: No, we've pretty much figured it out. Those misogynist bastards welded the fucking door shut.
EKSI: You know about that group of woman haters, do you?
KASIRA: Yup. And now we're going to make them pay.
(She sneered.)
KASIRA: Girls, let's get out there and take those bastards down.
(Just then, Cayley emerged from the kitchen carrying a tray of cups and a pot of tea.)
CAYLEY: Oh, you broke the wall down. How lovely.
(She smiled.)
CAYLEY: Tea's up, ladies.
KASIRA: Nope. Tea can wait, Cayley. Right now we've got work to do. There's trouble afoot and it's down to us to...
(Her face then dropped at the sight of Cayley, Sika, Nivea, Soapy, Ambre, Eksi and Lycia all sitting down around the table.)
KASIRA: What are you doing??? We've got work to do.
CAYLEY: I know, but let's have a cup of tea first, yeah?
KASIRA: Cayley...
(She then sighed inwardly and shook her head.)
KASIRA: Fine. But just one cup.
AMBRE: Yay! I'll fetch the straws.
KASIRA: One cup *each*, Ambre.
AMBRE: Oh, right. Makes sense.
SIKA: It does, I've heard terrible things happen when multiple girls share one cup.
SOAPY: Such as?
SIKA: I was afraid to ask.
KASIRA: Yes, well, anyway, get pouring, Cayley. We need to get out there and bring those bastards to justice for this.
(Eksi looked to her and cringed.)
EKSI: That won't be easy, Kasira.
KASIRA: What? Why not?
EKSI: Get comfortable and I'll explain.

Once the tea was poured and everyone started to enjoy a refreshing sip, Eksi began briefing Kasira about events on the island since they'd been welded into their base. She knew Kasira wasn't going to like what she had to say, so related the details in the most professional manner possible. Lycia, was happy to leave her to it.

EKSI: At approximately 0600hrs yesterday morning, eight unidentified males approached the academy then took the two female guards on night-shift hostage. By force. These men then threatened to kill the two guards if their demands weren't met.

(She nodded.)

EKSI: Their demands being that the staff gather everyone together and assemble in the gym. Once the entire compliment of staff and the full student intake were assembled, they then locked them all in; again threatening to kill the two female guards if anyone tried to stop them. To our knowledge, they're *still* locked in the gym. The kidnappers and their two hostages, on the other hand, have taken refuge in the main hall.

NIVEA: Wait. You say the kidnappers gathered *everyone*, but you two are right here.

(Eksi glanced at her briefly then looked back at Kasira again.)

EKSI: Lycia and I had the wherewithal to escape, ma'am. When the staff told us what was happening, we instructed them to obey the hostage takers and leave the rest to us. Then we escaped via the academy's other exit and attempted to raise the alarm with the local unit.

AMBRE: Us.

EKSI: Yes, ma'am. Unfortunately...

(Ambre giggled.)

AMBRE: She called me ma'am.

EKSI: Well you are my superior, Corporal.

AMBRE: I am? Cool.

(Eksi then resumed briefing her sister.)

EKSI: As I was saying, unfortunately when we got here, we found the door had been welded shut. So, we sent a delivery guy away with a message requesting back-up then set about trying to get you out. We were at it all day until, thankfully, Lycia stumbled across some dynamite, left over from when the building crew built the base into the cliff face. We used it to blow that hole in the wall. And that pretty much sums it up, other than to say that to date, we have no idea *why* these men attacked or who they were. And that concludes my status...

LYCIA: Our!

EKSI: That concludes *our* status report. Ma'am.

(She then saluted. At this point all eyes turned to Kasira. Staring back at Eksi, she was blinking nonchalantly.)

KASIRA: Have I done something to you offend you, Eksi?

EKSI: No, ma'am.

KASIRA: Then why are you talking to me like you're giving your least favourite secretary a dictation?

EKSI: I'm being professional, like you taught me.

KASIRA: No, I taught you to call me Kasira when we're in the base. Especially when we're all sitting down, having a nice cup of tea together.

EKSI: But, this is a matter of urgent army business, ma'am. I just...

KASIRA: Ma'am, ma'am, ma'am. Stop it. You never call me Kasira anymore.

(She then pouted.)

KASIRA: You never hug me anymore either.

EKSI: Well, we're soldiers now, ma'am.

KASIRA: No, we're sisters!

EKSI: Yeah, but we're still soldiers.

(Kasira sighed.)

KASIRA: I *miss* my Eksi hugs.

(Her brow then furrowed over.)

KASIRA: From now on, you'll call my sissy-poos and I expect a hug every morning when I arrive at the base!

EKSI: But that's the opposite of what you taught me. You taught me to be the consummate professional. Calling you... that... and hugging you is so... so...

CAYLEY: Embarrassing?

EKSI: Yeah.

KASIRA: Cayley...

CAYLEY: No, Kasira. You're tired, babes and you're talking nonsense. She can't refer to you as sissy-poops in the army!

KASIRA: Fine. Kas-Kas then.

CAYLEY: Kasira...

KASIRA: What?

CAYLEY: Have a sip of your tea and wake up a bit.

(Kasira sneered.)

KASIRA: I *am* sipping my tea. Look.

(She then took a long, refreshing swig from her cup before placing it down and exhaling happily.)

KASIRA: Damn, that's good.

(A look of horror then crossed her brow.)

KASIRA: Sissy-poops? Kas-Kas? You can't call me that! What the hell was I talking about???

AMBRE: You get really soppy when you've not had enough tea.

NIVEA: I told her that last night. Take a break, I said. Have a cup of tea, but no...

KASIRA: I get the point!

(She ruffled her neck.)

KASIRA: Thanks for the status report, Eksi.

EKSI: You're welcome, ma'am.

KASIRA: Tired or not though, you call me Kasira in here, okay?

SOAPY: It's the law!

SIKA: Yup!

EKSI: Right. Yes, ma'am. Kasira rather.

KASIRA: Much better.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: As for the things you're not clear on, Eksi, you too Lycia...

LYCIA: Finally!

KASIRA: What?

LYCIA: It's about time *someone* remembered I exist.

NIVEA: Right? You're so invisible.

SIKA: Like Nivea's brain.

NIVEA: Or your boobs!

SIKA: I'm perfectly proportioned!!!

KASIRA: Stop that!

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: As I was saying, the new intake contained a group of misogynous students who took exception to taking orders from women and decided to go on strike instead.

(She sighed.)

KASIRA: I was going to report them to the military once the fortnight long course was over. I'm guessing they realised that and decided to revolt. After all, if we fail to keep order on our island, *we'll* be the ones who end up looking bad.

CAYLEY: Yup. Such an event would give their fellow misogynists in the high command an excuse to kick *us* out instead of them.

(Soapy grimaced.)

SOAPY: Among their fellow woman-haters they'll be hailed as heroes for pointing out our shortcomings.

NIVEA: Yup. As silly as it sounds, woman-haters are like that at the top level. Any excuse to put the blame on a woman's shoulders.

(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: That's so unfair. We only have tiny shoulders. Men's ones are far bigger.

(Everyone gave her a loving, yet patronising smile.)

AMBRE: Right. That's not what it means, is it?

KASIRA: It means they'll twist the facts so they can lumber *us* with the liability.

AMBRE: Oh. What's liability?

KASIRA: Just drink your tea!

AMBRE: Right...

(She then shrunk down and supped from her cup, sheepishly.)

NIVEA: Ambre's just too cute.

CAYLEY: She is, yes, but let's get back to the matter in hand. The academy is being held hostage and it's up to us to free everyone.

KASIRA: Yup. Let's focus on that. Our first problem is going to be getting into the base without them spotting us.

LYCIA: Easy peasy. We can just get in the same way Eksi and I escaped. Through the secret exit.

KASIRA: You mean the emergency exit.

CAYLEY: Surely they'll be guarding it.

LYCIA: No. Not the *emergency* exit; the *secret* one.

(Kasira raised a baffled eyebrow then glanced at Eksi. Seeing her slowly sinking beneath the table with a troubled grimace on her face, she immediately became suspicious.)

KASIRA: There's a *secret* exit? An exit I don't know about?

(Eksi cringed.)

EKSI: General Sanders told us not to tell anyone. Only the security staff are allowed to know its location.

KASIRA: I see.

(Her nostrils then started to twitch.)

KASIRA: I'll ask you again; have I done something to offend you, Eksi?

EKSI: Of course not.

KASIRA: Are you sure? Only, you used to tell me everything. We didn't have any secrets.

EKSI: I was following orders, Kasira.

KASIRA: I see. Following orders, huh? That simple, is it?

EKSI: Well, yeah.

KASIRA: Fine. I order you to pour tea over your head.

EKSI: Ma'am.

(She then raised her cup over her head in readiness to obey Kasira's order.)

KASIRA: Don't actually do it, you silly fucker.

EKSI: But...

KASIRA: You and I *really* need to talk, love.

EKSI: I was just being professional. I take my role very seriously. You should be proud of me.

KASIRA: As a leader, I am. As a sister, on the other hand...

(Tears welled in her eyes.)

KASIRA: You never hug me anymore and now you're hiding things from me!

CAYLEY: Quick! Drink more tea, Kasira.

(Kasira flexed her shoulders then nodded.)

KASIRA: No, no. It's fine. Sorry.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: I still think you should have told me about the secret exit, but we can discuss that another day. Right now, let's focus on the mission.

SIKA: Wait, why would the academy need a secret exit?

EKSI: All mid to large military installations have them, apparently. They're for sneaking out royalty and high-profile superiors in case of a revolt or an assassination attempt.

LYCIA: A prince was killed visiting one once; now they install special exits for VIPs that only the guards know about.

KASIRA: Just the guards; not their sisters who've been nothing but loving and supporting all their lives. I see.

CAYLEY: Kasira, you really need to let it go.

KASIRA: And I will. Maybe. Given time.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: First we need to get busy taking back our island. We're gonna nip this revolt in the bud right now. Tool up, girls. We're gonna liberate the academy.

NIVEA: Yeah!!!

KASIRA: Just as soon as I've finished my tea!

NIVEA: Right.

A short while later, once they'd finished their tea and devoured several biscuits, the girls of the 123rd Wraith Containment Unit finally made their way from the compound, towards the secret exit/entrance to the base. Eksi and Lycia led the way. Determined to free everyone as soon as possible, Kasira looked extremely focussed. After a tired and emotional start to the day, she was finally in the right frame of mind for the task ahead. She was under no illusions, however, that this would be an easy task. Anxious to make sure her comrades also understood this, as they hurried towards the secret passage, she made her thoughts clear to one and all.

KASIRA: Girls, we're going to have to be clever about this.

SOAPY: That rules Sika out.

SIKA: Excuse me???

KASIRA: Hey! Pay attention!

SOAPY: Sorry.

SIKA: You *will* be!

KASIRA: Stop it.

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: As I was saying, we need to be clever about this. We can't just bundle in there, we need to be cautious. So once we're inside, we'll need to see what's what then create a strategy, okay?

NIVEA: Sounds good. Although I'm kind of a fan of bundling in there, sword blazing.

KASIRA: Well don't. There's eight of us and eight of them. That gives them the advantage.

SIKA: It does? Sounds even to me.

KASIRA: Well it isn't. They're men. They all have magic and skills just like we do. The difference being, men are physically more powerful than we are.

SIKA: Gotcha. Makes sense.

SOAPY: It does, yes, so why even ask? The fact they're much stronger than us was bleeding obvious, Sika.

NIVEA: I think you nailed it when you called her a dipshit earlier, Soapy.

SIKA: She did what?

SOAPY: I didn't call her a dipshit, I merely inferred she wasn't clever.

NIVEA: Yeah, but we all knew what you meant.

SIKA: Hey! I'll have you know I was the smartest kid in...

AMBRE: Oh, no; she's going to boast now.

KASIRA: No, she's not. She's going to shut up and listen like the rest of you.

(Silence fell as everyone grimaced at her.)

KASIRA: Thank you.

(She sighed then continued her team talk.)

KASIRA: Like I said, we'll access the base, see what needs to be done then plan the best way to do it. No heroics. If the eight of us end up going head to head with eight men, they'll break our gorgeous faces and we don't want that!

(Ambre whimpered.)

AMBRE: Not my gorgeous face. My looks are all I've got.

NIVEA: How do you think Sika feels then? She hasn't even got that.

(Sika was most exasperated.)

SIKA: Excuse me? Excuse me??? Are you really going to stand there in those ridiculous goggles and berate *me* for how I look???

NIVEA: Yes. I'm drop dead gorgeous under these goggles, whereas you look like *you* dropped dead.

(Soapy chuckled.)

SOAPY: I hate to defend Sika, but really? Nivea, you're the palest, whitest person in the world. How can you say Sika looks like a corpse?

NIVEA: Do you want a slap, fish face?

KASIRA: Nobody's going to slap anybody! Except me.

AMBRE: Why would we slap you?

KASIRA: I mean, I'll be the one *doing* the slapping.

(Ambre whimpered.)

AMBRE: Mean. What did *I* do?

KASIRA: I wasn't talking about you.

(She growled.)

KASIRA: Look, can you lot just be professional for once? No more baiting and bickering.

(Cayley gave her an apologetic smile.)

CAYLEY: I feel you're being a tad ambitious there, babe.

KASIRA: I know. And yet it's so little to ask.

CAYLEY: Right? I bet Eksi's over the top professionalism and adherence to rules doesn't seem so bad now, does it?

(Kasira just furrowed her brow.)

CAYLEY: Kasira?

KASIRA: She won't hug me anymore.

CAYLEY: Right...

(Just then, Eksi called out to them from ahead. She was standing in front of a clump of trees, pointing towards it urgently.)

EKSI: The secret entrance is just through here.

LYCIA: Literally a few feet in front of us.

(Slowing her jog as she caught them up, Kasira nodded.)

KASIRA: Nice work, ladies. Well done.

(Eksi saluted.)

EKSI: Ma'am.

KASIRA: And this is the *only* secret passage, is it?

EKSI: Yes, ma'am.

KASIRA: So you're not keeping any other secrets from your big sister who's been nothing but loving and supportive?

(Eksi sighed.)

EKSI: No, ma'am.

KASIRA: Are you sure?

CAYLEY: Let it go, Kasira. We've got a job to do.

KASIRA: Right. Okay. We'll come back to that.

EKSI: Oh, goody.

(Kasira then turned to face her unit.)

KASIRA: Now shut up and listen to what Eksi and Lycia have to say.

(She turned to face Eksi and Lycia.)

KASIRA: Tell us everything we need to know about this secret entrance.

LYCIA: Okay. Construction of the 7ft high by 3ft wide tunnel started shortly after the rest of the base was completed. A team of specialists came in with drilling equipment. As they went along, they reinforced the ceiling and walls with cast iron to prevent a cave-in. Upon completion of the 50 metre long project, hidden entrances were created at...

KASIRA: Lycia, stop. I said everything we *need* to know. Need. Stuff we need to know before we go in. We don't need to hear about its bra size and favourite type of vegetable.

LYCIA: Right... maybe Eksi should...

EKSI: Gladly.

(She nodded.)

EKSI: It leads out into the cupboard in the back of the stock room. There's a trap door in the floor. Be careful though, as there are no lights.

KASIRA: Okay. And what can we expect once we get to the other end?

EKSI: To my knowledge the hostage takers had no interest in the corridor where it's housed, ma'am. That, however, may have changed in the last twenty four hours.

KASIRA: Thank you.

(Kasira nodded then looked to Lycia.)

KASIRA: See how easy that was?

LYCIA: I apologise, ma'am. I rarely get the opportunity to speak and got carried away.

KASIRA: Yes, well, no harm done.

(She glanced towards Nivea.)

KASIRA: Seeing as there are no lights, you should go first. Seeing as you can see in the dark an' all.

NIVEA: I concur.

KASIRA: The rest of you, stay close to the person in front, okay? Keep hold of their top or something.

EKSI: That shouldn't be necessary, ma'am. It's long, thin and straight. Nobody can get lost.

KASIRA: Yes, but they can get disorientated.

CAYLEY: She's right.

KASIRA: I am. So, keep hold of one another and remain silent. We don't want to risk being heard should any of the misogynists happen to be at the other end.

SOAPY: Sounds good.

KASIRA: Thank you. Now. Any questions?

(Ambre glanced nervously between the others then slowly raised her hand.)

AMBRE: Um... why would a tunnel have a bra size?

(As everyone gave a stealthy chuckle, Kasira looked to her and smiled.)

KASIRA: You're adorable.

AMBRE: I am?

(She sighed.)

AMBRE: People only say that when I've said something dumb.

(Sika put her arm around her.)

SIKA: We say it all the time, Ambre. But yes, you're right.

KASIRA: Anyway, that's enough of that. Get moving, Nivea.

NIVEA: Ma'am.

KASIRA: Together now, ladies. Let's get this shit done.

CAYLEY: Go!

(With a nod, Nivea then headed through the trees to where a gap in the wall was situated.)

NIVEA: Here?

EKSI: Yup.

NIVEA: Cool.

(She then stepped into the darkened tunnel and removed her goggles. Sika was quick to follow her in, making sure to grab a hold of her top as she did so. The others then followed suit one by one. A slow and silent creep through the darkness then began. Alas, the silence wasn't to last. About half way down the tunnel, a devious expression appeared on Nivea's face and she whispered over her shoulder.)

NIVEA: Well, well. This is interesting, don't you think?

SIKA: What is?

NIVEA: This time *you're* blind and *I'm* guiding *you*.

(Sika gulped.)

SIKA: Don't you dare.

NIVEA: Don't dare what? Guide you into things? As if I would. I mean, you never did it to me when I was the blind one. Oh, wait... yes, you did.

SIKA: You already got me back for that.

NIVEA: Did I though? I mean, did I really?

(She then stomped her foot on the floor.)

NIVEA: Careful, there's a little step here.

(Feeling around for it, Sika slipped her foot forward gently and started to tap it on the ground.)

SIKA: No, there isn't.

(She then stepped forwards and promptly tripped over the inch high step. As she tumbled to the floor, Nivea burst out laughing.)

NIVEA: Stop, guys. Sika fell over.

SIKA: Ow! Soapy, you stood on me!

SOAPY: Sorry.

SIKA: You did that one purpose.

SOAPY: No, I didn't. How was I to know you were laying on the floor?

(Kasira's voice then rose up from the back.)

KASIRA: What's the delay?

SIKA: Nivea tripped me up then Soapy stood on me!

KASIRA: What really happened?

NIVEA: She fell over.

KASIRA: Figures!

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: Sika, concentrate.

SIKA: But...

CAYLEY: Silence!

(Sika fell silent.)

KASIRA: Much better. Now get going.

SIKA: Fine. Just tell Soapy not to stand on me again.

(Kasira rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: Fine. Soapy?

SOAPY: Yes?

KASIRA: Let the person behind you go in front. If Sika falls over again, *they* can step on her instead.

SIKA: I don't want anyone to...

KASIRA: Shut up! Soapy, just do as I asked.

SOAPY: Ma'am. Who's behind me?

AMBRE: Um... me.

SOAPY: Go past then.

AMBRE: Oh. Okay.

(Ambre then squeezed past her.)

AMBRE: Now what?

KASIRA: Now we can get going.

SIKA: Just don't step on me, Ambre.

AMBRE: I wasn't going to.

KASIRA: Never mind that, just bloody go.

SIKA: Right. Yeah. Onwards, man hands.

NIVEA: As you wish, double A cups.

SIKA: Hey!

KASIRA: Just go!

NIVEA: Right.

(They then resumed pacing onwards through the darkened tunnel. Highly amused still, Nivea whispered over her shoulder again.)

NIVEA: You're such a moron. Fancy tripping. I even *told* you the step was there.

SIKA: Like I'm gonna trust you.

NIVEA: Oh, wait, there's another one.

SIKA: Shit.

(Nivea then grinned from ear to ear at the sound of Sika shuffling forwards like a geisha girl, afraid to trip over a second time.)

NIVEA: Sika?

SIKA: What?

NIVEA: I'm lying.

SIKA: I don't believe you.

(She then continued to shuffle forth, much to Nivea's amusement.)

NIVEA: Nutter.

(Just behind them, clinging onto the back of Sika's top, Ambre grimaced.)

AMBRE: You're walking funny.

SIKA: No, I'm not.

AMBRE: Yes, you are. And you're making me walk funny. And the person behind me.

KASIRA: Walk properly, Sika.

SIKA: I'm being cautious.

KASIRA: You're being ridiculous.

SIKA: I don't want to trip again.

NIVEA: You're not going to. It's perfectly flat.

SOAPY: Like Sika's chest.

SIKA: Why, you...

KASIRA: Stop it. We're on a bloody mission, girls. One that requires your silence; now shut up.

(Silence descended.)

KASIRA: And stop walking like a twat, Sika.

SIKA: Fine, but I fall...

KASIRA: Shut it, I said!

(Once again, silence descended. Sika was just glad that in the darkness, nobody could see her sneering and mocking Kasira's voice with a wobbly head and exaggerated mouth movements. Very much aware that Sika was probably making such movements, but unable to prove it, Kasira just shook her head and continued onwards.)

In the academy stock room, a few moments later, all was quiet. The lights were out and but for a small window in the top of the far wall, the entire room would have been in darkness. It was the perfect place for the girls to emerge unspotted. First to do so was Nivea. Having nervously lifted the hatch then glanced around, her face lit up at the joyous sight of the empty room. She then scrambled out, helping Sika up behind her. One by one the eight members of the unit all emerged from the hatch in the floor, constantly being shushed by Kasira. Although the stock room was empty and silent, she was all too aware that a hostage-taking misogynist could pass by at any moment. She was also very much aware that these bitterest of men hated her the most. Not about to let anyone speak and drop them all in it, she continued to shush them all, even as she beckoned them close for a team talk.

Once her seven subordinates were all gathered around her, she nodded to herself then spoke up in barely a whisper.)

KASIRA: Okay, this is the stock room. Obviously. We're in. Now comes the hard part. We need to free the two captives without being spotted, then release everyone else from the gym. (Nivea replied, also in a whisper.)

NIVEA: You said they're in the main hall, right, Eksi?

EKSI: Yeah. At least they were.

NIVEA: And how do we get to them from here?

KASIRA: Slowly and stealthily. But most of all, quietly.

(She glowered at Sika.)

KASIRA: And that means you.

SIKA: Hey! Harsh.

NIVEA: Right well, that's great and all, ma'am, but I meant how do we get there in a geographical sense.

AMBRE: What?

NIVEA: Which way is it?

KASIRA: Don't worry, I'll lead you there.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: The way I see it is, splitting up would be foolhardy. This is gonna be hard enough as it is, without splitting into two parties of four. If four of us come up against all eight of them, we're screwed.

CAYLEY: Yeah, but eight versus eight doesn't exactly fill me with confidence either.

KASIRA: Then you understand. Eight versus four would be even worse.

CAYLEY: Yes, it would.

KASIRA: So, we'll go together. Slowly, cautiously and in single file. I'll lead as I know the way. Nivea, you walk behind me. Cayley, you'll be third and Soapy will be behind you. The back four will be Ambre, Eksi, Lycia and then Sika in that exact order. Okay?

SIKA: You're making me bring up the rear?

NIVEA: I hear you like it up the...

KASIRA: And that's exactly why, Nivea!

(She furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: I chose that order so you, Sika and Soapy aren't close together. We need to do this silently and the last thing we need is you three clowns turning it into a circus.

NIVEA: Seriously? You don't trust us to be silent?

KASIRA: No. I don't. What's the longest you've gone this week without baiting one of them?

(Nivea grimaced.)

NIVEA: I see your point. It's just too hard to resist.

SOAPY: It really is. As much as I'd love to be the consummate professional, those two are just too much fun to tease.

KASIRA: Then you get it?

SOAPY: Yes. I'm not proud of it, but yeah, I get it.

SIKA: I'm glad *you* do. I think that's totally harsh. I'm an *awesome* soldier nowadays. A credit to my unit, some would say.

KASIRA: Like who?

CAYLEY: Someone who doesn't know her.

SIKA: Right. You too, huh?

CAYLEY: Yup. You're so noisy, I'd have been tempted to leave you back at the base entirely.

SIKA: Ouch.

KASIRA: I *was* tempted, Cayley.

CAYLEY: I know.

SIKA: Wow. You two really know how to hurt a girl's feelings.

KASIRA: And she's *still* talking.

(Sika looked most put out.)

SIKA: Of course, I am. You were being mean to me.

KASIRA: No, we were chastising you for the fact you can't be quiet for five minutes and you've countered that argument by talking incessantly.

SIKA: That's such an exaggeration.

KASIRA: Enough. Let's get moving. And if I hear a peep out of you, Sika, I'll come back there and wallop you.

SIKA: That's bullying.

KASIRA: Fine, I'll send someone else to do it then. Someone who hits harder than me.

NIVEA: Which is most people, to be honest.

KASIRA: Excuse me?

NIVEA: What? You're very feminine.

KASIRA: And I make no apology for that, man hands.

(Nivea gaped.)

NIVEA: You... that's too mean.

KASIRA: That's not mean. If any of you screw this up by wittering or bickering, I'll show you the true meaning of mean.

SOAPY: You mean...

KASIRA: Yes, no tea or cake for a week!

(In perfect unison with each other, the seven in her company gasped in horror then fell into line, exactly as Kasira had instructed.)

KASIRA: Thank you. Now follow me.

(With that, she crept to the stock room door and eased it open, before peering into the corridor. Seeing not a soul around, she nodded then crept out of the door. The rest of the unit followed on silence, shocked into professionalism by the potential misery of a week without tea and cake.)

For several minutes they slowly made their way forth, taking extra care to make sure their footsteps were silent. Nobody wanted to be the one that gave them away. And they certainly didn't want to be deprived of tea and cake. As such, on this rarest of occasions, they eight members of the 123rd Wraith Containment Unit had never looked so professional. Not a word passed their lips as they made it to the end of the corridor and turned right into another one. They even made it to the end of that second corridor in perfect silence. Before turning this time, however, Kasira came to an abrupt halt then glanced behind her. In a barely audible whisper she then advised her subordinates as to their whereabouts.)

KASIRA: The main hall is around this corner.

(Everyone nodded to acknowledge her words. Satisfied they understood, she then glanced around the corner before swiftly retracting her head.)

KASIRA: There's one guy guarding the door.

(Nivea looked thoughtful and returned her whisper.)

NIVEA: Just the one, is it?

KASIRA: Yeah.

NIVEA: Excellent. Leave it to me.

(She then stepped forward, only for Kasira to grab her arm.)

KASIRA: What are you gonna do?

NIVEA: What I do best.

(She then shrugged her off and strutted around the corner, swaying her hips in a suggestive manner. Watching her go, Kasira spammed her forehead then looked to Cayley.)

KASIRA: Unless I'm very much mistaken, she's only gonna try to seduce the bugger.

CAYLEY: Sounds like something she'd do.

KASIRA: He's a misogynist; that's never gonna work.

CAYLEY: No? He's a man, Kasira. All men are susceptible to the chance of a potential, easy conquest. Even misogynists.

(Kasira looked enlightened.)

KASIRA: You make a good point.

(She then glanced around the corner again, just in time to see Nivea approach the guard and smile at him seductively.)

NIVEA: Hey, you.

(The guard furrowed his brow.)

TED: Why aren't you in the gym with the other hostages?

NIVEA: I was keeping your friend... shall we say entertained?

TED: My friend? Who? Everyone's in the hall here.

NIVEA: Except you and one other.

TED: Really, you sure?

(He then started to turn and reach for the door to check. Not about to let him do so, Nivea just smiled.)

NIVEA: Your friend said my talents were wasted on just one of you, so I should come and entertain you next.

(Ted swiftly turned to her face her; a delighted expression washing across his face.)

TED: I'm listening.

NIVEA: So why don't we...

(She then stepped closer as if to whisper in his ear. Eager to hear what she had to say, he turned his head and beamed.)

TED: Why don't we what?

NIVEA: Hurt you.

(She then kned him squarely in his private parts. In absolute agony and unable to breathe, the guard could only fold to the floor; his hands cupping his paining testicles.)

NIVEA: Result.

(With that, she yanked a length of rope from her bag and proceeded to tie him up.

Astonished by what she's witnessed, Kasira hurried over to her, closely followed by the others.)

KASIRA: Nice work.

NIVEA: Yup. One down.

LYCIA: Um... why did you happen to have a length of rope in your handbag?

(Nivea just winked at her.)

NIVEA: Because, if I happen to bump into the right guy, I need to be prepared.

AMBRE: I don't get it.

SOAPY: Me either.

CAYLEY: It's not rocket science, girls; Nivea's kinky.

AMBRE: I still don't get it.

SOAPY: I do. And it's gross.

KASIRA: Yes, well, never mind that. Let's get this dickhead all tied up then we can think about what to do next. One down, seven to go.

(Busy securing the ropes, Nivea glanced up.)

NIVEA: All done. He's not getting out of that any time soon.

SIKA: Are you sure?

NIVEA: I'm positive. My knots are first class.

(She shrugged.)

NIVEA: At least no man has managed to escape yet. No matter how hard they've tried.

EKSI: Wow. You really are an extraordinary pervert.

NIVEA: Thank you.

KASIRA: Girls, focus. We need to think about...

(Just then, the door cranked open and Rex, the mountain of a man with a personal grudge against Kasira, stepped forth.)

REX: Ted, can you swap shifts with...

(He then froze to the spot and stared at the horrified group of women before him.)

SIKA: Well that can't be good.

CAYLEY: No, no it can't.

(Rex's nostrils then started to twitch. Growling, he then glanced over his shoulder.)

REX: Lads, them bitches from the wraith containment unit are standing right here.

ELLIS: They are?

REX: Yeah! Let's get them!!!

(He then pounced forwards to grab one of them, only to find the eight of them already fleeing down the corridor in a blind panic.)

REX: After them!!!

(Charging away towards the main exit, Kasira whimpered.)

KASIRA: It's all gone so, so wrong.

EKSI: Just run, ma'am. Don't try to speak, conserve your energy. You're slow enough as it is without wasting energy reserves.

(Kasira pouted at her.)

KASIRA: Why do you hurt me, Eksi? Why?

NIVEA: Just run. Eksi's words won't hurt you half as much as their fists if they catch us.

AMBRE: I'm scared.

SIKA: Don't be; you can outrun anybody.

AMBRE: I'm scared for Kasira, she's really bad at running.

KASIRA: Can you lot stop bloody criticising??? I'm going as fast as I can.

SOAPY: Don't worry, ma'am. If they get too close, I'll use my magic on them.

KASIRA: No! If you do that, they might use theirs on us.

NIVEA: That wouldn't end well.

KASIRA: Exactly. For now, we just need to escape. We can consider what to do next once we've lost them, okay?

SIKA: Ma'am.

KASIRA: Thank you.

(Kasira's plan to outrun the men on their tail and lose them was, at the very least, ridiculous. Calling it ambitious would be far too generous. Ambre and Lycia were the only fast runners in their number. The other six would be outpaced and caught in no time. Therefore, the likely outcome was that they'd merely tire themselves out before getting embroiled in a fist fight. A fist fight they had absolutely no chance of winning. The urge not to get punched in the face, however, was a strong one. And so, they fled. Trying to muster as much power as they could, they put their heads down and charged, desperately hoping to get away. Unfortunately, the seven snarling men on their tail we're equally as determined to catch them. Not about to ease off and offer the girls even the tiniest glimmer of hope, they bounded after them, gaining rapidly.)

Such was the speed of the angry men's advance, it wasn't long before the inevitable happened. They'd barely made it out of the academy and into the adjacent woodland when the backmarker, Kasira, failed in her woefully overambitious quest to get away. Almost mocking her, the front runner of the angry hoard, Rex, grinned then raced alongside her, offering her a cocky wave. All Kasira could do was whimper to himself.)

KASIRA: Pretend you haven't seen him; pretend you haven't seen him.

REX: Yeah, that'll work.

(He then bellowed in her face.)

REX: Boo!!!

(With a scream, Kasira jumped away from him then tumbled, face first into a bush. Highly amused by it, Rex laughed to himself then called out to the rest of his men.)

REX: This cunt is mine! You lot can help yourself to *the rest* of the bitches.

(He then bounded over to Kasira and lifted her from the bush by her neck.)

REX: Hello.

KASIRA: Um... hi.

REX: Sorry to trouble you, love, but my fist would like a word with your face.

(Kasira gulped.)

KASIRA: I'm a bit busy right now. Maybe it could put its complaint in writing.

REX: You'd like that, wouldn't you?

KASIRA: You have no idea.

REX: Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I won't be doing that. You, like the rest of your slutty little harem, are about to feel pain.

(He then gestured to where the rest of Kasira's unit were darting desperately around the trees in a bid to evade capture. Their run had failed miserably and all they had left was ducking and dodging in desperation.)

REX: Kudos though. Those girls aren't giving up easily, are they?

(No sooner had he spoken, however, Soapy ran onto the end of a flailing fist and shot backwards into a tree.)

KASIRA: Soapy!!!

REX: Hey! Never mind her! You've got yourself to worry about.

(He then held up his fist. Staring at it, Kasira almost went cross-eyed.)

REX: It's as big as your head, look.

(All Kasira could do was whimper as he moved his fist from side to side, highly amused at the way Kasira's eyes were transfixed by it.)

REX: I won't lie to you, love; this is gonna hurt.

(Just then, Sika appeared, hovering overhead. Not about to suffer the same fate Soapy had, she'd taken to the air.)

SIKA: Leave her alone, you horrible bastard!

REX: Or what?

SIKA: Or I'll use my magic on you.

REX: Then we'll all use *our* magic on *you*!

KASIRA: No magic!!!

SIKA: Fine. I'll just have to throw things at him instead then!

(No sooner has she spoken, however, the misogynist from the airborne race, Ellis, flew towards her and slammed his wing into one of hers. Steadying herself in the air, she furrowed her brow furiously and bellowed at him as he flew onwards.)

SIKA: What are you doing? That's dangerous!!! You could have knocked me out of the sky!

ELLIS: That's the idea, dumb arse!!!

(He then proceeded to turn in readiness to have another go. As he did so, Sika shrieked then flew away.)

SIKA: Psycho!!!

(Left alone with Rex, all Kasira could do was offer up a cheesy grin then speak up in a small voice.)

KASIRA: So, anyway, like I said, if you put your grievances in writing, I'll...

REX: Fine. Okay. I will.

KASIRA: Really?

REX: Absolutely. Right after I've punched you in the face.

(He then drew back his fist. Very much expecting to get knocked unconscious, all Kasira could do was tense up and wince.)

KASIRA: This is gonna hurt!

REX: Correct!

(He then unleashed a powerful right hook into Kasira's jaw. Having expected her to collapse like a ton of bricks, he then stood there in bewilderment. She hadn't even flinched.)

REX: What the hell?

(Kasira gaped for a moment then spoke up in an uncertain tone.)

KASIRA: Um... I'm stronger than I look?

REX: I very much doubt...

(A peeved expression then crossed his brow. Much to his annoyance, Cayley was hovering above them, showering Kasira with healing magic.)

REX: Hey! That's cheating!

CAYLEY: No, it's...

(Suddenly, Sika zoomed past again. Ellis was right on her tail and she was scared witless.)

SIKA: Piss off!!! Why just me??? I'm not the *only* one flying here, you know???

(As the two of them zoomed onwards, Rex shook his fist at Cayley.)

REX: I have no idea what you said because that other winged nuisance drowned it out, I just know it was annoying.

(He then threw an almighty fist at Kasira again, only to see it fail a second time.)

KASIRA: Keep doing that, Cayley!!!

(Rex growled under his breath.)

REX: Women!!!

(Just behind them in the meantime, Nivea had been singled out for punishment by one of the snarling rebels. Ignoring all the other girls, Craig only had eyes for her. Having always had an irrational hatred of the nocturnal, subterranean race, he couldn't wait to unleash his anger on her face. Pacing backwards, all Nivea could do was try to remonstrate with him.)

NIVEA: Now come on, this is just silly. You don't *really* want to hurt me, do you?

CRAIG: Actually, I do.

NIVEA: Shit. That wasn't the answer I was hoping for.

CRAIG: I didn't think it was. Now brace yourself, bitch. I'm gonna smash your face in.

(Nivea whimpered.)

NIVEA: Oh, come on. Don't be like that. That's crazy talk. I mean...

(She then lifted her goggles slightly and squinted at him.)

NIVEA: Seriously, now. You wouldn't want to hit a face *this* pretty, would you?

(She then slid her goggles back in place.)

NIVEA: Well?

CRAIG: Like I care about pretty faces! Faces mean nothing to *me*, they never have. I do *my* women doggy style.

NIVEA: Well, yeah, I should imagine they insist on it.

CRAIG: You cheeky cunt!

(Just then, Eksi whizzed past, fleeing from another angry rebel.)

EKSI: Yeah, that's a great idea, Nivea; piss him off. What could possibly go wrong?

NIVEA: I was only saying. I mean look at him! If you had to sleep with him, *you'd* insist on doggy style too.

EKSI: Yeah, that's right; you re-iterate the point. That'll end well.

CRAIG: I beg to differ!!!

(He then charged in and grabbed Nivea by the neck.)

NIVEA: Uh-oh!

CRAIG: You're gonna be sorry you said that, bitch!

NIVEA: I fear you might be right.

CRAIG: Oh, I am. Watch my fist, you nocturnal shit-bag, this is what pain looks like!

(He was then propelled six feet into the air, having been butted skywards by an angry gazelle.)

CRAIG: My arse!!!

NIVEA: Ooh, so that's what pain looks like!

CRAIG: That's so not funny!

NIVEA: I beg to differ.

(She then looked to the gazelle and reached out to stroke its face.)

NIVEA: Thanks, Ambre. I owe you one.

(At this point, the gazelle rapidly transformed back into Lycia. Thrusting her hands to her hips, she growled bitterly.)

LYCIA: Seriously?

NIVEA: Sorry, I thought...

LYCIA: What's it gonna take to get some fucking recognition around here?

(She was then punched to the ground by another of the rebels.)

DANIEL: Ha! Now who's next?

(He was then coshed over the head by Ambre's familiar, Fluffy, and collapsed to the ground.)

NIVEA: Nice one, Lycia!

(Ambre pouted at her from through the trees.)

AMBRE: That was *my* familiar!!!

NIVEA: I know, but I already thanked you earlier.

AMBRE: Oh. That's fair then.

NIVEA: Now if you'll excuse me, I'm gonna see if I can help Soapy.
(She was then shoulder barged to the ground by another of the rebels, Zak.)
NIVEA: You gay!!!
ZAK: What?
(Laying on the ground, Nivea snarled at him.)
NIVEA: A shoulder barge? Seriously? Who does that??? Fight me like a man.
ZAK: Fair enough.
(He then bounced on the balls of his feet.)
ZAK: Come on then. Let's have at it.
(Nivea gulped.)
NIVEA: I wasn't serious about that, you know?
(At this point, Eksi zoomed past once again.)
EKSI: You really need to stop dropping yourself in it like that, Nivea.
NIVEA: You think I don't know that???
ZAK: Never mind yapping, just...
(He too was then floored by Fluffy.)
NIVEA: Yes! Ambre, you're a fucking legend.
AMBRE: Yay!!!
(Nivea then jumped to her feet and glanced to where Rex was throwing punches at Kasira. Left, followed right, followed left, but none of them connected and he was starting to wear himself out.)
REX: You will go down eventually!
CAYLEY: Only if you buy her dinner first.
(Staring in horror as fists keep flying at her face, Kasira whimpered.)
KASIRA: How can you make jokes at a time like this, Cayley???
CAYLEY: Right. Sorry.
KASIRA: Don't apologise; focus! If you stop healing me and he manages to connect, my beautiful face is going to have a dent in it.
CAYLEY: Relax, love, I know what I'm doing!
(Just then, Sika zoomed past once again. Ellis was still hot on her heels and by now, she was panicking profusely.)
SIKA: Piss off!!! Leave me alone! Attack Cayley!!!
KASIRA: Don't!!!
CAYLEY: I'm busy!!! Keep attacking Sika!!!
SIKA: Seriously??? Why would you tell him do that???
CAYLEY: Why did you tell him to attack *me*???
SIKA: Um... can't talk! Busy!!!
KASIRA: That girl...
REX: Hey!!! Pay attention when I'm trying to batter you.
KASIRA: Oh, sorry.
(Just then, Nivea came charging at them from behind Rex, hoisting a tree branch aloft.)
NIVEA: Not as sorry as *he's* gonna be.
REX: Wrong.
(He then about turned and punched Nivea in the face, before instantly refocussing on Kasira.)
REX: Now where were we?
(Just then, an angry booming voice rose up from the trees just behind them.)
FOREST: You were about to surrender unconditionally!!!
(At once, everyone glanced up and gasped. An army general and twenty soldiers armed with crossbows were standing in line before them. With horror in their eyes, everyone slowly raised their hands to surrender to him.)

REX: Uh-oh.

(Kasira whispered.)

KASIRA: Um... who's that?

REX: That's...

(A loud scream then filled the air as Sika came tumbling from the sky. Landing in a forward roll, she managed to jump to her feet again then bellowed into the sky.)

SIKA: Maniac!!!

FOREST: Enough!!!

(Sika glanced his way then flinched.)

SIKA: Huh??? Who are you?

FOREST: I'm General Forest of the high command.

(All the rebellious men could do was gulp at this moment. They were in a world of trouble and they knew it. For their part, Kasira's unit simply remained where they stood, hands aloft, waiting for the general to allow them to stand down. In no hurry to do so, the general paced up and down among them for a moment before standing tall and sneering.)

FOREST: I've never seen such an embarrassing shower in all my life.

(He shook his head.)

FOREST: So... which one of you is Miss Ashwood?

(Kasira saluted.)

KASIRA: Major Kasira Ashwood reporting for duty, sir.

FOREST: Actually, I'm looking for an *Eksi* Ashwood.

KASIRA: Huh?

(Eksi then peered around a tree.)

EKSI: Private Eksi Ashwood reporting for duty, sir.

FOREST: You reported an insurgence yesterday, did you not?

EKSI: I did, yes. Wow, you came quickly.

FOREST: Of course. Now tell me...

EKSI: Okay. Everyone here who doesn't possess a vagina is one of the perpetrators, sir.

Except your own men, obviously.

FOREST: Right...

(He then glanced over his shoulder.)

FOREST: Fuck it. Arrest all the men for now and we'll sort out the details back at the base.

And get that flying fella back down here before I *shoot* the fucker down!

(With a cry of "sir" his men then charged among them. Drawing a sigh of relief, Kasira looked to Eksi and smiled.)

KASIRA: Nice work, sis. Good girl.

EKSI: Ma'am!

KASIRA: Stop calling me ma'am!!!

(She then hung her head.)

KASIRA: Why doesn't she love me anymore, Cayley?

CAYLEY: I'm sure she does, Kasira, but she's on duty.

KASIRA: That's no excuse.

(She then turned and paced up to the general.)

KASIRA: Would you like my report, sir?

FOREST: No!

KASIRA: Right...

FOREST: Just get everyone healed and return to your base. We'll sort it all out once we get there.

KASIRA: Sir.

(She then turned to Cayley.)

KASIRA: Can you heal everyone, babes?

CAYLEY: Yes, yes I can.

KASIRA: Thank you.

(She then nodded to herself and stood tall.)

KASIRA: Thank fuck that's over.

Upon their return to the base, General Forest ordered the rebellious male soldiers to be locked in the exercise room, then ordered Kasira and her unit mates to line up outside in the base's courtyard. Wasting no time, whatsoever, as soon as they were in position, he then started to issue a severe dressing down. Having expected to be briefed on exactly what happened before any further action was taken, Kasira was most perplexed. Respecting his rank, however, she stood to attention and listened to his every harsh word.

FOREST: You're shit!

(He then stood there nodding defiantly. Under the mistaken, yet understandable impression that he'd finished, Kasira furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: With all due respect, sir...

FOREST: Do you mind??? I was talking!

KASIRA: Oh...

FOREST: Oh? What do you mean, oh? Did it *sound* like I'd finished to you?

KASIRA: Well.... yes, actually.

NIVEA: Very much so.

CAYLEY: Uh-huh.

FOREST: Well, I hadn't!

(He rolled his eyes then proceeded to pace up and down.)

FOREST: You six buffoons have brought shame on the military!

(His second in command, a major by rank, then chimed in nervously.)

MAJOR: Um... there's eight of them, sir.

FOREST: What?

MAJOR: There's eight of them.

FOREST: I know that, you moron! What do you think I am? An innumerate, blind idiot?
(He snarled.)

FOREST: I know there are eight of them, but only six of them brought shame on the military!

MAJOR: Right. Understood, sir.

FOREST: Oh, jolly. I'm so glad you understand. Maybe I can carry on then. If that's okay with you.

(The major just hung his head in shame.)

FOREST: Thank you.

(He then glowered at Kasira.)

FOREST: You're supposed to be this island's military unit. Its protectors! For an army unit to fail to deal with such a situation is unthinkable. You're meant to be soldiers. Soldiers should be able to deal with a rebellion!

KASIRA: Yes, but in our defence, the rebels were soldiers too.

FOREST: That's a pathetic excuse.

KASIRA: I respectfully disagree, sir. With both sides being soldiers, it was kind of even. The only difference being...

FOREST: The only difference being what?

KASIRA: Well...

AMBRE: They were bigger than us!

(The general glowered at her bitterly.)

FOREST: Bigger than you? Is *that* your excuse for this mess? Some big boys came???

What are you? Twelve?

AMBRE: No. I haven't been twelve since I was twelve.

(General Forest blinked at her then looked to Kasira.)

FOREST: Is she stupid or something?

KASIRA: She's a soldier.

FOREST: But is she a stupid soldier?

KASIRA: She's a brilliant soldier.

AMBRE: Yay!

FOREST: Silence!

(He clenched his fist.)

FOREST: The fact is, the army left you lot in charge of this island's security. You failed.

Welded into your own base!!!

(He looked to Eksi and Lycia.)

FOREST: Luckily, these two security guards had their wits about them. They followed protocol to the letter and sent an urgent request for assistance. And I'm informed that *you* were the ones who rescued these girls from the base as well.

EKSI: That's correct, sir.

FOREST: Excellent.

(He nodded.)

FOREST: It's good to know that *some* women aren't completely useless.

(He smiled.)

FOREST: Go, you two. Go and resume your duties at the academy. You don't need to be here for this. Oh, and nice work.

LYCIA: Sir!

EKSI: Sir!

(The two then headed out of the gate, glancing back nervously at their six unit-mates.)

KASIRA: It's fine, Eksi. I'll come and talk to you later.

FOREST: Silence in the ranks!!!

(He shook his fist then bounded up to the gates, before slamming them shut.)

FOREST: Now they've gone we can deal with you six failures accordingly.

(He nodded.)

FOREST: According to my notes, the six of you make up the island's defence unit and some of you teach at the academy as well. Those two security guards, although *affiliated* to this unit are both *based* at the academy full-time, correct?

KASIRA: Correct.

FOREST: Who gave you permission to speak?

CAYLEY: You asked her a question.

FOREST: Since when did that mean I wanted her to speak?

NIVEA: What else could it mean?

FOREST: Shut up! Nobody gave *any* of you permission to speak!

(He snarled at Cayley and Nivea.)

FOREST: I didn't even ask *you two* a question.

(He growled.)

FOREST: Idiots.

(He stood tall.)

FOREST: I didn't *need* an answer. I wasn't looking for confirmation. My use of the word "correct" in a questing tone was entirely rhetorical. I *know* who's who. *You six* are the ones who are meant to take care of the island's security. You six and nobody else. That's why *you're* here and the other two have returned to their duties.

(He shook his head.)

FOREST: Like I said, your duty is to take care of this island's security. Instead of doing so, however, you ended up welded into your base while a group of rogue students run amuck. I'm appalled. While you were trapped in there, unable to do anything, the academy staff were all taken hostage! And what's more, while all that was going on, nobody was out killing the wraiths! This is an appalling dereliction of duty! Now, what have you got to say for yourselves???

(Kasira glanced at her grimacing allies then looked to General Forest again.)

KASIRA: Sir, what happened to us could have happened to anybody. A group of students forged a revolution in the night and welded us into base as we slept. All units sleep, so it could have happened to anyone.

FOREST: I didn't happen to anyone though, did it? It happened to you!

KASIRA: The point is, sir, there was no gross dereliction of duty whatsoever. We steadfastly went about our duties diligently and professionally, like we always do. This was an act of sabotage from fellow soldiers. One that requires a severe punishment for those responsible for the trouble, not for those on the receiving end of it.

(General Forest nodded.)

FOREST: You make a compelling argument, major.

KASIRA: Thank you, sir.

FOREST: Sadly for you, it was bollocks. The fact is, you failed in your duties to protect the island from harm and failed to even perform the simple task for clearing the wraiths. Such a failure requires discipline.

KASIRA: But, sir...

FOREST: Shut it, fish face.

KASIRA: Fish face?

AMBRE: She's not fish face. Soapy's fish face.

FOREST: What?

AMBRE: That's her nickname.

SOAPY: Oh, is it now?

(Ambre whimpered.)

AMBRE: I think I've said too much.

SOAPY: On the contrary, Ambre, who's been calling me fish face?

FOREST: Silence!!!

SIKA: Yeah, be quiet, fish face.

SOAPY: I might have known it'd be you.

FOREST: Enough!!!

(He growled.)

FOREST: I've never seen such a horribly undisciplined group of misfits in all my born days.

(He sneered.)

FOREST: Well, soon remedied. It's discipline you need, so it's discipline you'll get. Your failures *cannot* go unpunished! So, here's what's going to happen. Six of my men shall remain behind here to take over your duties temporarily. You six idiots, will be travelling with me to the disciplinary board headquarters for a trial and possible court-martial.

(All the girls gasped in horror. Delighted by their mortified reaction, the general couldn't help but smirk.)

FOREST: Oh, and wear a thick coat!

A short while later, Kasira, Cayley, Nivea, Soapy, Ambre and Sika found themselves standing together on the dockside, handcuffed and roped together. It truly was bewildering.

They were the *victims* of the attack, and yet they were being treated no differently than the aggressors. Kasira was especially dumbfounded. The military's code of conduct clearly stated that if a unit was put out of action by an act of sabotage from a third party, an investigation should take place before any disciplinary measures were taken. The general, however, seemed determined to ignore that fact. Rather than investigating, he'd opted to arrest them and treat them like common criminals. Suffice to say, she was not happy about it. As such, she'd tried to protest to him several times, but her words simply fell on deaf ears. It was extremely frustrating.

Having marched the misogynist rebels to the dockside alongside Kasira's unit, the general then boarded a ship to supervise the rebel's transfer. Left on the dockside, overseen by armed guards, Kasira no longer had anybody to air her grievances to. All she could do was stand with her subordinates and share her annoyance with them instead.

KASIRA: Either that general is an incompetent buffoon or he's being a cunt on purpose.

CAYLEY: I'm starting to feel like it's the latter.

NIVEA: He's a bell end either way. A bell end with no understanding of military procedures.

KASIRA: Right? I mean, no investigation whatsoever. None. Straight to disciplinary proceedings without even finding out what happened.

SIKA: He says he *knows* what happened.

CAYLEY: Yeah, but how can he if he hasn't investigated?

SOAPY: Maybe he investigated *before* he found us in the woods.

KASIRA: It's unlikely, Soapy. If he'd investigated, I mean, *actually* investigated, he'd know we did nothing wrong.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: Yup, I'm convinced. He's just being a cunt on purpose.

NIVEA: He is. He really is. I mean, if failing to stop a rebel attack is an arrestable offence, why is it just the six of us here? Why not arrest all the academy staff too? By *his* logic, because they got taken hostage, they're *also* guilty of a gross dereliction of duty surely.

KASIRA: Right? *Any* failure is a disgrace to the uniform if you go by *his* reasoning.

SIKA: And yet he only arrested the six of us.

SOAPY: Thus proving beyond all doubt that he really is just being a cunt.

AMBRE: That makes me sad. I don't like bad people.

SIKA: Nonsense, you like Nivea.

NIVEA: Because Nivea's frigging awesome!

SIKA: Yeah, right...

KASIRA: No. No bickering; not now.

(She twisted to look at Nivea.)

KASIRA: The disciplinary board headquarters is in your neck of the woods, right?

NIVEA: Yeah. At a place called Vallae Island. It's a small island off the coast of Hakoki.

KASIRA: So it's fucking freezing, yeah?

NIVEA: Yup. Five seconds out in that weather and your nipples will be like two plump strawberries, only rock hard.

AMBRE: Yummy.

(She beamed.)

AMBRE: I like strawberries.

NIVEA: Right...

(She rolled her eyes then looked to Kasira.)

NIVEA: This time of year it can reach up to minus twenty degrees.

SIKA: Tell me you mean Fahrenheit.

NIVEA: Centigrade!

SIKA: Shit.

(Kasira grimaced.)

KASIRA: That'll be why he told us to bring a thick coat then.

SOAPY: Like any of us own one.

NIVEA: I do, but the bastard wouldn't let me go and fetch it. He just dragged us all here, no change of clothing, nothing.

SIKA: And moved a group of men into our base! With all our stuff in there. That's disgusting. They could do anything from peeing in the communal bath to sniffing our dirty knickers!

SOAPY: Gross! Why did you mind instantly go there?

SIKA: Because we don't know *what* they'll do! They might be a bit fruity some of them.

What if they put our clothes on and stretch them out?

SOAPY: In front of all their army buddies? It's unlikely.

SIKA: Is it? Is it? You don't know what men get up to when there's no women around. For all we know, they might like putting dresses on and having tea parties. My cousin Jack used to do that all the time when he was a kid apparently.

(She grimaced.)

SIKA: We have to call him Jacqueline now.

SOAPY: Sika, you're definitely overthinking it.

SIKA: Well... maybe.

NIVEA: *I'm* more worried about how we'll keep warm in sub-zero temperatures without a thick coat.

KASIRA: Well, according to the army's procedural handbook, the military are duty-bound to *provide* you with any extreme weather clothing if they send you somewhere it's required, but clearly General Fart Breath hasn't read it.

CAYLEY: Yeah... I'm worried.

(Just then, the general's voice rose up from behind them.)

FOREST: Well, don't be. Inside the ship it's a toasty seventy degrees, and we'll dock only twenty feet away from the disciplinary board's headquarters. You'll be fine. Once inside, *they'll* provide you with all the warm winter clothing you'll need. If indeed you ever will.

CAYLEY: Then why tell us to *bring* a thick coat?

FOREST: I was being obnoxious, obviously.

(He then stood tall and placed his hands behind his back.)

FOREST: Okay, listen up. Major Kasira...

(He groaned.)

FOREST: Wait. I need to read my clipboard for this bit.

(He then brought his hands back in front of himself and proceeded to read from a clipboard.)

FOREST: Major Kasira Ashwood, Brigadier Cayley Avanti, Captain Nivea Visage, Captain Soapy Candiru, Corporal Ambre Solaire and Corporal Sika Owsley, I'm hereby officially placing you under military arrest on a charge of gross dereliction of duty.

AMBRE: That's not nice!

FOREST: You shall be transported to the disciplinary board headquarters on Vallae Island, where you shall explain your actions to a tribunal. They shall decide your fate and you will abide by the outcome. Any questions?

SIKA: I have one...

KASIRA: No, Sika! Don't!

SIKA: Why are you being such a cunt?

KASIRA: Sika!!!

FOREST: Insubordination? Excellent. I'll add that to the list of charges. Anyone else?

KASIRA: No! No more!!!

(She growled at Sika.)

KASIRA: I'm gonna slap you!

FOREST: You're going to slap me?

KASIRA: No. Sika.

FOREST: Sika's going to slap me?

SIKA: May I?

FOREST: No. You can shut up.

KASIRA: And so can you, Sika.

SIKA: Fine.

KASIRA: What did I literally just say?

SIKA: Shut up.

FOREST: What? Did you just tell your superior to shut up?

SIKA: No.

KASIRA: She was repeating what I just said.

FOREST: I see.

(He rolled his eyes.)

FOREST: I'm lost.

(He groaned.)

FOREST: Never mind.

(He then took another glance at his clipboard.)

FOREST: A major, a brigadier, two captains and two corporals? Interesting. Your unit has no privates.

SOAPY: Not that *you*'ll ever get to see.

FOREST: A-ha! Further insubordination. Excellent.

KASIRA: Why, Soapy?

SOAPY: It was too good an opportunity to pass up.

KASIRA: You...

NIVEA: No. Fair play, Kasira. One of us *had* to say it really.

SIKA: It was begging for it.

KASIRA: Girls...

(She hung her head in defeat.)

KASIRA: I give up.

FOREST: That's the spirit. Now get your arses off to the furthest ship along. The first one is taking those rebellious little fuckers to the brig so they can face a court-martial. You little comedians are off to the frozen north for disciplinary proceedings and with any luck, several demotions. How you all achieved ranks, I'll never know. Now march.

(He then pointed them along the dockside. With a sigh, Kasira and her subordinates then headed away. As they did so, Kasira looked to Ambre and smiled.)

KASIRA: Don't be scared, babe.

AMBRE: I'm not. As long as you're all here with me, everything's fine.

NIVEA: That's our brave Ambre. The only thing she's afraid of is being left out.

AMBRE: Which I'm not.

(She beamed.)

AMBRE: We're all being arrested *together*. As a team!

(Watching Ambre smile warmly, adrift in her own little world, Soapy could only grimace.)

SOAPY: I have a feeling someone doesn't quite grasp the seriousness of our situation.

SIKA: And let's leave it that way. The less she understands, the better.

(She grimaced.)

SIKA: Only, I have a feeling we're in seriously deep shit right now.

KASIRA: We are. A disciplinary hearing brought by a general tends to go in that general's favour.

(She whimpered.)

KASIRA: I won't lie to you, girls. We're in trouble here, big time.

Within the hour, the six detainees from the 123rd Wraith Containment Unit, found themselves locked inside a large prison cell within the hull of a military transport ship. A soulless metal cage with no windows and only two small lanterns for light, it was a thoroughly wretched place to be. Trapped in there, knowing they'd not be coming out again for quite some time was mortifying. Needless to say, the girls were all more than a little dispirited by it all.

To make matters worse, once the ship started moving, seasickness set in extremely quickly. Ambre, Nivea and Kasira instantly turned pale and laid down on the floor in a desperate bid to make it go away. It didn't help. Watching them all squirm, all Cayley could do was shake a sorrowful head. She then attempted to comment on it, only for Sika to cut over her angrily.

SIKA: I'm not happy! This isn't fair. It's harsh, that's what it is!

(Soapy glanced up from where she was casually sitting in the corner with her legs crossed.)

SOAPY: Is that the only word you know, Sika? Harsh! Everything's fucking harsh!

SIKA: Excuse me? Are you saying this *isn't* harsh? We didn't do anything wrong, and yet we've been arrested and thrown into a prison cell. A prison cell that's bouncing up and down, making half our party feel extremely sick. If you don't think that's harsh, Soapy then you're...

SOAPY: Then I'm what? Huh? What am I?

SIKA: Wrong.

SOAPY: Oh. Fair enough. I thought you were gonna call me a twat.

SIKA: Why would I do that? You already know you're a twat!

SOAPY: Hey!

(Cayley rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: Stop it, you pair of idiots. Enough.

SIKA: Right. Sorry.

(She furrowed her brow.)

SIKA: It's just that when Sika gets angry, Sika rants.

SOAPY: Yup. Sika's so annoying.

SIKA: Piss off, you.

CAYLEY: Don't!

(She gestured to where Ambre, Nivea and Kasira were curled up in balls on the floor of the cell.)

CAYLEY: Seasickness must be hard enough to deal with as it is, without having to listen to two adolescent halfwits measuring their non-existent penises.

SIKA: Huh?

(She flinched.)

SIKA: What? Measuring... huh? What? What in god's name are you talking about?

SOAPY: Yeah, what are you talking about, Cayley? Non-existent? Sika's penis is very real.

SIKA: Hey!

SOAPY: I'm joking. Calm down, Sika.

SIKA: Shan't. Being on this boat is annoying. It's...

CAYLEY: Harsh?

SIKA: Among other things, yes!

CAYLEY: Thought so.

SIKA: So what's this about measuring non-existent penises? I don't get it.

SOAPY: When two men have a superficial argument, they call it a penis measuring contest. She was just making a play on that.

SIKA: I see. Our argument *wasn't* superficial though.

(Cayley rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: The point I was making is, you two bickering like morons is the last thing Kasira, Ambre and Nivea need.

SIKA: Right. Why didn't you just say that then?

CAYLEY: Sika?

SIKA: Shut up?

CAYLEY: Yes.

(She shook her head and glanced at her three fallen comrades.)

CAYLEY: They really don't look well, do they?

SOAPY: Kasira and Ambre don't. Nivea always looks like that.

SIKA: Right? She's all pale and ghost-like even on a good day.

(Nivea glanced up from the floor and snarled.)

NIVEA: I'm gonna vomit in your shoes if you carry on.

SIKA: Ew.

SOAPY: She's so classy.

SIKA: Right?

(Soapy sighed.)

SOAPY: I'm guessing you can't heal them. If you could, you'd have done it already.

CAYLEY: Yup. There's nothing I can do. People born to dry-land feel nauseous at sea because the fluid in their ears that helps them balance is bouncing all over the place.

Airborne and ocean-bred folk don't have that problem.

SIKA: Then how come *I* get seasick sometimes?

CAYLEY: You're half land-bound!

SOAPY: Duh!

SIKA: Shut up, you.

(She nodded then glanced down at the ground.)

SIKA: Thank god it hasn't affected me this time. Those three look really, really ill.

(Cayley grimaced.)

CAYLEY: Yup. Poor buggers are gonna feel really crappy until they either get used to it or the boat stops moving.

SIKA: Really? So like, until then... Nivea's a sitting duck?

(She glanced to Soapy and beamed menacingly.)

SIKA: This is too good a chance to miss, surely. We should put some ants in her underwear or something.

SOAPY: Where the hell would we get ants from?

SIKA: Good point.

SOAPY: We should definitely slip her knickers off and stick them on her head though.

SIKA: Love it!

CAYLEY: Behave!!!

(She rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: Leave the poor bugger alone.

NIVEA: What Cayley said. Leave me alone or I'll murder the fucking pair of you.

CAYLEY: I'm pretty sure I didn't say *that*.

(She glanced at Sika and Soapy.)

CAYLEY: And I have to say I'm pretty appalled at you two. Seeing Nivea down and broken like that, the first thing you thought about is what pranks to pull on her. How about showing some empathy?

SIKA: She'd do the same to us.

SOAPY: Yeah.

CAYLEY: Then the three of you need to take a long, hard look at yourselves, don't you?

SIKA: I already looked at myself in the mirror this morning, Cayley...

SOAPY: It smashed.

SIKA: I... hey! Fuck you. I looked gorgeous!

SOAPY: Really? I doubt it was a mirror then. It was probably a photo of me.

SIKA: Doubtful. The image wasn't fat enough to be you!

SOAPY: Oh. Maybe it *was* you then. Bit bony was it? Teeny tiny boobs?

SIKA: Piss off! I'm perfectly proportioned!

(Cayley growled.)

CAYLEY: Enough!!!

(She shook her head.)

CAYLEY: Look, I know being stuck in here is mortifying, but turning on each other isn't going to help.

SIKA: We're not turning on each other. We always have these arguments.

SOAPY: And I always win.

SIKA: No...

CAYLEY: Stop it. What I'm saying is, *you two* arguing with each other isn't going to help, because *us four* have to listen to it. We've suffered enough. Now be quiet. I mean it, you're starting to really annoy me now.

(Sika and Soapy shared an uneasy glance then sighed.)

SIKA: Sorry. Sorry, Cayley.

SOAPY: We forgive you, Sika.

SIKA: Hey!

SOAPY: I'm kidding. I'm sorry too, Cayley.

CAYLEY: It's fine, just...

(Just then, Kasira started to ease herself from the floor.)

CAYLEY: Kasira?

KASIRA: One sec.

(She managed her prop herself up into a seated position then sighed.)

KASIRA: It seems to be easing off now.

CAYLEY: Oh, cool.

KASIRA: Damn. That sucked. I don't normally get seasick, but this boat is rocking all over the place.

CAYLEY: It does seem a little more frisky than most boats, I have to say.

SOAPY: That's because it's one of those new magically enhanced ones.

KASIRA: What?

CAYLEY: That's new.

SOAPY: They had one at my academy. They're an aqua-human invention, you see? They have metal rotors at the back, powered by having magic blasted at them. With every blast, the rotors spin around in the water and propels the boat forwards.

KASIRA: Interesting.

SIKA: Almost, yes.

CAYLEY: So how fast...

SOAPY: Stupidly fast. The quickest boats in the world by far. Ten times faster than any other boats.

(Kasira nodded.)

KASIRA: That explains it then.

(She looked to Cayley.)

KASIRA: When that general said we'd be up in the frozen north in eight hours, I thought he must have meant eighty. It's fucking miles away from Capsway Island.

CAYLEY: Right... well... I can't say I'm sad about that. If I was stuck in here for eighty hours, I reckon I'd go insane.

KASIRA: I think we all would.

(She puffed out then glanced down at Ambre.)

KASIRA: Do you feel any better, love? Ambre?

(Ambre simply snuggled tighter into herself then started to quietly snore.)

KASIRA: Right... she nodded off. That's definitely the best idea.

(Nivea whimpered from the floor next to her.)

NIVEA: I wish I could do that.

CAYLEY: I think we all do. It'd get this stupid journey over quicker, at least.

SIKA: And that's a good thing, is it?

(She grimaced.)

SIKA: All that awaits us at the other end is misery.

(She sighed.)

SIKA: And snow. I fucking hate snow.

KASIRA: Snow's fine, it's the cold *I* can't handle.

(She whimpered.)

KASIRA: And it's bloody freezing where we're going.

SIKA: Yeah, but we'll be in a nice warm prison cell.

CAYLEY: How do *you* know it'll be warm?

SOAPY: She's been in prison *before*.

SIKA: No, I haven't.

CAYLEY: Then you couldn't possibly *know* it'll be warm. They might keep the cells cold for all we know.

KASIRA: Yeah. We're going there to be punished and a cold cell might well be part of it.

(Nivea glanced up from the ground.)

NIVEA: We're not going there to be punished; we're going there to be investigated.

CAYLEY: Come of it; don't be so naïve, Nivea.

SIKA: Naïve Nivea. I'm gonna call her that from now on.

SOAPY: Yeah? I'm gonna stick with Nokia.

NIVEA: You two...

CAYLEY: Stop it.

(She rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: Nivea, yes, we're officially going there for a disciplinary hearing, but you know what the army are like.

NIVEA: Good point. Guilty until proven innocent.

CAYLEY: Exactly.

KASIRA: They'll probably start with dishing out our punishment *then* move onto finding out if we did anything to deserve it.

CAYLEY: Uh-huh. We could get a not guilty verdict long after we've started serving the sentence.

SOAPY: Really? Do you think they'd do that?

CAYLEY: Sounds like something the army would do, yes.

SOAPY: Shit.

KASIRA: So yeah... expect a cold cell.

(She grimaced.)

KASIRA: Ambre's gonna freak. She's never known cold weather before. Never mind snow and freezing conditions. She told me once, she had *no idea* the outside air could be cold.

SIKA: She's in for a nasty shock then.

KASIRA: Yup. It won't be pleasant for any of us though.

NIVEA: Well... I'll be alright. I'm used to it. I grew up in the frozen north.

SOAPY: I'll be fine too. I don't feel the cold.

SIKA: Rubbish.

SOAPY: It's true. The ocean can get really, really cold sometimes, but my kind are built to withstand it.

SIKA: Oh, yeah. I forgot you were a fish.

SOAPY: And I forgot you're a twat.

SIKA: Hey!

SOAPY: Just kidding. I didn't forget it at all.

SIKA: Listen, you...

KASIRA: Don't! No more bickering.

AMBRE: Bickering!

(They all swiftly glanced to Ambre, just as she rolled over and continued to doze.)

KASIRA: Right... where was I?

CAYLEY: You were telling these clowns that the circus is closed and it's time to focus on their day job; being soldiers.

SIKA: How can we do that? We're trapped in a cell?

KASIRA: Simple. Start preparing yourself *mentally*. We don't know what's to come exactly, but what we *do* know is, it's not going to be pleasant.

CAYLEY: So use this time to get used to the idea that we could well be spending a lot of time in a cell over the coming weeks.

SIKA: Weeks?

KASIRA: Maybe months!

SOAPY: What???

(Sika and Soapy clung onto one another and trembled.)

SIKA: Trapped in a cell?

SOAPY: With ol' man hands down there???

(They stared down at Nivea, only to be greeted by the sight of her smirking at them devilishly.)

NIVEA: There can be no escape!

(Scared witless, Soapy screamed, then Sika clung onto Kasira.)

KASIRA: What are you doing?

SIKA: You need to save us all. Do something boss like. You know, something awesome, like when you saved me from Major Miles.

(She looked enlightened and hope reappeared in her eyes.)

SIKA: Maybe if you get on your knees and suck General Forest's...

KASIRA: Hey!

SIKA: What? It worked with Major Miles.

(Kasira sneered.)

KASIRA: Cayley?

CAYLEY: Ma'am?

KASIRA: Get this thing off of me.

CAYLEY: Ma'am.

(She then pulled Sika away.)

KASIRA: Thank you.

SIKA: What are you doing, Cayley???

CAYLEY: Following orders.

(She rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: You should try it sometime.

SIKA: That's a bit harsh; I always follow orders.

SOAPY: And we're back to everything being harsh again.

SIKA: Well it was!

KASIRA: Enough. Just calm down, will you?

(She smiled.)

KASIRA: Yes, things are looking bleak right now, but there's no excuse for going to pieces. We're soldiers and we need to be strong.

SIKA: Right.

KASIRA: And we need to be *seen* to be strong! So I don't want to see any tears once the inquiry starts, girls. Let's not give anyone that satisfaction.

CAYLEY: I concur. And no tears if we get sent to jail while we await the outcome of the investigation.

SIKA: I'll try.

SOAPY: Yup.

(Nivea slowly edged herself upwards from the floor.)

NIVEA: You know me, Cayley. *I* won't cry. I never do. Even if we do have to live off bread and water in prison; I won't bend. Even if makeup isn't allowed...

(Kasira shrieked.)

KASIRA: What???

(Everyone glanced in her direction. Tears were welling in her eyes.)

KASIRA: No makeup?

NIVEA: No beauty products whatsoever.

KASIRA: Not even moisturiser???

NIVEA: Not even shampoo.

KASIRA: That's outrageous!

(She then climbed to her feet and growled.)

KASIRA: I'm not standing for that. We're going to fight these outrageous allegations with everything we have. There *was* no gross dereliction of duty, and we need to make sure that the enquiry team are left in no doubt whatsoever that we're innocent, okay? We need to fight that ridiculous accusation with every fibre of our being!

(She whimpered.)

KASIRA: My beautiful hair depends on it.

(Cayley rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: Such a girl.

KASIRA: What?

CAYLEY: I was agreeing with you.

(She nodded sternly.)

CAYLEY: We need to fight this thing tooth and nail. Our unit is first class and we need to leave that tribunal in absolutely no doubt that the charges against us are scandalous.

SIKA: I'm in!

SOAPY: Me too!

(She sneered.)

SOAPY: We need to fight this thing like we fight wraiths!

SIKA: By using magic?

SOAPY: No, you tit. I mean we need to fight hard.

SIKA: Right. Now that I can do.

(She nodded.)

SIKA: And don't call me a tit! *You're* a tit.

KASIRA: Stop that.

(She nodded sternly.)

KASIRA: No more sniping at one another. Once we arrive at our destination, I want to see a united front. A unified frame of mind. This it is, girls.

(She sneered.)

KASIRA: Once again, it's the six of us verses the world.

Vallae Island, off the coast of Hakoki.

Several hours later, as the ship started to head into port, Kasira and her team were extracted from their cell and brought to the brightly lit disembarkation room. The general and his remaining subordinates awaited them. Having just emerged from the darkness into a dazzling light, however, the girls didn't even acknowledge them. Instead, they all stood and rubbed their eyes, before squinting in the hope their vision returned. Despite wearing dark goggles, even Nivea was struggling to see.

NIVEA: Well this sucks, I'm fucking blind again.

SIKA: I know, right? Did we sail directly into the sun or something???

(The general rolled his eyes.)

FOREST: No, you idiots. This brightness is a result of the snow and the intense sunlight reflecting off of it.

(He smirked.)

FOREST: Welcome to the frozen north!

(Nivea grimaced at Soapy.)

NIVEA: Like I've never been here before.

SOAPY: Yeah, but I'm not surprised he *thinks* you haven't. How could *you* be surprised by the brightness? You grew up here.

NIVEA: I grew up underground, you tit. I'm subterranean! We never went out during the day.

SOAPY: Oh, yeah. Sorry, I'm just a bit...

NIVEA: Stupid?

SOAPY: Disorientated.

(Just then, Ambre gasped and hurried to the window.)

AMBRE: Wow. Everything's really, really white and shiny. No wonder my eyes went all funny.

(Kasira forced a smile.)

KASIRA: Pretty isn't it?

AMBRE: Yup.

(She grimaced.)

AMBRE: It's really sunny here. I thought you said it'd be cold.

KASIRA: It...

FOREST: Nope. Enough of that! You're done with your mothers meeting now. Be quiet and listen to *me*.

KASIRA: It's still cold, Ambre. Trust me on that.

FOREST: Hey! Are you deaf or something?

KASIRA: What?

FOREST: I said are you deaf or something???

(Sika smirked.)

SIKA: What?

FOREST: Oh, very witty.

(He growled.)

FOREST: I'm looking forward to seeing *you* punished.

(He beamed.)

FOREST: Speaking of which. Enjoy your last few moments of freedom, ladies. The ship will dock in roughly five minutes. Until then, you're free to have a good cry together. Share a group hug, maybe; braid one another's hair. Whatever it is your kind get up to; I don't know. Just savour every second, because as soon as we dock, we'll be marching you down that gangplank and into the disciplinary board's headquarters. Expect to be jailed.

(He then exhaled happily.)

FOREST: So, yes; enjoy.

(With that, he turned away to chat to his men. As he did so, the six members of the 123rd wraith containment unit quickly gathered in a circle.)

KASIRA: Girls, remember what I said. Be strong.

NIVEA: We will.

SIKA: Yup.

AMBRE: How can it be cold when it's sunny? I don't get it.

CAYLEY: We'll explain it later, Ambre. Right now, we need to focus.

AMBRE: Oh. Okay. Focus on what?

KASIRA: Staying strong.

SIKA: And making good our escape.

(Five pairs of bewildered eyes glanced in her direction.)

NIVEA: Are you fucking serious?

SIKA: Deadly so. Look, General Fart Breath had twenty men initially, right? Six stayed at the base and another six escorted those idiot rebels to the brig on another ship. That only leaves him with...

(She started to count on her fingers.)

SOAPY: Eight, you dipshit.

SIKA: Yup, eight. Correct. Though I don't appreciate your tone, Soapy.

SOAPY: Suck it up, Corporal.

(She smirked.)

SOAPY: That's an order.

(Sika gasped.)

SIKA: Rude! How dare you pull rank on me?

KASIRA: Sika?

SIKA: Yes?

KASIRA: Shut up.

SIKA: But...

KASIRA: Shut up before I slap you.

SIKA: Wow. Talk about...

SOAPY: Harsh?

SIKA: Put a sock on it, you.

KASIRA: You can both put a sock in it. Especially you, Sika.

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: We don't have time for your silliness. Escaping indeed. They have crossbows, not to mention an army of thousands they can call in to help recapture us. And where the fuck would we go? We're heading for a tiny island, covered in ice. On the ridiculous off chance we *did* evade recapture for more than a few days, we'd all freeze to death.

SIKA: Right... escaping probably isn't an option then.

KASIRA: Correct. Now shut up and listen. Girls, we might get split up into different cells in a few minutes time, and before that happens, I need to know everyone's okay. Nobody's gonna freak out are they?

AMBRE: I might! Why would they separate us?

KASIRA: They might not, I'm just saying, if they *do*, I need to know everyone's going to be able to handle it.

CAYLEY: I reckon we're good, babes.

AMBRE: No, we're not.

CAYLEY: It'll be okay, Ambre. We won't be away from each other for too long, I hope.

KASIRA: Fingers crossed.

AMBRE: Well... okay. I hope you're right. I don't like being on my own.

(She then proceeded to bite her nails. Eager to console her, Kasira placed her arm around her.)

KASIRA: Just keep calm, love. If we do end up in separate cells, just draw me a picture or something, okay?

(Ambre sighed.)

AMBRE: Okay. That might be fun.

KASIRA: That's the spirit.

(She then glanced at Nivea.)

KASIRA: So, what do you know about this place?

NIVEA: What place? Disciplinary board HQ?

(She furrowed her brow.)

NIVEA: Why? What are you implying? *I've* never been here before either, thank you. Why would I have? My record's squeaky clean, if you don't mind.

SIKA: So you claim.

NIVEA: Shut it, tiny tits.

SIKA: I'm perfectly proportioned!!!

NIVEA: Whatever. Kasira...

KASIRA: Chill the fuck out, Nivea. I was only asking you because you grew up around here. Maybe you've heard things.

NIVEA: Oh... fair enough.

(She shrugged.)

NIVEA: There's not much to say really. All I know is, it's based on a tiny island. *Vallae Island*. There's like, a twenty metre stretch of water separating it from the Hakoki mainland.

KASIRA: I don't need to know about the geography, babe.

SOAPY: Duh!

(Nivea slapped her around the back of the head.)

SOAPY: Ow!

NIVEA: Sorry, Kasira. Apart from the geography, I'm pretty much clueless.

SIKA: About everything.

(Nivea then attempted to slap Sika, only for her to duck. As a result, she slapped Soapy again instead.)

SOAPY: Ow! What the hell?

SIKA: Ha!

(Soapy then stomped on her foot.)

SIKA: Yeow!!! What did you do that for?

KASIRA: Pack it in, you silly fuckers.

(She rolled her eyes then looked to Nivea.)

KASIRA: Thanks for trying at least, Nivea.

NIVEA: Sorry. Like I say, I don't really know anything.

(She then flinched and raised her finger. A childhood memory had just come flooding back to her.)

NIVEA: Oh, oh. Wait! Come to think of it, my uncle did mention *something*. He used to fish in these waters, you see? I don't know if this helps, but he told me boats would come and go from Vallae Island several times a week, and the wraiths across the water would gather to growl and snarl at them. Hakoki is uninhabited, you see; so there's wraiths in their thousands there. I should imagine that's really intimidating.

KASIRA: Yeah, I'll bet. Arriving to a chorus of snarling wraiths, a mere twenty metres away must be really unsettling.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: Prepare for that, girls. We'll be arriving to a cacophony of wraith howls.

NIVEA: We'll be perfectly safe though, as they're across the water.

KASIRA: Yeah. Just remember that and don't freak out.

(She smiled at Nivea.)

KASIRA: See? You *did* know something useful after all, Nivea.

SIKA: Said nobody ever!

NIVEA: I'm gonna grope you good and proper later, Sika, you...

KASIRA: Stop!

(She nodded sternly.)

KASIRA: No more. Not today. Let's savour this moment, shall we? In this very moment, we're still free and we need to make the most of it.

AMBRE: With a group hug!

CAYLEY: Um... let's not. That condescending general suggested we'd do something like that, like all women are predictable or something. I really don't fancy proving him right.

AMBRE: I don't care. I need a hug!

SIKA: And that's good enough for me.

(Kasira, Ambre, Nivea, Sika and Soapy then reached forwards and shared a hug together. Watching them, Cayley couldn't help but smile.)

CAYLEY: Aw, screw it.

(She then threw her arms around them. Watching on from the other side of the room, the general could only shake his head then glance to his subordinate.)

FOREST: I've said it before and I'll say it again... women are shit.

When Nivea's uncle had told her that arrivals to Vallae Island were greeted by hoards of snarling wraiths, he'd not been exaggerating. The stretch of water that led to the disciplinary board's headquarters was extremely thin. On the Vallae Island side, there was a set of large buildings and a port. On the Hakoki side, however, there was nothing but trees and angry wraiths.

As General Forest's ship headed into the port, as expected, hundreds of snarling wraiths gathered at the opposite water's edge, a mere twenty metres away. Growling and eager to spill blood, they desperately wanted to savage the humans on board. It did indeed make for an extremely intimidating sight. Having been forewarned, however, Kasira and her team managed to hide their apprehension well. Alas, the same could not be said for the newest member of General Forest's team. Having never been there before, he could only stand there, staring out of the disembarkation room window, whimpering and trembling. Unsurprisingly, the general was far from impressed.

FOREST: You, boy!

(Struck with terror, the young lad in question didn't hear him.)

FOREST: I said, you boy!!!

(Still he received no response.)

FOREST: I see. Like that, is it?

(He then strode over to him and tapped on his shoulder.)

FOREST: Boy!!!

(Taken by surprise, the lad jumped then threw a flailing arm at him.)

HARRY: Fuck off!!!

(Watching his flailing arm go by, the general sneered.)

FOREST: So not only do you *tremble* like a girl, you lash out like one too.

HARRY: I...

FOREST: No, wait. Maybe that was harsh.

(He pointed to where Kasira and her unit were standing together across the room.)

FOREST: On girls!

HARRY: General...

FOREST: None of *them* are biting their nails and trembling. It was just you! And I bet none of them would throw out a girly slap if someone startled them either.

(Sika, Soapy, Nivea, Ambre and Cayley all glanced at Kasira.)

KASIRA: What?

CAYLEY: Nothing, babe.

SIKA: You're just really girly, that's all.

KASIRA: Sika...

(The general growled.)

FOREST: Shut the fuck up, ladies!

(He ruffled his neck.)

FOREST: Or should I say, ladies who are far less effeminate than this embarrassing fellow.

(He clouted Harry about the head.)

HARRY: Ouch!

FOREST: Cock.

(He shook his fist.)

FOREST: Women are feeble. *Beyond* pathetic. They're limp and floppy little things who spend all their time hugging each other and talking about flowers. Useless. They can't handle even the *tiniest* amount of danger without bursting into tears and praying a man will save them. All they're fit for is cooking and cleaning and even then they need a man to do the heavy lifting. Why? Because they're crap. Weak as fuck. And yet you're making *those six* look like super heroes. Where's your fucking pride? Aren't you embarrassed?

HARRY: Well... I am now, sir; you're making me look like a right cunt.

FOREST: Then stop *being* a right cunt.

(He nodded.)

FOREST: And don't worry about showing yourself up in front of that lot. I can assure you, they're not interested in you. I mean, look at you. They wouldn't date you even if you begged.

(He rolled his eyes.)

FOREST: Man up, you pillock. Trembling and whimpering; whatever next? Even those six pointless women aren't doing that and *they're* about to go on trial!

HARRY: Sorry, sir. But in my defence, it *is* my first day on the job and I've never seen that many wraiths before.

FOREST: Nobody cares. Keep sobbing like a poof and it'll be your *last* day on the job too. Possibly your last day ever. Now stand up straight and be a man, for fuck sake.

(He then strutted across the room and glanced out of the portside window.)

FOREST: A-ha! We're docking.

(He glanced at his six detainees.)

FOREST: You have about thirty seconds to say your farewells.

(He then sneered at Harry.)

FOREST: Would you like to share your flowery, girly feelings with the girls before they leave, or are you ready for work now?

HARRY: I'm ready for work, sir.

FOREST: Good. Glad to hear it.

(He then glanced out of the window again.)

FOREST: We're coming alongside the dock now, chaps. Prepare to open the door, bosun.

(A member of the ship's crew nodded to him from across the room.)

BOATSWAIN: Aye, aye, sir.

(He then strode towards the doors with his hands behind his back. Watching him go, Kasira grimaced at Cayley.)

KASIRA: As soon as he opens that door, we're gonna freeze.

CAYLEY: Right? Thin summer-dresses and skimpy miniskirts aren't exactly ideal for freezing temperatures, are they?

SOAPY: We should say something.

NIVEA: Yeah, right. Like he gives a shit about *our* discomfort.

AMBRE: We'll be fine. The sun's out, look.

SIKA: It'll still be cold, Ambre.

AMBRE: How?

KASIRA: Save it, Sika. She won't believe it until she feels it herself.

SIKA: Yeah, okay.

(They then glanced towards the door nervously. In this moment, the fear of ice cold winds lashing their bare arms and legs was far more terrifying than standing trial or being separated.)

NIVEA: This is really gonna suck.

(Just then, the boatswain started to yank at the levers that had been holding the door shut. As one, Kasira, Sika, Nivea and Cayley all gulped in unison.)

BOATSWAIN: Door opening!!!

(He then yanked open the door, allowing freezing winds to force their way into the cabin.

Seconds later, several girly cries of anguish echoed across the room.)

NIVEA: And that, Soapy, is why my kind live underground!!!

AMBRE: It's cold, Kasira!!!

KASIRA: I know!!!

SIKA: Huddle together!!!

(Watching them, Soapy grimaced.)

SOAPY: Is it really that bad?

CAYLEY: Yes!!!

(She then cast open her wings and cocooned them around, Kasira, Ambre, Nivea and Sika.)

KASIRA: Ooh, that helps a bit.

SIKA: You're a legend, Cayley.

CAYLEY: I'm glad you think so, because I'm still blooming freezing.

(Just then, the general stormed over to them.)

FOREST: Hey! Put those fucking wings away!!! If you're thinking of taking flight once we disembark...

CAYLEY: Of course not, you cock; I'd freeze to death trying to fly anywhere in these temperatures. That'd be suicide!

NIVEA: Really? Great idea! Fly away, Sika!

SIKA: Fuck off, you!

FOREST: Enough!

(He shook his head.)

FOREST: Insubordinate little fuckers. The sooner I'm rid of you lot, the better.

(He then glanced to the door.)

FOREST: Bosun?

BOATSWAIN: Sir?

FOREST: Gangplank?

BOATSWAIN: No, thank you, sir. I already have one.

(He then slid a gangplank out of the door, chucking to himself as he did so.)

FOREST: Funny bugger, aren't you?

(He nodded sternly.)

FOREST: Okay, when I leave the ship, you ladies can follow me. Harry, Bob, you two can bring up the rear. The rest of you can stay on board.

(He beamed.)

FOREST: I already wrote my report, so we can be on our way again in no time.

A few moments later, the general began striding down the gangplank, draped in a warm, fur overcoat. Just behind him, Kasira, Ambre, Cayley, Nivea, Sika then Soapy headed after him. There was a lot of shrieking and complaining. The bitter sting of ice cold air lashing their skin was virtually unbearable.

AMBRE: The sun isn't hot, Kasira!!!

KASIRA: See?

SIKA: I'm not happy!!!

NIVEA: It happened! My nipples are like rocks!!!

CAYLEY: It's like being slapped repeatedly with a wet fish!!!

AMBRE: Cold is rubbish!!! I don't like it!

KASIRA: Nobody does!!!

(Marching ahead, the general chuckled gleefully.)

FOREST: Chilly, ladies?

KASIRA: Yes!

FOREST: Wimps!

SIKA: Wimps? It's like minus two million and twelve degrees out here!

FOREST: More like minus ten, but what's two million and two degrees between friends?

NIVEA: He's loving this!!!

FOREST: No, I'm not. You have my deepest sympathies, actually. If I'd realised it was this cold, I'd have loaned you a scarf!

CAYLEY: A scarf?

SIKA: One between us?

FOREST: Of course. The army isn't *made* of money, you know?

(He then faked a remorseful sigh.)

FOREST: Although, come to think of it, it probably wouldn't have helped, would it? Oh, well, I tried.

(He then strutted up to the door, chuckling. He did so with six pairs of angry eyes focussed on the back of his head.)

FOREST: You can cheer up now, ladies. Your misery in the ice cold wilderness is at an end. Now it's time for your misery at the hands of the disciplinary committee.

(He then yanked open the door.)

FOREST: Now, if...

(He was then knocked off his feet by Kasira, Ambre, Cayley, Sika and Nivea all trying to bundle through the door at the same time.)

FOREST: Do you mind???

(Looking extremely angry, he then jumped back to his feet and growled.)

FOREST: I'll be reporting *this* too. Bundling over a general is not a sensible thing to do, especially when you're already knee deep in the shit as it is!

(He then followed them inside, as did Soapy and the general's two subordinates. Seconds later, when the door clicked shut behind them, his two men, Harry and Bob saluted.)

BOB: Orders, sir?

FOREST: Guard the door.

(He then sneered at Soapy.)

FOREST: And keep a sharp eye on that one. She didn't moan about the cold once. She must be up to something.

HARRY: She's an Aqua Human, sir; they don't *feel* cold.

FOREST: I see.

(He nodded.)

FOREST: You're a cocky little shit, aren't you? I might throw you overboard on the way back.

HARRY: But...

FOREST: Oh, like I actually would.

(He then strutted up to the front desk and hammered on a small bell.)

FOREST: Anyone home?

(Sitting quite literally on the other side of the desk from him, a female member of the admin team furrowed her brow.)

JANE: No, sir; we're all down at the beach.

FOREST: Oh, I...

JANE: Sunbathing.

FOREST: Yeah, alright, there's no need to be sassy. I didn't see you, that's all.

JANE: Fine.

(She smiled.)

JANE: How can I help?

FOREST: I'd like to commission a disciplinary hearing, please.

(He then handed a file to the admin worker.)

FOREST: The details are all in this file.

JANE: Thank you, sir.

FOREST: And these six girls are the accused.

JANE: I see.

(She then stuck to file to one side and smiled.)

JANE: In that case, we'd better process them first then send them to the waiting room.

FOREST: You mean the cell, right?

JANE: No. The waiting room. This isn't a criminal court, sir.

FOREST: No, but if they're found guilty, that's where this case could end up.

JANE: If. If is the operative word, sir. They might be cleared of all charges. Innocent until proven guilty.

FOREST: Right...

(He shook his head.)

FOREST: Utter nonsense. Back in my home nation, those accused of a crime get slung in jail and like it. Innocent or not, they know their duty. Get busy proving your innocence or expect a lengthy sentence!

(He exhaled.)

FOREST: That's how real men operate.

JANE: No, sir; that's how dictatorships operate.

FOREST: Are you calling Emperor Shale, supreme ruler of the Kinta nation, a dictator?

JANE: Didn't he have a piano teacher beheaded once for teaching his child to play a tune he didn't like?

FOREST: He did, yes. And you know what? No teacher ever made *that* mistake again. The system works!

JANE: Right...

(She rolled her eyes.)

JANE: Step aside please, sir. I'd like to process the detainees.

FOREST: Superb. You can start with this one. The ringleader.

(He then grabbed Kasira's arm and thrust her at the counter.)

KASIRA: Hey!!!

(Having splatted into the counter with both hands flat on the countertop, Kasira furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: There was no need for that!

FOREST: Hey! Stop giving me lip and pay attention to the young lady behind the desk!

KASIRA: Fine!

(She then looked to Jane. Staring down at Kasira's fingers, she was wearing a quizzical expression.)

KASIRA: What? What's wrong?

JANE: What?

(She then glanced up at Kasira's face and smiled.)

JANE: Nothing. I was just admiring your nail polish, it's lovely.

KASIRA: Oh. Thank you.

(She fully extended her arm then lifted her hand to glance at her fingernails.)

KASIRA: I use a blend of natural herbs for the base then apply a special wax for the shine.

JANE: You totally have to show me.

KASIRA: Happy to. I've got some in...

FOREST: Oh, for fuck sake.

(He growled.)

FOREST: I'm gonna go and sit down.

(He then headed away across the room, snarling under his breath.)

FOREST: This might take a while. Women talk too much.

(As he stormed onwards, Kasira pulled some nail polish from her bag then explained her creation process to Jane in great detail. She covered every aspect from where to find the herbs, how to extract the dye and where to harvest the wax she used. She then explained the application process. It took several minutes, but nobody other than the yawning general seemed to mind.)

Finally, once Kasira's explanation was complete, Jane bounced excitedly.)

JANE: I'd never thought of doing it like that, you know? And is it long lasting?

KASIRA: Absolutely.

JANE: Oh, wow. I'm so going to do it your way in future.

KASIRA: You won't be sorry.

JANE: That's wonderful.

(Her face then flat-lined.)

JANE: Name?

KASIRA: Oh. You can call me Kasira.

JANE: No, I need your full name and rank for the records.

(Kasira looked enlightened.)

KASIRA: Oh... we've started booking me in, have we?

JANE: Yes. As much as I'd love to discuss make up with you all day, I do have a job to do.

KASIRA: Shame, right?

JANE: Totally.

(They chuckled together then Jane flinched.)

JANE: Stop it! I'm a professional. Name and rank, please.

KASIRA: Yeah... okay.

(She sighed. Happily discussing nail polish with Jane, she'd briefly allowed herself to forget how much trouble she was in. Now the harsh reality of her situation had swiftly come flooding back.)

KASIRA: Major Kasira Ashwood.

(Jane wrote her name down then smiled.)

JANE: Regiment?

KASIRA: 123rd wraith containment unit.

(Jane started to write then glanced up at Kasira.)

JANE: 123rd?

KASIRA: Yeah.

JANE: As in... the girls who saved an entire island from a haze break by themselves?

KASIRA: Yeah, that's us.

JANE: I see.

(She grimaced.)

JANE: Why would anyone want to discipline *you*? You're heroes.

(An angry voice then called out from across the room.)

FOREST: I'll be the judge of that!

JANE: Right. Sorry.

(She then looked to Kasira.)

JANE: Okay. That's *you* all registered.

KASIRA: Right... so what happens now?

JANE: I'm just going to take all your names and that of any witnesses; then we can convene in the hall and hear the evidence. It won't take too long.

(She then pointed down the hallway behind her.)

JANE: In the meantime, just follow the hallway to the end and take a seat in the waiting room, please.

(The general sneered.)

FOREST: Ridiculous! It ought to be a cell. A freezing cold one with no windows!

JANE: Well it isn't! They've not been found guilty of anything yet.

(She rolled her eyes then smiled at Kasira again.)

JANE: So, yes. It's just down the hall.

(Kasira glanced down the hallway then nodded.)

KASIRA: Thank you.

JANE: There's tea and coffee making facilities, so feel free to...

FOREST: Tea and coffee making facilities???

(Kasira and Jane turned to face him.)

JANE: Um... yes. Is that a problem?

FOREST: We're here for a disciplinary hearing! It's not a social gathering. Next you'll be telling me there's chocolate biscuits as well.

(Jane shrugged.)

JANE: Three different kinds, if you must know.

SIKA: Ooh, yummy.

FOREST: I can't believe I'm hearing this.

(He then kicked the ground in annoyance.)

FOREST: The world's gone mad, I tell you.

(Ignoring him, Jane glanced past Kasira then smiled at Soapy.)

JANE: Next!

(Just as Soapy stepped forth, however, Sika bundled her to one side and thrust herself again the counter.)

SIKA: Corporal Sika Owsley of the 123rd Wraith Containment Unit.

(She beamed.)

SIKA: Right. I'm off to get some biscuits.

JANE: Wait. I didn't catch a word of that.

KASIRA: And you won't for a while, either.

(She then grabbed Sika and dragged her to the back of the line.)

SIKA: What are you doing? There's biscuits back there!

KASIRA: I know!

(In that moment, all Sika's unit mates rounded on her at the same time.)

SOAPY: If you go first there'll be none left for us!

AMBRE: You're a biscuit fiend!

NIVEA: Yeah. There's a reason Cayley started locking them away recently.

CAYLEY: You kept pigging them all.

KASIRA: A barrel used to last us all week before you joined the unit.

NIVEA: Now were getting through the whole fucking thing in a day. Or at least, *you* are!

(Sika whimpered.)

SIKA: That's a bit harsh. It's not my fault. I just really like biscuits.

AMBRE: So do we!

CAYLEY: So imagine how annoying it is to keep finding an empty tin!

(Looking somewhat miffed, Jane raised her voice.)

JANE: Can one of you come and register, please?

FOREST: Yes! Do!

(He sneered sarcastically.)

FOREST: If you're not quick about it, your tea will go cold.

KASIRA: Soapy, you go next.

SOAPY: Ma'am.

KASIRA: Sika, you'll go last. That's an order!

SIKA: Harsh!

KASIRA: Excuse me?

(Sika sighed bitterly.)

SIKA: I mean, yes, ma'am.

KASIRA: Thank you.

JANE: Um... Major Ashwood?

KASIRA: Yes?

JANE: Why are you still here?

KASIRA: What?

FOREST: Get your arse in the waiting room!!!

KASIRA: Oh, right... sorry.

(She then headed away, glancing back at Sika.)

KASIRA: If you cut the line, you'll be getting a cake ban when we get back.

FOREST: *If* you get back!

KASIRA: Right...

(She then headed away, being sneered at hatefully by the general.)

FOREST: The army cite this ill-disciplined rabble as a shining example of the perfect unit.

Clearly, they've never met any of them.

(He then shook his head disdainfully. Caring very little for his disdain, Soapy stood at the counter and saluted.)

SOAPY: Captain Soapy Candiru, reporting for duty.

JANE: Can you spell that for me, please?

NIVEA: And repeat it slowly. Candy what?

SOAPY: Soapy Candiru.

(She then spelt it out slowly.)

JANE: Right. Thank you. 123rd Wraith containment unit, yes?

SOAPY: Yes, ma'am.

SIKA: Candiru? What sort of weird name is that?

SOAPY: Shut up, Sika.

AMBRE: I didn't know you had two names, Soapy.

NIVEA: I did, but I had no idea what the second one was. Or that it was that silly.

SIKA: No wonder she kept it to herself.

SOAPY: Shut up, you lot.

JANE: Captain Candiru, you can go through to the waiting room now.

SOAPY: Thank you. Happy to.

(She then sneered at her unit mates.)

SOAPY: Laughing at my name. Rude. I'm going to eat all the biscuits now, just so *you* can't have any.

SIKA: No!!!

CAYLEY: Calm down, Sika; she wouldn't dare.

JANE: Next!

SIKA: She'd better not.

JANE: Next!!!

FOREST: Just bloody register, will you?

CAYLEY: Go, Nivea.

NIVEA: On it!

(Nivea then stepped up to the counter and smiled.)

NIVEA: What do you want to know?

JANE: Name and rank, please.

NIVEA: Righto. I'm Private Ethel Evans of the 168th Wraith Containment Unit.

FOREST: No, you're fucking not!

NIVEA: Shit! You weren't mean to hear that.

(She sighed.)

NIVEA: Fine. I'm Captain Nivea Visage of the 123rd.

JANE: Right...

(She grimaced.)

JANE: Why would you lie?

NIVEA: Well... I might get found guilty, you see? And I much rather Ethel Evans got punished.

JANE: Who's Ethel Evans?

NIVEA: I have no fucking idea.

JANE: I see.

(She rolled her eyes.)

JANE: Go through to the waiting room, please.

NIVEA: Yeah, okay. Might as well. I can help Soapy finish off the biscuits.

(Sika gasped in horror as she watched Nivea saunter away, grinning fiendishly.)

SIKA: She's just evil enough to do it too.

CAYLEY: Don't be ridiculous.

JANE: Next!

CAYLEY: You go, Ambre.

AMBRE: Okay.

(Ambre stepped up to the counter and smiled warmly.)

AMBRE: Hiya!

JANE: Hi. Name and rank please.

AMBRE: Ambre and I'm a level 10. I even have the certificate to prove it.

JANE: I asked for your rank, not your level.

AMBRE: Oh. Um...

CAYLEY: She's Corporal Ambre Solaire of the 123rd wraith containment unit.

AMBRE: Oh, yeah. Corporal Ambre Solaire. 123rd.

JANE: Really?

(She grimaced.)

JANE: Corporal?

AMBRE: Yup.

JANE: Not private?

AMBRE: Nope. Our unit has no privates.

(Sika promptly started to giggle.)

AMBRE: What's so funny?

CAYLEY: Ignore her. She's twelve apparently.

AMBRE: Oh, okay.

JANE: Right. Thank you, Miss Solaire. Please go through to the waiting room.

AMBRE: Where's that?

CAYLEY: Go the same way Kasira went.

AMBRE: Oh, cool. Yay.

(She then headed away. As she did so, Cayley stepped up to the counter.)

CAYLEY: Before you say anything, I'd just like to apologise for...

JANE: No, no; it's fine. She can't help being dim.

(Cayley furrowed her brow.)

CAYLEY: I was referring to Nivea being a dick and telling you a false name.

JANE: Oh, right. Sorry.

CAYLEY: I should hope so too. You know...

SIKA: Skip the lecture and register will you, Cayley? Soapy, Ambre and Nivea will be half way through the biscuits by now. We need to get a move on.

CAYLEY: Oh, whatever.

(She nodded.)

CAYLEY: I'm Brigadier Cayley Avanti, 123rd Wraith containment unit.

JANE: Avanti with an I or a Y?

CAYLEY: An I.

JANE: Phew. I guessed right.

(Cayley grinned.)

CAYLEY: Yes, but you've spelt Cayley completely wrong. It's a C not a K and it ends in a Y.

JANE: Fuck!

(She furrowed her brow then hastily started to rewrite it.)

SIKA: Come on, what's the delay?

JANE: I'm going as quickly as I can.

SIKA: The biscuits...

CAYLEY: Will you shut up about the blooming biscuits.

JANE: Okay, that's you registered. Please head to the waiting room.

CAYLEY: Thank y...

(She was then bundled to one side by the anxious Sika.)

SIKA: Corporal Sika Owsley of the 123rd Wraith Containment Biscuit. Unit!

JANE: And how are you spelling that?

SIKA: Spell it how you like, I don't care!

JANE: It needs to be correct for the records. Is it Sika like a deer, or seeker like someone searching for something.

SIKA: Like the deer!

(She whimpered.)

SIKA: Please, let me go.

JANE: Right. That's you all done, you can...

(She then fell silent and watched in astonishment as Sika charged towards the waiting from, bundling past Cayley in her desperate rush to get there.)

JANE: Right...

(She then glanced up.)

JANE: That just leaves you, General.

FOREST: Me? I need to register?

JANE: Yes. You're the one bringing the case, aren't you?

FOREST: So? Can't I just leave that file and let you refer to that?

JANE: That's not how it works, sir. You ought to know that; you've been here a dozen times.

FOREST: Transporting people, yes. This is the first time *I've* been the one *bringing* the case.

JANE: Then I'm sorry to inform you that as the person bringing the case, your presence is mandatory.

FOREST: Mandatory?

JANE: Yes. If the person bringing the case isn't present, the charges are instantly dropped and the defendants cleared of any wrong-doing.

FOREST: Fuck. I'm gonna be here for a while then.

JANE: Yes, sir.

FOREST: Shit. I wanted to take a nap on the ship until it was over then transfer those horrible witches to prison.

JANE: Right... well... what can I tell you? You'll have to wait here in the witnesses room.

FOREST: Fine. I'm assuming there's tea? And biscuits?

(Jane sucked her teeth.)

JANE: Sorry!

FOREST: Oh, for fuck sake!

(He sighed then looked to his two subordinates.)

FOREST: Harry, Bob, fuck off back to the ship and tell the captain I'm going to be a while. Oh, and grab some lunch or something, you might as well.

HARRY: Sir.

BOB: Sir.

(As Bob and Harry left, the general paced up to the counter.)

FOREST: So... what do you need to know?

JANE: Just your name and rank, sir.

FOREST: The name's General Edward Forest of the high command.

JANE: I'm sorry. Did you say Dead Wood Forest?

FOREST: Edward!!!

(He then hung his head in defeat.)

FOREST: Women. You're all fucking idiots. Every single fucking one of you.

(He then kicked the counter in frustration.)

In the waiting room, a short while later, Sika was stuffing her face with chocolate biscuits and scowling at Nivea. One after another, she was shovelling them in her mouth, never once removing her piercing glance from her subterranean unit-mate. Far from intimidated by the glare she was receiving, however, Nivea simply sat there giggling; ably assisted by Soapy. Somewhat dismayed by their behaviour, Kasira could only shake her head. Sat in between Ambre and Cayley, she was appalled at what she was seeing.

KASIRA: I can't believe you three sometimes. We're about to go on trial and all you can do is piss about playing pranks.

(Sika swallowed her biscuit then furrowed her brow.)

SIKA: *I* didn't play any pranks; that was them two. I was the innocent victim.

KASIRA: Right... yeah... innocent.

SIKA: I was!

(She ruffled her neck.)

SIKA: I did nothing to those two. Not a thing. I was minding my own business and *they* played a prank on *me*. A mean, horrible prank. Too horrible! You crossed a line, Nivea!

NIVEA: Crossed a line?

(She chuckled.)

NIVEA: All I did was hide the biscuits.

SIKA: That's not *all* you did! You grabbed a handful first then teased me that you'd got the last ones. You *and* Soapy.

(Soapy giggled.)

SOAPY: Your face was a picture.

SIKA: Yeah? Well *your* face is a badly sculpted gargoye.

SOAPY: Ouch.

SIKA: You knew I really, really wanted a biscuit, and yet...

KASIRA: Enough!

SIKA: But...

KASIRA: Sika, be quiet. This ends now.

(She furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: You really, really wanted a biscuit. Fine. Well now you've had one. In fact, you've had at least twenty!

SIKA: They're really nice biscuits.

KASIRA: I don't care. Go and put the tin back, will you?

SIKA: But...

KASIRA: Go! Before I get Ambre to run you through with her horns.

AMBRE: What? But I don't want to...

KASIRA: It was empty threat, love; don't worry.

(She sneered.)

KASIRA: The tea and cake ban that's heading Sika's way isn't an empty threat though.

(Sika gasped.)

SIKA: On it.

(She then upped and zoomed across the room to put the biscuit tin back, but not before helping herself to another handful. Satisfied she'd set Sika straight, Kasira then glanced at Soapy and Nivea.)

KASIRA: Seriously, no more pranks.

NIVEA: Ma'am.

SOAPY: Sorry.

KASIRA: We're about to be called into a disciplinary hearing that could well determine our futures. I'd rather we were all focussed on that, because I'm beginning to think you don't realise how serious this is.

NIVEA: We do, Kasira. Trust me.

SOAPY: It's just that it doesn't feel like stressing over it will help, you know?

KASIRA: I don't want you to *stress* over it, Soapy. I just want you to be prepared.

(Nivea nodded knowingly.)

NIVEA: Get our story straight, you mean? I like it. What shall we say happened?

KASIRA: Nivea...

NIVEA: I know! We can blame pre-menstrual tension!

SOAPY: What???

NIVEA: Just hear me out. We could pretend that, having lived together for so long, our menstrual cycles have synchronised. As a result, *all six of us* were bit off our game that night. That's how the rebels were able to sneak in and weld the base's door shut without us even noticing.

(Kasira blinked at her nonchalantly, and Cayley threw her palm into her own forehead.)

CAYLEY: Good god, Nivea.

NIVEA: What?

KASIRA: We don't *need* to get our stories straight! You only need to do that when you're guilty and need to come up with a convincing lie.

CAYLEY: Which we don't.

KASIRA: They were able to weld the base's door shut because they did it in the middle of night, when we were asleep in our beds, like we were *supposed* to be. Why would we have to lie about it?

NIVEA: Well... I just thought... you know... an extra layer of insurance wouldn't hurt.

KASIRA: We don't need it, Nivea. Just stick to the facts, okay? We did nothing wrong.

CAYLEY: Exactly. Just the truth. Nothing more, nothing less.

SOAPY: Damn right. And besides, the last thing I want to do is sit in a room full of strangers, talking about my monthlies.

AMBRE: That'd be gross.

CAYLEY: Not to mention the fact it'd be wasted if the panel turn out to be men. Men don't care about our monthly happenings.

NIVEA: They're not though. The staff room door was open when we passed it before coming in here. The staff are all women. They'd *empathise* with our plight.

KASIRA: There's nothing to empathise with. That idea is vetoed.

(Just then, Sika came skulking back and sat down.)

SIKA: What's vetoed?

SOAPY: Oh, you're gonna love this one, Sika. Nivea said something really stupid.

NIVEA: Piss off.

SIKA: Ooh, do tell.

KASIRA: Stop it.

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: You can tell her *after* the trial.

(Her face then started to crack into a smile.)

KASIRA: And we can all laugh at her together.

(She then burst out laughing, causing her unit-mates to do the same. At first Nivea just scowled at them all, then she too, started to chuckle.)

NIVEA: You girls are really mean sometimes, but I love you for some reason.

AMBRE: Aw. We love you too, Nivea.

SIKA: Well...

KASIRA: Shut up, Sika.

SIKA: Right...

KASIRA: Girls, it really is this simple. When asked, be honest. The panel are *bound* to see there was no dereliction of duty.

CAYLEY: Right? Like it was *our* fault we got welded into our base in the middle of night?

KASIRA: Exactly. I mean, who'd have seen that one coming?

SIKA: Nobody!

AMBRE: Except Nivea!

NIVEA: What?

AMBRE: *She'd* have seen it coming. She can see in the dark.

SOAPY: So cute.

AMBRE: Yeah... so patronising.

SOAPY: Sorry.

KASIRA: I didn't mean *see*, as in to physically see something with your eyes, Ambre. I meant, who'd have foreseen it happening? Like, who could have guessed they'd weld us into our base?

AMBRE: Oh.

(She grimaced.)

AMBRE: Nobody. That was a really weird thing to do. Weird, weird, weird. And ultra-mean too. Nobody expects ultra-meanness.

KASIRA: Exactly. The facts of the case are, we got welded into our base in the night. Then our two unit mates freed us. After which...

AMBRE: We finished our tea!

KASIRA: No. Well... yeah, but we were only getting our strength up before we tried to take the academy back from the rebels, which is quite the opposite of a dereliction of duty.

SOAPY: Damn right.

KASIRA: Okay, it didn't go as smoothly as we hoped and a fight broke out, but that wasn't a dereliction of duty either. They attacked us.

CAYLEY: And during that attack, the general appeared and arrested us, for pity's sake.

KASIRA: Yeah. Surely the disciplinary board can't criticise us for *any* of it.

NIVEA: I'd like to think so.

SOAPY: Uh-huh.

KASIRA: So, remember to stick to the facts, girl. In this case, it's just possible that the truth might set us free.

CAYLEY: Absolutely.

SIKA: Yeah. There was no need to drag us all the way up here to Vishnu Island or whatever it's called.

CAYLEY: Vallae.

SIKA: Yeah.

(Cayley smiled then glanced at the ceiling.)

CAYLEY: I used to have a friend called Vallae, you know?

AMBRE: Aw. Is she in heaven?

CAYLEY: No, I was just glancing upwards, Ambre.

AMBRE: Right...

NIVEA: So what happened to her, Cayley? I mean, when you say you *used* to have a friend... did you fall out or something?

CAYLEY: No, not at all. We just went our separate ways after graduating. You know, like you do. We went to different units and I haven't seen or heard from her since. Shame really. (She smiled.)

CAYLEY: We used to kill minimum-risk wraiths together as a duo when we were low-ranking trainees. It was great fun. I miss her.

(Kasira nodded.)

KASIRA: Sad, isn't it? You make some truly amazing friends in training then lose them forever after you leave. I kinda miss them too.

SOAPY: I miss Pepsi and Maxine; the three of us were inseparable.

(Just then, a female admin staff member stepped into the doorway and spoke up.)

ADMIN: It's time, ladies! The tribunal is ready!

(At once, a foreboding silence fell across the room and everyone grimaced at one another uncomfortably. Their moment in court had arrived.)

Some ten minutes later, Kasira, Cayley, Nivea, Ambre, Sika and Soapy found themselves sitting on a bench at the side of a large white room. Opposite them, sat the general with a bench all to himself. He was the only male in the room. At the front of the room, there was a large wide desk, at which a judge and three independent adjudicators were seated. Two writers were situated at the back of the room, ready to take detailed notes of the proceedings. Court was now in session. Eager to get the ball rolling, once she was satisfied everyone was ready, the judge stood up and cleared her throat. She then projected her voice to all those present.

LADY HASHAM: Good morning, everyone. My name is Lady Justice Hasham of Leavesbury. I will ask that you either refer to me as my lady or lady justice. Seated with me, are Carol Crashaw, Saxa Halen and Après Taiyang. All are qualified disciplinary adjudicators. And at the back we have Lucy and Erika, our typographers.

(She then smiled to the defendant's bench.)

LADY HASHAM: Don't worry about the formal court setting, you're not on trial. This is just a hearing to ascertain whether disciplinary sanctions might be required in regard to the incident we're here to discuss. Okay?

AMBRE: What?

KASIRA: Understood, your honour. Ma'am. Milady. Sorry.

LADY HASHAM: It's quite alright.

(She then looked to the witness's bench.)

LADY HASHAM: Okay, let's begin. General Forest, I've read your report on the alleged incident and I must say, I found it quite alarming.

FOREST: Yes, well...

LADY HASHAM: Don't interrupt.

FOREST: Right...

LADY HASHAM: This is a serious matter, but before we proceed, I must ask you... as the one who brought this case forth, do you stand by your statement, one hundred percent?

(The general saluted.)

FOREST: Yes, ma'am.

LADY HASHAM: Thank you. Then would you please tell the court, in your own words, exactly what happened.

FOREST: I...

LADY HASHAM: Please, be upstanding.

FOREST: Right, yes. Sorry.

(He climbed to his feet then grimaced.)

FOREST: Do I *have* to go over it again? Can't you just read out my report and submit it into evidence?

LADY HASHAM: No, I can't. A report is only used to ascertain whether a hearing will be *required*. It has no other use. For a hearing to *proceed*, witnesses have to be present and give evidence.

FOREST: Really? That's a thing is it?

LADY HASHAM: Yes! It's a thing called the law!

FOREST: I see.

LADY HASHAM: So, please. In your own time.

(The general sighed with disappointment then nodded.)

FOREST: Okay. I was in my office late one night, minding my own business, doing professional things like a dedicated soldier, and most definitely nothing sordid with my secretary, when there was a hammering on my door. So, I told her to hide then went and answered it. The caller was an underling informing me that a messenger had sailed through the night to get to our headquarters with an urgent request for support from the unit on New Capsway Island. The 123rd Wraith Containment Unit. The report stated that a group of students from the training academy there had welded the base's door shut and the six soldiers charged with protecting the island were all trapped inside.

(He nodded.)

FOREST: Naturally, being the consummate professional that I am, I immediately sounded the alarm to gather my personal unit of nineteen good men and that Harry fellow. We then set off to Capsway Island in our fastest ship. Whereas the messenger had had to travel overnight, we made it to the island in just over three hours.

(He shook his head.)

FOREST: What we found when we arrived was absolutely appalling.

LADY HASHAM: I'll be judge of that. Just tell us what you saw, not what you thought of it.

(A tad miffed at being spoken down to, the general sneered then continued.)

FOREST: Fine. Upon arrival, we headed into the woods, where we found the group of students beating the living daylights out of the local unit.

(He pointed across the room.)

FOREST: Those six girls there. Naturally, we drew our crossbows and demanded that the fight come to an end forthwith. The students immediately surrendered.

(He stood tall.)

FOREST: That's when I began my investigation.

(Kasira and her unit-mates all gave each other baffled glances. He'd not done any sort of investigation whatsoever and they knew it. Not about to speak out of turn and get sanctioned by the judge however, all they could do was sit there and listen to him lie.)

FOREST: I spoke to several islanders and, of course, I interrogated some of the rogue students. As did other members of my team. Everyone we spoke to told a very similar tale. The night before the girls were welded into their base, they'd invited the large group of unruly male students into their barracks. A night of drinking and fornication ensued.

SIKA: You fucking liar!!!

KASIRA: Sika!!!

LADY HASHAM: Order!

AMBRE: I don't remember that. Did you have a party without me, Kasira?

KASIRA: No!

LADY HASHAM: Silence!

(She sneered.)

LADY HASHAM: Any more interruptions and I'll eject you from the court room.

(Sika's face lit up.)

LADY HASHAM: And lock you in the broom cupboard!

(She then pointed to a cupboard with the key resting in the door. Sika's face swiftly flat-lined.)

LADY HASHAM: Thank you! Continue, General.

FOREST: Quite.

(He sighed.)

FOREST: It seems that in a moment of drunken exuberance, after their night of vice was over, the louts thought it'd be funny to weld the base's door shut. They were stuck in there for at least twenty four hours, during which, no wraith patrols were undertaken. And to make matters worse, the unruly, drunken louts then took it upon themselves to storm the academy and take the staff hostage for a laugh.

(He shook his head.)

FOREST: It took the 123rd wraith containment a whole day to escape, after which they tried to embroil the unruly students in a fight, which they promptly started to lose. If we hadn't arrived when we did, god only knows what would have happened. And that's why I brought forth the case. Nights of drinking and fornication in a military base are forbidden. And when such nights lead to an academy being ceased and a unit being disabled, that very much equals a gross dereliction of duty. Thank you.

(He then sat down again.)

LADY HASHAM: Did I say you could sit down, General Forest?

FOREST: Sorry.

(He then climbed to his feet.)

LADY HASHAM: Thank you. You may be seated.

FOREST: Oh, for fuck sake.

(He then sat down again.)

LADY HASHAM: What was that general?

FOREST: Forgive me, my lady. I'm tired from a long night of being a stalwart professional, one hundred percent devoted to his duty.

LADY HASHAM: Right...

(She then looked to the defendant's bench.)

LADY HASHAM: Those are quite the allegations being made against you, ladies. Which one of you would like to speak on your behalf?

SIKA: I will!

KASIRA: No, you won't.

SIKA: Okay, I won't then.

LADY HASHAM: Your name is?

SIKA: Sika.

LADY HASHAM: Not yours, dumb arse.

KASIRA: I'm Major Kasira Ashwood, ma'am.

LADY HASHAM: Okay, Kasira. In your own words, could you please tell the court what happened in regard to the incident in question?

KASIRA: Yes, my lady.

AMBRE: Don't forget to tell her the general tells fibs.

(Kasira glanced to Ambre.)

KASIRA: Hush now, love. It's important I'm heard.

(Ambre swiftly placed her hand over her mouth then gave Kasira the thumbs up. Kasira just winked at her then turned to face the judge.)

KASIRA: My lady, there *was* no night of drunken fornication. The students who welded us into our base were mostly from the Guevina region, where women are treated as second class citizens.

LADY HASHAM: I'm familiar with it.

KASIRA: They were extreme misogynists, you see? And as the female head of the academy, they refused to be taught by me and many of them stormed out. So, I informed them they'd be reported to the high command, as I'm required to. They took it badly. They rebelled. They welded us into our base overnight. And I can't stress highly enough that it had been a *quiet* night with no drinking or fornicating whatsoever, taking place. They then took the staff at the academy hostage.

(She glanced at the general.)

KASIRA: Upon being freed from the base by two of the academy's security staff, we then attempted to take the academy back. It ended badly. We ended up in a fight. That's when the general here showed up. I'd love to say I don't *know* where he got the idea that we were embroiled in a night of drunken fabrication from, but I'd be lying. Clearly that was the excuse made by the misogynist students after he arrested them. They must have claimed it was all a bit of harmless, drunken fun, and he's chosen to believe their word over ours, because *he's* a misogynist himself.

FOREST: Not I'm not, you stupid woman!

LADY HASHAM: Order!

FOREST: I meant person! Stupid person.

LADY HASHAM: Silence.

(She sat back and sucked her teeth.)

LADY HASHAM: I have to say, ladies and gentlemen...

(Suddenly, the entire building started to shake violently. Pictures fell from the walls and books started to slide off the shelves. A lantern then became unhooked from the wall and smashed all over the floor. Horrified by the sudden occurrence, Ambre clung onto Kasira for dear life, and Sika and Soapy hugged each other and trembled.)

AMBRE: The world's gone all wobbly, Kasira!

SIKA: The gods are angry!!!

LADY HASHAM: Calm down, everyone! It's just an earthquake.

SIKA: Right... yeah, that does seem more likely.

LADY HASHAM: Don't worry. It'll pass in...

(In that moment, the world suddenly *stopped* shaking, as quickly as it had begun to.)

LADY HASHAM: Ah, there you go. It's over already.

CAYLEY: Thanks heavens for that.

NIVEA: Right?

(She then smirked at Sika.)

NIVEA: Really, Sika? The gods are angry?

(Sika pushed Soapy away then scowled at Nivea.)

SIKA: What? It's not like it hasn't happened before! We're only in the army now because angry gods inflicted wraiths on us.

NIVEA: Right. Yeah. You have a point there actually. That's annoying.

SIKA: Ha!

LADY HASHAM: Anyway, let's take a brief recess while all this mess is cleared up, shall we? If you wouldn't mind returning to...

(She then fell silent and gulped. Like everyone else in the room, she was acutely aware of a rumbling sound in the distance growing increasingly louder by the second. Set on edge by it, everyone glanced around into one another's worried eyes, only pausing to shake their heads at where the general was cowering beneath the witness bench.)

NIVEA: Um... girls?

SOAPY: What?

NIVEA: I hate to alarm you, but having lived around here for most of my life, I'm pretty sure that's the sound of an avalanche heading our way.

SIKA: An avalanche??? What are we gonna do, Kasira???

KASIRA: I'm thinking!

CAYLEY: You might want to think quickly then.

SOAPY: Yeah, I hate to rush you, Kasira, but we need a plan as soon as possible.

KASIRA: I'm trying to think, damn it.

(Kasira mouthed silent words for a moment then nodded sternly.)

KASIRA: Got it! Nivea?

NIVEA: Ma'am?

KASIRA: What are we gonna do?

(Everyone groaned.)

CAYLEY: That's your plan, is it? Ask Nivea?

KASIRA: Well *I* don't know what to do, do I? I've never been anywhere near an avalanche before. I don't like icy climates, they're bad for my complexion.

(She then looked to Nivea again.)

KASIRA: What do your kind *normally* do when there's an avalanche?

NIVEA: Stay in our caves and ignore it. That's probably not going to help right now though.

KASIRA: Shit.

(Just then, Lady Hasham dashed to the window and shrieked. Her skin turned pale and she gulped fearfully. Anxious to know what had terrified her so, Kasira and her five subordinates all hurried to the window and joined her.)

SOAPY: Oh, boy.

SIKA: That's bad; that's really, really bad.

AMBRE: I wish we hadn't come over here and looked now.

NIVEA: Uh-huh.

(They then stood there shaking their heads at the sight before them. Snow and ice had cascaded down the side of Hakoki, tumbling into the water to form a natural bridge across to Vallae Island. To make matters worse, the boat upon which they'd arrived was rapidly being buried under the snowdrift.)

AMBRE: Um... how are we going get home if they boat is... like that?

(Pondering her words, nobody answered.)

AMBRE: I said, how are we going to...

KASIRA: I don't know, Ambre.

(They all then shared a despairing sigh.)

LADY HASHAM: Looks like we're going to have to get out there and dig the boat free.

KASIRA: Uh-huh.

LADY HASHAM: Do you have warm, winter clothing with you?

KASIRA: Actually, no.

LADY HASHAM: That's okay. We've got plenty here you can use.

SIKA: Cool. Thanks, your judginess.

NIVEA: Judginess? Is that another example of your awesome vocabulary; a rare and exciting word that only you know?

SIKA: Yes!

NIVEA: Another word the dictionary isn't even familiar with?

SIKA: Shut up, Nivea. I...

KASIRA: Stop bickering, you morons. We've got work to do.

(She looked to the judge.)

KASIRA: If you could just show us where to get...

LADY HASHAM: Aw, crap. Like things weren't hard enough!

(Kasira gave her a baffled glance then looked out of the window again.)

KASIRA: Aw, crap.

(She threw her hands up in defeat.)

KASIRA: Every fucking where we go, shit like that has to happen.

(Sure enough, wraiths in their hundreds were pouring across the snowy walkway between Hakoki and Vallae Island. To even reach the boat, they'd now have to do battle with hoards of deadly creatures.)

SIKA: I told you the gods were angry.

NIVEA: Yeah, but why are they angry at *us*?

AMBRE: Because Sika keeps eating all the biscuits.

SIKA: Hey!

SOAPY: No, no. She has a point. Let's all punch Sika and see if the gods forgive us.

NIVEA: That's a great idea.

(Kasira snarled.)

KASIRA: Can you lot stop talking complete and utter bollocks for once, please? We've got work to do. Not only do we need to clear this fucking island of wraiths, but we need to dig through a million feet of snow to free the boat. If not, we're never going to leave here alive.

NIVEA: Right. Yeah.

LADY HASHAM: I'll show you where the winter clothing is kept then we can all get out there and set to work.

KASIRA: Yes, m...

(Just then, the general bounded through them and paced up to the window. Nodding sternly, he then glanced to the judge.)

FOREST: This is a military matter, ma'am, and with all due respect, you're merely a civilian. As such I'm assuming command.

LADY HASHAM: Actually...

FOREST: No, no. I insist.

(He nodded sternly.)

FOREST: Okay, this is how it's going to be. You girls...

LADY HASHAM: General Forest, may I remind you...

FOREST: No, you may not! I'm trying to talk tactics here, woman. If I need advice on knitting or baking a cake, I'll consult you. Until then, button it.

LADY HASHAM: Why, I've never been so insulted in all my life.

FOREST: Will you put a bloody sock in it? I'm trying to conduct official army business here, if you don't mind.

LADY HASHAM: Well don't! I have jurisdiction here.

FOREST: Not in regard to military matters, you don't.

LADY HASHAM: Actually, General, I...

FOREST: Anyway, as I was saying, I need you girls from the 123rd unit to...

LADY HASHAM: I already gave them their orders!

FOREST: Which was adorable. Now if you don't mind, the soldiers are talking.

LADY HASHAM: General Forest, if you don't...

FOREST: Shut it! Good god, woman. You're worse than my ex-wife.

LADY HASHAM: How dare you talk to me like...

FOREST: Shut up.

LADY HASHAM: General Forest...

FOREST: Are you going to shut up or not?

LADY HASHAM: Not until I've made it clear to you that...

FOREST: Right! I'm done listening to you.

(He then grabbed her in a headlock and paced across the room with her.)

LADY HASHAM: Unhand me at once, you brute!

FOREST: Sorry, judge, but you've left me no choice.

LADY HASHAM: General...

FOREST: I'm trying to conduct official army business here and all you're doing is interfering. I can't have that; sorry.

(With that, he strode up to the broom cupboard, yanked open the door then lobbed her inside.)

LADY HASHAM: Eek!!!

(As she crashed headlong into some cleaning supplies that were strewn on the cupboard floor, the general then slammed the door shut.)

FOREST: And that's the last we'll hear from her!

(He then locked the door, removed the key and stuffed it into his pocket.)

FOREST: Right...

(With that, he paced back across to the room to where a large group of astonished women were watching him agape.)

FOREST: Now, where was I? Oh, that's right. My orders.

(He looked to Kasira.)

FOREST: Get yourself kitted out in winter gear. And take those five unit-mates of yours with you. As soon as you're ready, start culling those wraiths.

KASIRA: Fine by me. That's what Lady Hasham ordered us to do anyway.

FOREST: No! It's what *I'm* ordering you to do! *I'm* in charge now.

KASIRA: I'm just saying, they're the same orders.

FOREST: Wrong! She wanted *everyone* here to go. Well, that's just silly. We can't *all* go. (One of the adjudicators gave him a sideways glance.)

SAXA HALEN: So who's going then? It's not just going to be you and the six defendants out there, is it?

FOREST: Of course not! That'd be foolish.

(He ruffled his neck.)

FOREST: *I'm* not going. I need to stay here so I can protect you lot.

SAXA HALEN: No you don't. We don't *need* protecting. We can fight too.

FOREST: No, you can't! Don't be obtuse! You're office types, not soldiers.

SAXA HALEN: On the contrary, we're both.

FOREST: Both?

SAXA HALEN: Yes! Who do you think clears the wraiths here every day? They don't just up and kill themselves when they realise they've spawned on government property by mistake, you know? We have to go out there and cull them.

(The general looked far from impressed.)

FOREST: I don't like your tone, young lady.

(He then snarled.)

FOREST: Bloody throwing sarcasm at me? Whatever next. I won't stand for it.

(He then nodded sternly.)

FOREST: I've made my decision and as my subordinates, you're just going to have to abide by it. Major Ashwood and her team will head out to kill the wraiths, while the rest of us remain here to protect the base.

SAXA HALEN: Protect the base from what?

FOREST: Wraiths, obviously.

SAXA HALEN: Why? What are you afraid the wraiths will do if we're not here? Are you afraid they might go in the larder and swap all the labels on the food jars or something?

FOREST: No, I...

SAXA HALEN: Good call, general. How awful would it be to make a jam sandwich for lunch, only to find it's actually cranberry sauce in there? We can't have that, can we?

You're right. We should definitely leave half our manpower here to ensure such a horror can never unfold.

(The general growled.)

GENERAL: Do you want to go in the fucking cupboard with the judge???

SAXA HALEN: No, I just...

GENERAL: Then gather the rest of the staff and we can all take refuge in the staff room while we wait. That's a fucking order. And as a member of the disciplinary staff, I'm sure you know the penalty for questioning an order, don't you?

(Saxa Halen hung her head.)

SAXA: Yeah... fine.

(She then nodded to the her fellow admin staff and they all headed for the exit to the courtroom. Nodding defiantly, the general then strode after them. About half way to the door, however, he turned and glanced at Kasira.)

GENERAL: Don't be slow in finding the winter gear. Find it, put it on then bugger off outside. Oh, and don't come back until you've finished.

(With that, he exited the room, leaving Kasira and her unit-mates shaking their heads in disbelief.)

SOAPY: That's just... wow.

CAYLEY: Uh-huh.

SIKA: How? How can this keep happening?

NIVEA: We're fucking jinxed, that's how.

(Kasira glanced out of the window.)

KASIRA: Look at them all. Look how many wraiths there are.

AMBRE: Lots and lots.

KASIRA: How can this be happening again?

CAYLEY: I know! Most people go their entire military careers without facing large hoards of wraiths, and yet we seem to run in them wherever we fucking go.

(Ambre gasped.)

AMBRE: Cayley said a naughty word.

CAYLEY: Cayley's livid, Ambre.

AMBRE: Aw. Would a hug help?

CAYLEY: No, but killing that general might.

AMBRE: I'll summon fluffy then.

(Kasira's eyes bulged.)

KASIRA: No!!! Don't do that, Ambre.

AMBRE: But...

KASIRA: Cayley was just saying that in frustration. She didn't mean it, did you, babe?

(Cayley looked to her emptily and said nothing.)

KASIRA: Cayley...

CAYLEY: Oh, fine. Yeah. Don't do that, Ambre.

(She sighed.)

CAYLEY: I guess we'd better get going, girls.

SIKA: Fine.

(She nodded.)

SIKA: But we're taking the biscuit tin with us.

KASIRA: Damn right we are.

(She glowered at Sika.)

KASIRA: And I'll be looking after it.

Having found the equipment storage, Kasira, Cayley, Nivea, Soapy, Sika and Ambre set about trying on warm, winter coats with miserable expressions on their faces. With another hellish battle ahead of them, they could barely even begin to raise a smile between them. It all seemed incredibly unfair; which was something Sika wasn't going to keep quiet about for long.

SIKA: This is the harshest harshness in all harshdom.

NIVEA: You...

SIKA: It's a word!

NIVEA: Right...

SIKA: Including us, there's like fifteen people here. All capable of fighting those wraiths. And yet just us six get sent out there. That's so...

SOAPY: Harsh?

SIKA: Yes.

AMBRE: He's a mean man, that general. Why would he do that to us?

NIVEA: Because he's a cunt and he doesn't like us.

KASIRA: Actually, Nivea, it wasn't about us.

SOAPY: It was about himself.

NIVEA: Himself?

KASIRA: Yeah. Think about it. There's just him and roughly fourteen female soldiers here. He's sent *us* out to kill the wraiths for him, and barricaded himself in the staff room with the others. I suspect he wants them there to protect him should we fail.

(Nivea gasped.)

NIVEA: Why, that fucking coward.

SIKA: Wow. He has, hasn't he? He's locked himself away with a personal crew of bodyguards.

KASIRA: That's definitely how it looks to me. The other girls wanted to fight, but he was adamant they stayed inside with *him*.

SOAPY: Arsehole.

CAYLEY: As for that nonsense about protecting the base... it's a building for crying out loud. As that adjudicator pointed out, wraiths are *welcome* to attack and empty building. (Sika chuckled.)

SIKA: She made me laugh. What she said about the jam sandwich...

SOAPY: Oh my god, that was so funny.

NIVEA: Brilliant. I like her.

(She beamed.)

NIVEA: I should grope her boobs later, that always endears me to people.

(She then became acutely aware of several growls being aimed in her direction.)

NIVEA: What?

AMBRE: Hands off, you.

SIKA: Fucking ape.

NIVEA: Oh, you're asking for it, you are.

KASIRA: Don't start, girls. Just finish getting changed, shall we?

(She smiled.)

KASIRA: I've found six fur hats we can use. One of them has holes in it for your horns, Ambre.

AMBRE: I call them antlers.

NIVEA: And we correct you every time.

AMBRE: I'll call them what I like! It's my head.

CAYLEY: Fair comment, love.

(Just then, Kasira cooed with delight.)

KASIRA: Ooh, I like this combo, actually.

(Posing in front of a mirror, wearing a thick, light-brown coat with a fur collar; tight, shiny, black leggings; fur-topped knee length boots and a matching fur hat, she could barely take her eyes off herself.)

SIKA: Ooh, nice. So *that's* how it looks once we've got it all on.

NIVEA: No, that's how Kasira looks with it all on. You'll still look a tramp that got caught in an elephant stampede then thrown into a dirty river.

(Sika was horrified.)

SIKA: What? Hey! Nivea! Too mean!

NIVEA: Right. My apologies to tramps everywhere.

SIKA: No! Not nice!

(She then stomped to the other side of the room and grabbed a fur hat.)

SIKA: I could have grabbed one for you too, Nivea, but you suck, so I didn't.

NIVEA: I've suffered greater traumas to be honest, Sika.

SIKA: Whatever.

(Ambre then exhaled happily.)

AMBRE: This coat is awesome. I like the way the fur feels on my neck.

KASIRA: It looks great on you, love. Now come and grab your hat from the pile.

AMBRE: Okay.

(Kasira then nodded sternly.)

KASIRA: Get a move on, girls. I'm sweating like an overweight jogger with all this gear on. The sooner we get outside, the better.

CAYLEY: Really? There are wraiths out there, love? Hundreds of them.

KASIRA: Good point.

(Her body then slumped in defeat.)

KASIRA: Kill me.

A short while later, once Kasira and her team were dressed, and they'd secured all the biscuits, they slowly opened the door to the base. Wincing miserably as the ice hit their faces, they tentatively stepped outside then gathered in a bunch, staring in horror at the snow. Mercifully, the wraiths were yet to spot them.

KASIRA: Um...

SIKA: I'm cold.

NIVEA: I'm really not in the mood for this.

AMBRE: Let's just stay here for a bit and hope the wraiths don't see us.

SOAPY: Just standing here will make things worse, won't it? I mean, if you're cold, shouldn't you move around? I'm no expert, obviously, because I don't feel the cold. I'm just saying, fighting might warm you up.

NIVEA: I'll fight *you* in a minute.

SOAPY: What? I'm only saying.

SIKA: She's so insensitive. Just because *she's* too important to feel the cold, she thinks she can belittle us.

SOAPY: I never said I was too important. And I didn't belittle you, come to that.

SIKA: No, but you did gloat about not feeling the cold.

SOAPY: I...

SIKA: Told you she's the boastful sort.

SOAPY: I wasn't boasting, Sika.

(She sighed in frustration.)

SOAPY: I give up. Sorry, I spoke.

(She nodded.)

SOAPY: You lot can do what you like. I was asked to fight wraiths and fight them I will. Stay here if you want, I'm gonna get started.

AMBRE: She's so professional.

NIVEA: No, she's just a psycho who enjoys killing things.

KASIRA: Actually, Nivea, Soapy's spot on. Standing here will make things worse. We need to get busy killing.

(Sika whispered to Kasira.)

SIKA: Don't tell her she's spot on, we'll never hear the end of it.

SOAPY: I'm not deaf, Sika!

SIKA: Wow, she's even boasting about that.

SOAPY: Oh, for pity's sake.

KASIRA: That's enough now, girls. Let's get this show on the road. There's a group to our right who look ripe for the taking, what say we...

(They then watched on in astonishment as Soapy hurried forth and proceeded to open fire on the wraiths Kasira had just referred to.)

CAYLEY: Blimey, look at her go.

NIVEA: Impressive.

AMBRE: She's really powerful.

(They all nodded silently for a moment then Kasira sucked her teeth.)

KASIRA: Maybe we should...

CAYLEY: Uh-huh.

SIKA: Let's go.

(With that, they all hurried forth to join Soapy in battle. Upon reaching her side, Sika and Cayley instantly unleashed their vortex-like magic, and Ambre focussed hard on controlling the biggest wraith, making it attack the smaller ones. Kasira and Nivea, on the other hand, slowed to a halt then grimaced at each other. Feeling inside her bag, Kasira could only wince in embarrassment.)

KASIRA: I haven't got my...

NIVEA: And I didn't bring...

(Cayley rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: There were weapons in the equipment room.

NIVEA: Right...

KASIRA: We'll be right back.

(They then about turned and scarpered back into the building.)

KASIRA: This is so embarrassing. Who goes out to do battle and forgets to bring their weapons?

NIVEA: We do, apparently.

KASIRA: Yes, well, I'm just glad nobody else saw it.

NIVEA: Yeah, that'd be embarrassing.

KASIRA: It's already embarrassing.

NIVEA: Oh, I dunno. You normally keep your blades *on* you, but they took them away before the trial. Being used to keeping them in your possession, I can see why you might have forgotten they weren't there.

KASIRA: Right...

(She grimaced.)

KASIRA: I think you're being somewhat overgenerous there.

(They then bounded into the equipment room and made a beeline for the weapons.)

NIVEA: Hmm... which one...

KASIRA: Just pick one.

(She then yanked some duel blades from the shelf, before glancing at Nivea in bewilderment.)

KASIRA: Okay, so maybe I *did* forget because I'm used to having my blades in my bag. It's *moderately* acceptable as an excuse I suppose. What's *your* excuse though?

NIVEA: Um...

KASIRA: A sword is a heavy and cumbersome thing to have in your possession, Nivea. How could you not realise you'd gone out without one?

NIVEA: Um... well... that's...

(She then furrowed her brow.)

NIVEA: *You* forgot your weapon an' all, don't forget!

KASIRA: Which you literally just said was understandable!

NIVEA: I lied!

KASIRA: Wow.

(She then furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: Forget it. Let's get out there and fight.

(Nivea nodded and slung her sword onto her shoulder.)

NIVEA: Right!

KASIRA: Don't forget your sword!

NIVEA: You're so not funny.

KASIRA: I'm moderately funny.

NIVEA: Well...

KASIRA: Let's just get out there, shall we? We've got wraiths to destroy.

(With that, they both put their heads down and charged. Determined to make up for their respective errors, they slammed the door open then whizzed to Soapy's side, snarling angrily. They had an aching to redeem themselves by butchering some wraiths horribly. Much to their utter frustration, however, as soon as they arrived, Soapy finished off the last wraith in the group then clenched her fist triumphantly.)

SOAPY: Yes! That's that group dealt with!

KASIRA: Shit!!!

NIVEA: Fuck!!!

SOAPY: What? What's wrong?

CAYLEY: Nothing! *Nothing's* wrong.

(Battling away her personal frustration, Kasira smiled.)

KASIRA: Nothing at all. Well done, guys. Nice work.

CAYLEY: It was. You were fantastic. Especially you, Soapy; you were immense.

(She rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: Kasira and Nivea, on the other hand...

KASIRA: Cayley...

CAYLEY: Yes?

KASIRA: Please don't. We feel silly enough as it is.

CAYLEY: Good. I mean, who goes into battle and forgets their weapon? Who?

NIVEA: We've already chastised ourselves for that, thank you.

KASIRA: Yes, we have.

NIVEA: And we'd appreciate it if you didn't bring it up ever again.

(Soapy smirked.)

SOAPY: Of course we won't. Nivea. When do Sika and I ever tease *you*?

(Sika looked to her and whimpered.)

SIKA: Not now, Soapy; I'm cold.

SOAPY: Too cold to annoy Nivea?

SIKA: Yes!

KASIRA: Blimey, that *is* cold.

AMBRE: I'm cold too. My head's freezing!

CAYLEY: Then put your hat on.

AMBRE: I can't! It won't fit over my antlers.

KASIRA: It should do.

AMBRE: It doesn't. Look.

(She then pulled her hat out and tried to place it on her head. After much struggling, it ended up dangling off of one of her horns.)

AMBRE: It's useless.

KASIRA: You're supposed to put your horns through the little holes in the side.

AMBRE: What little holes?

(Sika pointed to her own hat.)

SIKA: These ones. They don't do any good though, having my head feathers poking out like this is making my head cold. I want one with solid sides, like Cayley, so I can keep my whole head under wraps.

(Kasira gave her an unimpressed glance.)

KASIRA: You're *supposed* to have one with solid sides, you idiot. That's Ambre's hat!

SIKA: What?

KASIRA: When I got them out, I *told you* there was one with holes in it for Ambre's horns!

SIKA: No, you didn't.

CAYLEY: Yes, she did.

KASIRA: Just give Ambre her sodding hat, will you?

SIKA: Then *I* won't have one.

KASIRA: You can have hers, obviously!

(She spanned her forehead.)

KASIRA: Give me strength.

SIKA: Yeah, alright; calm down. I don't function well in the cold.

NIVEA: Or the heat.

SOAPY: Or anything in between.

SIKA: Shut up, you.

(She then crept up to Ambre and sheepishly swapped hats with her.)

SIKA: Thank you.

AMBRE: Yay. Hat!

SIKA: Yeah...

(She then plonked her hat on her head and nodded firmly.)

SIKA: There we go. That's much better.

AMBRE: Is it? How do I even...

NIVEA: Here...

(Nivea helped Ambre squeeze her horns into her hat then looked to Kasira.)

NIVEA: And she's good to go.

KASIRA: Good. We can finally get this cull started.

CAYLEY: Some of us already started, but okay.

KASIRA: Really, Cayley?

CAYLEY: I was only saying.

KASIRA: Right...

CAYLEY: Don't forget your weapons this time.

KASIRA: Cayley!

(She then started to chuckle.)

KASIRA: You come over as really angelic, but you really are a shit sometimes.

(They all shared a giggle then Kasira stood tall.)

KASIRA: Okay, the next group.

(She nodded towards the next nearest group of wraiths.)

KASIRA: Let's smash that lot then take stock of the situation.

SIKA: Good idea. And let's be quick about it. All this standing still is making my joints cease up.

KASIRA: Agreed.

(She looked to Nivea.)

KASIRA: Nivea and I will take the right flank.

NIVEA: You don't want me to spin, no?

KASIRA: Nope. Just normal attacks for now. This island's stupidly small, so if I have to fight twenty feet away from you, I'm going to be treading dangerously close to *other* groups of wraiths.

NIVEA: Makes sense.

(Kasira then glanced at the rest of her unit.)

KASIRA: The rest of you can start culling from the left, okay? Once the herd is down to the final dozen or so, let Nivea and I finish them off. Don't risk firing off your magic and accidentally hitting one of us two instead.

(Everyone glanced at Sika.)

SIKA: Hey! That's just rude! I made that mistake once! Once. Well, maybe twice. There's no need for you lot to keep...

(Not about to listening to her complaints, Kasira rolled her eyes then nudged Nivea. The two of them shot off into a group of fifty or so wraiths, chopping and slashing with their blades.

At the same time, Soapy, Cayley and Ambre hurried forwards to resume their cull. Left behind, Sika gasped in disgust.)

SIKA: And the rudeness just keeps on coming. I was trying to make a point!

(She then stomped to Cayley's side and joined her in firing magic at the wraiths.)

SIKA: Why would you all bugger off and leave me like that? Rude!

CAYLEY: Really? Are you sure it wasn't harsh?

SIKA: It was both.

CAYLEY: Right...

(Firing off rapid blasts of magic, one after another, Soapy exhaled. She was in her element right now. She'd never tire of killing things and couldn't have been happier. The others, however, were having no fun at all. The wind on their faces was virtually unbearable. As such, they went about their culls with strained expressions on their faces. Simply being there was a horrendous experience.)

SOAPY: This is fun!

NIVEA: Said nobody ever!

SOAPY: Okay, this is fun for me. Maybe you're just too old for this kind of thing.

NIVEA: Wow! Permission to hit her with my sword.

KASIRA: Denied, obviously.

(Nivea smirked.)

NIVEA: Spoilsport.

(She then ploughed through three more wraiths before standing tall with a perplexed expression on her face. The entire wraith group had already been slain.)

NIVEA: That was quick. What happened? Did the other half run away?

SOAPY: Of course not!

SIKA: Forgive her, Soapy. She's so used to *her* other half running away, she's come to expect it.

NIVEA: Right... I'll punish you for that later.

(She looked to Kasira.)

NIVEA: Seriously, that was stupidly fast.

KASIRA: Yeah... all six of us onto fifty wraiths. And when one of us six is Soapy, it's not even a challenge. There'll be bigger challenges to come though, no doubt.

CAYLEY: No doubt whatsoever.

(Kasira nodded then glanced across the island.)

KASIRA: Okay, listen up. Ultimately, we need to get to the middle of the island so Soapy can do her mega-attack.

CAYLEY: Makes sense.

SIKA: Shouldn't we also think about clearing the causeway though? I mean, as long as that's there, wraiths can keep on coming over here, long after Soapy's done her thing.

KASIRA: Yes, but getting to the middle of the island and killing the fucking lot in one go would make clearing that causeway a hell of a lot easier. Not to mention safer; what with there being no chance of an attack from behind.

CAYLEY: She's right. If we can clear this island with Soapy's attack, all we'll need to do is guard the causeway and stop any newcomers.

SIKA: While trying to *destroy* the causeway, I assume.

NIVEA: Right? That thing has *got* to go.

KASIRA: Agreed.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: Okay, so we know what our goal is, now we just need to set about finding a way to reach the middle of this island.

(She glanced out across the island.)

KASIRA: Thoughts, Cayley?

SIKA: If you ask me...

KASIRA: You're not Cayley!

SOAPY: You'll *never* be Cayley.

NIVEA: We *like* Cayley.

SIKA: Hey!

AMBRE: We like Sika too.

SIKA: Aw. Thanks, Ambre. You're...

AMBRE: But she'll never be Cayley. Cayley can heal like a proper airborne person.

SIKA: Hey!

(Nivea and Soapy burst out laughing.)

NIVEA: Priceless. You just got owned by Ambre.

SOAPY: Again!

(Kasira growled.)

KASIRA: Shut the fuck up!

(She shook her head.)

KASIRA: Thoughts, please, Cayley. And *only* Cayley. If I hear a peep from anyone else, I'll start my cull by attacking *you*.

(Sika, Nivea and Soapy grimaced at one another as Cayley stepped forward.)

CAYLEY: I think we should head around the coast to our left a bit. The slope to the centre of the island is less sheer from there and seems to be less densely populated with wraiths.

KASIRA: I agree. Let's do that then.

(She glanced over her shoulder.)

KASIRA: Move out, team. For now, we'll attack like we had been. Fighting as a six against smaller groups. It's safe, quick and effective. As long as it works we'll stick with it.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: Now let's hurry. If we don't keep moving our joints are going to suffer.

NIVEA: Amen to that.

(With that, they all put their heads down and marched away to their left.)

Inside the staffroom of the disciplinary board headquarters at this time, the general was sweating and snarling as he tried to push a bookshelf across the only doorway. Watching him, the women in his company looked most perplexed.

JANE: Why? Just why are you doing that?

GENERAL: Because, you idiot, it's better to be safe than sorry!

SAXA HALEN: Tell that to them poor girls you sent outside. They're far from safe.

GENERAL: They're not my concern. My job right now is to protect you lot.

JANE: Yeah, right.

GENERAL: What's that supposed to mean.

JANE: Your only concern is protecting yourself.

GENERAL: Excuse me??? How dare you insinuate that I'm some sort of coward???

SAXA HALEN: Are you saying you're not? Only, a real man would be out there right now, *leading* his troops. He wouldn't send them off on their own then barricade himself in a building.

GENERAL: I'm doing this to keep you safe, I told you!

SAXA HALEN: No, you're doing it because you're scared.

GENERAL: Scared? Fuck you! I fear nothing!

JANE: Except wraiths entering the building having learned how to open the doors.

GENERAL: What?

JANE: Doors, general! This is an army facility with heavy, reinforced doors! Wraiths will never get in here!

GENERAL: You don't know that!

(He nodded.)

GENERAL: Now, why don't you quit being a pain my arse and help me shift this bookshelf across the doorway?

JANE: Because, quite frankly, we're just not that scared. If it'll make *you* feel better though, you carry on.

GENERAL: For pity's sake, woman; how many times? I'm not doing this because I'm scared!

SAXA HALEN: Yeah, right. Bloody coward.

(Just then, one of the other court adjudicators stepped among them and held her palms out to female colleagues.)

CAROL: Girls, you need to give the general a break. Just get off his case.

JANE: But...

CAROL: Seriously, that's enough now.

GENERAL: I concur.

CAROL: You can't just go around calling someone a coward like that.

GENERAL: Indeed. Listen to your friend here.

CAROL: You're being extremely insensitive. Clearly, there's a reason why he's shit scared of wraiths; a childhood trauma perhaps.

(Half way through pushing the bookshelf, the general's hair stood on end and he collapsed into the side of it; such was his horror at her implication.)

GENERAL: Excuse me???

CAROL: It's okay, general. I understand. I had a friend who used to soil himself in the face of danger, just like you; so I get it. Fear is a terrible thing.

(She smiled.)

CAROL: Maybe talking about it would help.

(Utterly flabbergasted, the general flapped furiously.)

GENERAL: Fear? Fear??? And who craps themselves in the face of danger??? I fucking don't! Good god, woman. Why would you even suggest that? Do you really think I'd have made it all the way through the ranks to become a general if I was afraid of wraiths???

CAROL: Good point.

GENERAL: Yes, it was.

CAROL: So that rules out a *childhood* trauma. Something must have happened *after* you reached the rank of general.

(The general growled.)

GENERAL: I'm gonna thump you in a minute. You're even more annoying than your friends here.

CAROL: I'm only trying to help, general.

(She smiled.)

CAROL: Why don't you come and have a cup and tea with me? Maybe we can talk you through it. Help you to face your fear.

GENERAL: I fear nothing!

CAROL: I see.

(She looked to Jane and sighed inwardly.)

CAROL: That was quite telling.

JANE: What was?

GENERAL: Yes! What was?

CAROL: You said you fear *nothing*. That's twice you've said that.

GENERAL: And? It's true.

CAROL: Oh, I know. It's quite *literally* true. You fear nothingness. The void. The emptiness that death might bring.

(The general gave her a most belittling glance.)

GENERAL: Have you been spiking your coffee with rum or something? How drunk are you?

CAROL: I don't drink.

GENERAL: Then you're boring.

CAROL: I might well be boring, general, but we're not talking about me. Clearly someone very important to you was taken away by wraiths. It left an emptiness in your heart. A void, like I said. It's a pain you're terrified of returning to.

SAXA HALEN: Nah, bollocks. I prefer my theory. He's just a cowardly chicken shit.

JANE: Yeah, sorry, Carol, but your theory makes no sense. If he'd lost someone close to him, he'd be terrified of losing someone else he's close to; not himself.

CAROL: Yes, but that's the thing, you see. If he dies and goes to heaven, he will lose the people he's close to. His soul will ascend to the afterlife and he may never see them again. That's his fear.

SAXA HALEN: Oh... that actually makes sense.

JANE: You poor man.

GENERAL: Excuse me? Are you *all* sneaking swigs of rum or something?

CAROL: Not at all. Look, come and sit down. Have some tea with us.

GENERAL: No! Now if you don't mind, I'm busy trying to shift this bookshelf.

JANE: That can wait. Take a break general.

GENERAL: No!

CAROL: He's afraid that if he stops working, he'll start thinking about the person he lost. It'll break his heart all over again. So he's keeping busy just to take his mind off of it.

SAXA HALEN: Tragic!

GENERAL: For fuck sake! Where are you getting this crap from? I haven't lost anybody I care about to wraiths. Nobody! Except my father!

(He grimaced.)

GENERAL: They *ate* my father in front of me.

(Tears welled in his eyes.)

GENERAL: I really loved that man.

CAROL: Aw. See? There you go.

(She then guided him over to the seated area.)

CAROL: There. You have a cup of tea and relax. Leave everything to us.

GENERAL: But I...

CAROL: Hush now, general. Allow us to pamper you for a moment.

(She then pushed him into a seat.)

GENERAL: Hey! I don't have time to sit around!

(He then felt two hands begin to massage his shoulders.)

GENERAL: What the hell are *you* doing???

ERIKA: Helping you relax.

(She smiled.)

ERIKA: I'm Erika, by the way; one of the typists here at the disciplinary unit.

GENERAL: Right, well...

(He then went crossed eyed and exhaled.)

GENERAL: Blimey, you're really good at that.

ERIKA: I know.

GENERAL: That's really soothing.

(A piping hot cup of tea then appeared under his nose, courtesy of the other typist.)

LUCY: Here you go, general. A nice warm cup of tea.

GENERAL: Oh, my.

(He beamed.)

GENERAL: I could get used to this.

(For a good thirty seconds of so, he then sat there and allowed himself to relax. All his troubles melted away and he was very much at peace with the world.)

GENERAL: You know, I have to say...

(Just then, he heard the key turn in the door. At once, he twisted his head and spotted several off the girls attempting to sneak out so they could help Kasira and her team.)

GENERAL: Hey!!!

(He then jumped to his feet and dropped his tea on the floor.)

GENERAL: Get back over here.

(With a sigh, the group of girls all hung their heads and paced back into the room.)

GENERAL: Fucking women! I'm going to have watch you lot, aren't I? Trying to hypnotise me with your motherly kindness, so you can sneak around and defy my orders; whatever next? I'm appalled!

CAROL: Well we had to try something! We want to go outside and fight.

SAXA HALEN: You know, like soldiers are supposed to.

GENERAL: Not in *my* army they're not!

JANE: Then your army is fucking weird!

GENERAL: No! *My* army is bloody well disciplined. Meaning the troops do as I fucking well tell them to!

(He then stomped over to the door and locked it again.)

GENERAL: I'm going to have watch you bitches, aren't I?

JANE: You already said that!

GENERAL: And I'm saying it again.

(He then shook his head in annoyance.)

GENERAL: Fucking women! Now stay over there. Where I can see you!

(With that, he proceeded trying to move the bookshelf again. All the women in his company could do was share a sorrowful sigh. Their plan to distract him with kindness had failed.)

Outside in the meantime, Kasira, Cayley, Nivea, Ambre, Sika and Soapy continued to endure the stinging cold on their faces as they did battle with another group of wraiths. Having picked a much larger group to attack this time, they were all extremely busy. Kasira and Nivea were chopping and slashing frantically, Sika, Cayley and Soapy were all releasing continuous attacks one after the other and Ambre had called forth fluffy. With Fluffy holding the wraith's attention with his whistling sound, he was making the killing easy. No attacks were coming the girl's way. Needless to say, Kasira wasn't sad about that fact.

KASIRA: This is how I like my wraith battles.

SIKA: Long and boring?

KASIRA: Safe!

SIKA: Right...

SOAPY: It kind of feels like cheating to me; distracting them then hitting them from behind, but I'm okay with it.

NIVEA: As you should be. If anything, it's the wraiths who are cheating. Two hundred onto six isn't a fair fight.

AMBRE: There's seven of us.

NIVEA: What? Oh, yeah. Sorry, Fluffy.

SOAPY: Technically there's only six and a half, what with Sika only knowing half her race's skills an' all.

SIKA: Shut up, you. I also have land-bound dexterity, remember; so I have *two* halves. Idiot.

NIVEA: It's true, Soapy. Two halves. She's a *halfwit* making a *half-arsed* attempt to be a soldier.

SIKA: Piss off, man hands!

KASIRA: Pack it in, will you? Just focus on these wraiths.

NIVEA: Ma'am.

KASIRA: Thank you.

(She glanced up.)

KASIRA: We're nearing the end of this pack now. Keep it going.

(Just then, they cries of a vast pack of wolf-like wraiths echoed out from the trees to their left. At once, they all threw a glance in their direction and gasped.)

CAYLEY: Not good!

SIKA: Can Fluffy handle that many?

AMBRE: No!

KASIRA: Fuck!!!

(She then yelled out urgently.)

KASIRA: Retreat!!! To the sea!

(With that, she about turned and fled. Not about to hang around become wraith food, the others swiftly followed suit; Ambre dismissing Fluffy in the process. As they charged off across the snow towards the icy water's edge, Cayley glanced back and grimaced.)

CAYLEY: Holy crap. It's a blooming good thing we didn't stick around!

SIKA: There's literally hundreds of them.

(Soapy grimaced.)

SOAPY: Literally? Or *your* version of literally?

SIKA: What?

SOAPY: When you say literally hundreds, I picture no more than half a dozen.

CAYLEY: There's at least five hundred of the little blighters!

NIVEA: Fuck that!!!

(Very much in agreement with her sentiments, they all then doubled their efforts and sprinted past Kasira with all their might.)

CAYLEY: Faster, Kasira!!!

KASIRA: This is as fast as I go!

CAYLEY: Right... yeah. Sorry.

(She then joined Sika, Nivea, Ambre and Soapy in charging straight into the ice cold sea. At once, everyone except Soapy squealed with discomfort.)

SIKA: Cold!!!!

AMBRE: It's like being whipped on the ankles by an angry towel!

SOAPY: An angry towel?

NIVEA: It's so cold it burns.

(She then glanced to one side at where Kasira was still racing towards them.)

NIVEA: Wow. She's so slow.

AMBRE: Uh-huh.

NIVEA: It's a good thing animals can't patent their attributes, isn't it? If they could, the tortoise population would sue.

(Everyone allowed themselves a stealthy chuckle then watched as Kasira raced into the freezing water.)

KASIRA: Holy mother fucker!!! That's ice cold!!!

(She then attempted to about turn and flee back out again, only to find a hundred wraiths baiting her from the edge of the land.)

KASIRA: Shit!

CAYLEY: Yeah, this isn't good. Standing in ice cold water is a really bad idea.

SIKA: Good point.

(She then opened her wings and took to the sky, hovering above them.)

CAYLEY: You're a shocking coward.

SIKA: Cayley...

CAYLEY: But I like your style.

(She then did the same.)

CAYLEY: Now, quickly think of something. We need to get you girls out of that water.

SOAPY: I'm fine, it's these three you need to worry about. They're turning blue already.

KASIRA: We need to get back on land somehow.

AMBRE: And back into the base!

NIVEA: Yeah, I need a cup of tea.

AMBRE: I mean for dry boots.

NIVEA: Yeah, but having a cup tea while we there only makes sense.

KASIRA: Shut up about tea, and help me think of something.

CAYLEY: Actually, Kasira, I've got it.

(All eyes turned to Cayley.)

CAYLEY: I'll blow my wraith whistle and fly above them, luring them away. You lot can then sprint to the base. Oh, and get *me* some dry boots while you're in there.

KASIRA: That works for me.

(She then paused and an enlightened expression crossed her brow.)

KASIRA: Wait. Girls? Remember after last time we decided that if we were ever in this mess again, one of you would just fly above the wraiths and get their attention so Soapy could go straight to the centre of the island unopposed?

(Everyone looked enlightened, except one.)

SIKA: Go on.

KASIRA: I'm saying let's do that.

SIKA: Oh.

(She then flinched.)

SIKA: Fuck me, I'm dim.

SOAPY: Chill, Sika; that's hardly a revelation.

SIKA: Hey!

KASIRA: Enough.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: We can end this right now, guys. Let's get ready. Cayley, you can fly over the wraiths, the rest of us will escort Soapy to the centre; hopefully unhindered.

CAYLEY: Works for me, ma'am.

KASIRA: Good, good.

(She sighed.)

KASIRA: We should have done this from the off, really. I only just remembered.

SIKA: Don't feel bad, it's a been long and weird day.

KASIRA: Yeah... we seem to make that excuse a lot when we forget to do things.

NIVEA: It's a good excuse, why not take advantage of it?

KASIRA: Yes, well, never mind that. Soapy, are you good to go?

(Soapy scoffed.)

SOAPY: Is Nivea a perverted weirdo with massive hands?

AMBRE: Yes.

NIVEA: Ambre!

KASIRA: I said, are you good to go, Captain?

(Soapy blushed.)

SOAPY: Oh... yes, ma'am.

KASIRA: Then let's get this show on the road.

(Ambre blushed.)

AMBRE: Sorry, Nivea.

KASIRA: Hey! Fuck, Nivea; we need to get going.

NIVEA: Excuse me?

KASIRA: You know what I meant.

SIKA: Yeah. She *meant* fuck you, Nivea.

SOAPY: A sentiment shared by us all.

NIVEA: I'm gonna...

KASIRA: Nope. No more. Just go, Cayley. If these clowns want to piss about, let them. I'll just drown the fuckers in the bath when we get back to our base.

CAYLEY: Affirmative, Major.

(Cayley then proceeded to fly over the wraiths, blowing hard on her whistle. As she did so, every single wraith beneath her, snarled up then proceeded to chase her. Watching from the sea, Kasira waited until she'd moved the wraith pack from their path then looked to Soapy.)

KASIRA: Go!!! All of you!!! To the centre of the island. When we get there make sure you find a good spot to cast your magic from, Soapy!

SOAPY: Ma'am!

KASIRA: Go!

(Only too delighted to finally get out of the ice cold water, Ambre and Nivea raced away immediately. With a nod, Soapy and Kasira then charged after them. Sika flew after them then landed at their side, to join in the run. Unsurprisingly, however, within roughly ten seconds, Kasira already started to lag behind.)

SOAPY: Shall I wait for you before I pick my spot, ma'am? Or just find one and perform the magic?

KASIRA: The latter. If you wait for me, we'll be stuck here all bloody night.

(She sighed emptily.)

KASIRA: I have really long legs. How can they run this slowly?

AMBRE: Because they're sexy and girly.

SIKA: The polar opposite of Nivea here. Her legs are so thick, they're making the trees feel inadequate.

NIVEA: Sika, I'm gonna belt you in a minute!

KASIRA: Belt her later; we've got work to do. Now focus.

(She sneered.)

KASIRA: Running in snow is exhausting.

SOAPY: Stay there then. I'll be fine.

KASIRA: No chance. If anything goes wrong, I need to be close by to fight at your side. It's what teams do.

NIVEA: Yup.

(She smiled.)

NIVEA: And that's why *she's* the boss.

SIKA: And comments like that are why we call *you* a kiss arse.

NIVEA: And violent episodes like *this* are why people call me a psycho.

KASIRA: Don't! I told you, save it for later. Now keep running.

(Having shared an amused grin between them, Sika and Nivea stared ahead and then charged onwards silently. Ahead of them, Soapy was sprinting for all she was worth. Her face was contorted with the effort and her breathing was somewhat laboured. Ambre, on the other hand, jogged alongside her, barely looking like she was exerting any effort whatsoever. As ever, Kasira brought up the rear, further strengthen her claim for the title of the world's slowest runner. Such was their combined effort, it wasn't long before they made it over half way up the slope that led up to the centre of the island. Knowing her time to shine was imminent, Soapy couldn't help but mumble under her breath.)

SOAPY: Okay, Soapy, make it a good one.

AMBRE: A good one?

SOAPY: Ignore me. I was just psyching myself up.

AMBRE: Right...

(She grimaced.)

AMBRE: Why would you try to defeat yourself with mind games?

SOAPY: That's psyching yourself *out*, Ambre. Psyching yourself *up* is like giving yourself encouragement.

AMBRE: Oh.

(She smiled.)

AMBRE: I can help with that.

(She then started to clap excitedly.)

AMBRE: Yay. Go, Soapy. You're the best.

SOAPY: Aw. Thanks, Ambre.

AMBRE: You're welcome.

(She then mused to herself.)

AMBRE: It's only fair on the others though, if I point out you're the *joint* best. Well, joint *second* best. Kasira's the actual best. She did adopt me, after all.

SOAPY: Well, I can't...

AMBRE: Come to think of it, Cayley's better than you too. She's really, really nice.

SOAPY: Yeah...

AMBRE: And despite all our arguing, Sika's still my best friend, so it'd be rude to say you're equal with her. Disrespectful even.

(She nodded.)

AMBRE: You're joint fourth best with Nivea. I don't know anyone else.

SOAPY: So I'm joint last for your affections?

AMBRE: No. Well... no. There is no last. Everyone's awesome and I love them to bits.

(She smiled.)

AMBRE: You're definitely head and shoulders over everyone when it comes to magic though. In that case, you're the best by far. Easy peasy.

SOAPY: Right...

(She furrowed her brow.)

SOAPY: When you said I was the best, I actually thought you *were* talking about my magic skills. You could have left it at that. You didn't have to make of list of who you like best and plant me firmly on the bottom with ol' man hands down there. That really hurt my feelings.

(Ambre whimpered.)

AMBRE: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to.

(She sighed.)

AMBRE: I'm just a bit dim.

SOAPY: No kidding.

AMBRE: Sorry.

(She gave her a nervous grin.)

AMBRE: I love you.

SOAPY: Yeah?

(She then gave a stifled laugh.)

SOAPY: I love you too, you horned-headed nutcase.

AMBRE: Aw. Thanks, fish-face.

SOAPY: You're welcome.

(She nodded sternly.)

SOAPY: Okay... no more distractions. Now we're getting close to the top, I need to pick my spot.

AMBRE: Don't! It'll bleed.

SOAPY: Ambre...

(She rolled her eyes.)

SOAPY: I'm not even going to dignify that with a reply.

(Suddenly, the sound of several hundred screeching wraiths rose into the air. At once, everyone swung their heads in the direction of the noise and screamed in terror. Much to their utter horror, the wraiths that Cayley had led away were charging back again, and heading straight for them.)

SIKA: Why are they....

KASIRA: Run, you idiot!!!

SIKA: Idiot???

(She then noticed her four unit-mates all sprinting back towards the beach.)

SIKA: Right... yeah... idiot would be correct.

(She then proceeded to sprint after them.)

AMBRE: Why are they coming back again, Kasira???

KASIRA: I don't know. They should be well and truly under Cayley's thrall.

NIVEA: Shit! You don't think anything happened to her, do you?

SOAPY: I *don't* think that, no. She's over there, flying after the wraiths, still blowing her wraith whistle like a lunatic.

KASIRA: Then why the hell is it having no effect?

SIKA: Maybe these wraiths are deaf.

NIVEA: If they were deaf, they wouldn't have gone with her in the first place, would they, you dumb shit.

SIKA: It was just a suggestion, Nivea.

(She sneered.)

SIKA: I figured that, seeing as the idiot humans who grew up around here are too stupid to figure out how their eyes work, it wouldn't be unreasonable to assume the local wraiths hadn't quite mastered using their ears.

NIVEA: Idiot humans, huh?

SIKA: Yeah. Sub-standard-terranians.

NIVEA: I don't have to take that from you, you overgrown pigeon.

KASIRA: Enough fucking bickering. Unless you'd forgotten, we've got a fuck load of angry wraiths up our arses.

(She gulped.)

KASIRA: Right up our arses.

SOAPY: Fuck! How did they gain that quickly?

AMBRE: They've got more legs than we have!

SOAPY: Right... forget I asked.

(She sneered.)

SOAPY: There's nothing for it, girls; we're gonna have to fight them here.

KASIRA: You might be right. We'll never make it back down to the sea in time.

NIVEA: So we either fight them here or get savaged from behind?

KASIRA: Pretty much!

NIVEA: Then I guess we've got no option other than to fight them.

AMBRE: Yes, we have. We can take the quick way down.

SIKA: The quick way?

AMBRE: Yeah, like this!

KASIRA: Ambre...

(She then watched on agape as Ambre veered to the left where a long patch of thick ice had formed.

AMBRE: Woohoo!!!

(She then jumped onto the ice, slipped onto her back then proceeded to slide down it at a rate of knots. Completely out of control, her arms and legs were flailing wildly as she spun in circles all the way down.)

AMBRE: Help!!! I'm spinning in circles, Kasira!!! I don't like it.

(Kasira bit her lip.)

KASIRA: *She* might not like it...

SIKA: But I love it!

(With that, they all charged over to the ice then swiftly jumped onto their backsides and proceeded to slide.)

SIKA: Yeah!!! This is awesome!

NIVEA: Right? I'm having another go once we've finished!

SOAPY: Me too. This is great fun!

(Bouncing and spinning, very much like Ambre, Kasira somewhat disagreed.)

KASIRA: Fun??? Fun???

NIVEA: Well, it certainly beats being savaged by angry wraiths.

KASIRA: In what way???

NIVEA: Well... all of them, I reckon.

SIKA: Uh-oh. Ambre's at the end.

NIVEA: And...

(Ambre then flew from the end of the icy slope and bounced and rolled into the sea.)

NIVEA: Splash!

SOAPY: That looked awesome.

SIKA: That looked cold!

KASIRA: I'm really not looking forward to that part!

NIVEA: Then you'd better brace yourself, babe. We're about to...

(They then thudded into the water, rolling and bouncing until they came to a standstill in the shallows.)

KASIRA: Wet!!!

SIKA: Cold!!!

(They then leapt to their feet, shivering and shuffling about. Slowly climbed to her feet, Soapy shook her head.)

SOAPY: Being able to feel the cold looks like it sucks.

AMBRE: It does!

SOAPY: Right.

(She smiled.)

SOAPY: Good thinking, by the way, Ambre. Sliding back down, I mean.

AMBRE: Thank you. I fell on that ice, as you call it, on the way up the hill and slid back down ten feet, but nobody even noticed.

(She beamed with pride.)

AMBRE: And that's how I discovered that ice is really slippery.

SIKA: You didn't *discover* it, Ambre. *Everyone* knows ice is slippery.

AMBRE: They do?

(She sighed.)

AMBRE: Aw. I thought I'd done something clever for once.

KASIRA: You did. You thought of something that we didn't. Good girl.

AMBRE: Yay!

KASIRA: Now be quiet, Cayley's here.

(She then looked to where Cayley was hovering above the water's edge with hundreds of wraiths gathering below her.)

CAYLEY: Thank heavens you're okay.

KASIRA: So? What happened?

CAYLEY: I don't know. It started off alright...

(She then growled.)

CAYLEY: I'll fly down, those damned wraiths are drowning me out.

(She then sunk down to the ground, next to Kasira.)

CAYLEY: Like I said, it started off alright. They flew after me and everything was as it's supposed to be. All of sudden though, they stopped paying attention to my whistle. And I couldn't get their attention back no matter *what* I tried.

(She grimaced.)

CAYLEY: I was mortified when they about turned and started charging back towards you guys. I thought you were in deep poo there.

KASIRA: So you've got no idea why they stopped paying attention?

SIKA: It could be a geographical thing.

(She glanced at Nivea.)

SIKA: Having a short attention span seems to be a local trait.

NIVEA: Why, you...

(Much to her delight, Kasira then cuffed Sika about the head.)

SIKA: Ouch!!! Why?

KASIRA: Because we're up to our ankles in freezing cold water and I, for one, would like to get out of here. Therefore, when I'm trying to discuss the situation with my second, I'd appreciate it if you'd shut the fuck up and stop interrupting me to say something stupid.

SIKA: Right...

(She blushed.)

SIKA: Sound fair.

KASIRA: Oh, it sounds fair, does it? I'm so glad you think so. Now if you don't mind...

(She looked to Cayley.)

SIKA: Don't mind what?

(Nivea sucked her teeth.)

NIVEA: Ooh, that one's gonna cost you.

KASIRA: Sika?

SIKA: Yes?

KASIRA: Right now, you're one stupid comment away from a very nasty outcome! Do you hear me? So help me, I'll give all your biscuits to Soapy and order her to boast about how tasty there are!

SIKA: No!!! Anything but that!

KASIRA: Thank you. Now, Cayley...

CAYLEY: I'm baffled, Kasira. It makes no sense. All I can think of is, maybe the wraiths here are wiser. Normally we fight wraiths who only spawned a few hours beforehand. These have never been hunted, so they might be quite old. Maybe they've learned a few things. One of those things being that, there's no point in chasing something they'll never catch.

(Kasira mused to herself.)

KASIRA: You think they realised the futility of chasing something in the air, and that realisation was enough for them to break the whistle's thrall?

CAYLEY: I don't know. It's a possibility, I guess. It's the only reason *I* can come up with, at least.

KASIRA: Okay. Sounds plausible, doesn't it?

CAYLEY: I guess so, yeah.

KASIRA: So, if they're wise to the fly over and whistle tactic, that only leaves us two options. We can either stay here and freeze to death or fight our way out of trouble.

(As one they all looked to massive throng of wraiths.)

SOAPY: I say we get blasting.

AMBRE: Yup. I choose fighting too. Freezing to death doesn't sound like something I'd enjoy doing.

SIKA: What are we waiting for then?

KASIRA: And finally she says something sensible.

SIKA: Harsh!

NIVEA: Yet true.

KASIRA: Do you want a cuff around the head as well, Nivea?

NIVEA: Right... Sorry.

KASIRA: Okay then, that just leaves one thing on our to do list.

(She snarled.)

KASIRA: Give them hell, ladies!!!

(She then stepped forth and started to chop and slash with her blades. Following her lead, Nivea then did the same. Cayley, Sika and Soapy hurriedly moved away to the right then proceeded to blast the wraiths with their magic from there. For her part, Ambre started to focus on controlling the bigger wraiths, manipulating them to attack the smaller ones. Within seconds, wraith dust started to fly high into the misty air.)

CAYLEY: That's it, girls. Give it everything you've got.

KASIRA: Yup! It's do or die. We either shift these bastards so we can get on land or we're done for. No whining; just winning.

SIKA: That...

KASIRA: And no mean comments about your comrades.

SIKA: Ma'am.

CAYLEY: No bickering either!

NIVEA: Understood.

KASIRA: And once this is over, we'll get back on dry land and get started on some of those biscuits!

SIKA: We will? Cool?

(With that, she proceeded to fire off her magic twice as quickly.)

SIKA: Hurry up, guys!!!

CAYLEY: Blimey! Look at her go.

AMBRE: Crikey. She's almost as fast as Soapy.

SOAPY: Nobody's as fast as Soapy.

NIVEA: Just ask the boys at her academy.

(Soapy could only furrow her brow as everyone continued to do battle, giggling incessantly.)

SOAPY: I fail to see how that was funny.

KASIRA: Don't pout, Soapy. Just keep on fighting.

SOAPY: Ma'am.

SIKA: Hehe. You got told.

KASIRA: Shut up, Sika.

SIKA: Right.

SOAPY: Hehe, so did you.

KASIRA: How's it looking over there, Cayley?

CAYLEY: Like the gates of hell opened and every evil creature within spilled out and started to try to savage us.

KASIRA: Shit.

NIVEA: It looks the same from here too.

KASIRA: Which sucks, because fighting from the sea isn't a problem in the warm waters off Capsway Island, but doing it here is fucking suicidal.

SIKA: We're going as fast as we can though, Kasira. It feels like every time we kill one though, another one joins the back of the throng.

SOAPY: Then there's only one thing for it. I'll have to do my sonic boom spell from here. (Kasira grimaced.)

KASIRA: I'm not sure about that, Soapy. When you do that thing, we all get blown several feet from where we were hiding. If you do that here, we could get knocked unconscious, face down in the sea. And that'll be the end of us.

SOAPY: Yeah... I thought that too, that's why I didn't mention it sooner. But if you're likely to freeze to death anyway, it might be a risk worth taking.

KASIRA: I hear you.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: Let's just see how things go, shall we?

SOAPY: Okay.

KASIRA: Well done for showing initiative though.

SOAPY: Thank you.

(Sika sneered then mumbled under her breath.)

SIKA: Kasira's pet.

(Cayley suddenly looked enlightened and stopped firing her magic.)

CAYLEY: Wait! I've had an idea, Kasira.

KASIRA: Does it involve getting out of this water sooner?

CAYLEY: It does, yes.

KASIRA: Then I'm all ears.

AMBRE: And boobs!

(Everyone gave her a sideways glance, forcing her to hang her head.)

AMBRE: It sounded funny in my head.

CAYLEY: Right... anyway...

(She gave Ambre one last sideways glance then spoke up.)

CAYLEY: That ice we slid down is a frozen stream, obviously. And all those wraiths are on *this side* of it. So, if we can smash the ice, thus turning it back into a watery no-go zone for the wraiths, we can simply walk back onto land on the *other side* of the stream. And more importantly, on the other side from the wraiths.

(Kasira withdrew from her battle then stepped back.)

KASIRA: Sounds good. It's too wide for them to jump across, they'd have to go right to the top of the island and go around it.

SIKA: And they would! Which would bring us back to square one. Us six wallies being charged down by hundreds of wraiths, but on the other side of the stream.

NIVEA: And which point we'd come back to *this* side, obviously.

SOAPY: She's such a dipshit.

SIKA: Hey! You know what, Soapy...

KASIRA: No, Sika. I'll handle this! Soapy, don't call her a dipshit.

SOAPY: Fine. Sorry.

KASIRA: Good. You know she can't help it.

SIKA: Yeah!

(She flinched.)

SIKA: Hey!!!

KASIRA: I'm joking, Sika; lighten up.

(Sika ruffled her neck begrudgingly.)

SIKA: Yeah, alright.

KASIRA: So how do we break the ice?

CAYLEY: Yeah...

(She blushed.)

CAYLEY: I kinda hoped *you guys* would have some ideas about that, to be honest.

(At this point, Nivea also withdrew from her fight and stepped back.)

NIVEA: Simple! I'll bash it with my sword!

SIKA: That's your answer to everything.

NIVEA: So? It might actually work this time.

SIKA: Or you could end up standing there all night, making a twat of yourself again.

NIVEA: Piss off. I'm gonna try it anyway.

SIKA: Go for it. I'm sure Ambre and Kasira won't mind standing here, freezing to death while they wait.

AMBRE: Why just us two? *You'd* freeze to death too, Sika.

SIKA: Would I fuck! I can fly.

AMBRE: Oh, yeah. Lucky.

NIVEA: Anyway, watch and learn, ladies.

KASIRA: Wait. Nivea, that ice is several inches thick from the looks of things.

NIVEA: And?

KASIRA: And I doubt you'll even make a dent.

NIVEA: Even so, I have to try.

(In that moment, a chill ran down Kasira, Cayley, Soapy, Sika and Ambre's spines. Those who'd continued to do battle, stopped what they were doing and glowered at her.)

CAYLEY: Nope. That's exactly what you said about bashing the door back at the base.

KASIRA: Thud, thud, thud, all fucking night.

AMBRE: It gave me a headache.

NIVEA: Fine. Does anyone have a better idea?

(Soapy rubbed her chin, deep in thought.)

SOAPY: An idea, you say? Hmm... I wonder. If only there was *someone* here who could breathe underwater and swim like a fish. They could go under the ice, swim upstream then smash it from below with... oh, no, wait... they'd have to have really strong magic too.

AMBRE: That'd be really cool. If only there *was* someone like that.

(As everyone gave her a sideways glance, she suddenly looked enlightened.)

AMBRE: Wait! Wait! Soapy! I know someone.

SOAPY: You do? Who?

AMBRE: You, silly!

SOAPY: Oh, yeah! Me! I forgot my own skills for a minute.

(Everyone allowed themselves an adoring smile at Ambre. Her cuteness at times was simply irresistible.)

SIKA: She's so adorable, I could hug her all day.

NIVEA: Right? She's like fifteen fluffy kittens all rolled into one. Only less hairy.

KASIRA: Yes, well, never mind that. Do you think you can do it, Soapy?

SOAPY: I do. With my eyes closed, in fact.

KASIRA: You don't *have* to do it with...

SOAPY: I know, I'm just saying.

KASIRA: Give it a go then.

SOAPY: Ma'am.

AMBRE: Wait! I'm worried.

CAYLEY: Why?

AMBRE: What if she's beneath the ice then forgets her skills again. She might forget she can breathe underwater, panic and hurt herself.

SOAPY: Really, Ambre?

AMBRE: What? You literally just *forgot* you could do it. I had to remind you.

(She shook her head.)

AMBRE: All this time I've been laughing at Sika for not having her race's skills, but even she's never forgotten the ones she *has* got. I'm worried about you, Soapy.

SOAPY: I didn't actually forget, Ambre, I...

(She then hung her head in defeat.)

SOAPY: Forget it. Just relax, Ambre; I'll be fine. Trust me.

AMBRE: Well... okay. But be careful. Keep reminding yourself you're a fish or something.

SOAPY: Right.

(She looked to Kasira then rolled her eyes.)

SOAPY: I'll get cracking. Literally.

KASIRA: Good luck.

NIVEA: Hang on. How are you even gonna get under there, Soapy? We came off the ice into, like, three inches of water. You're a skinny twat, but even *you're* not that bloody thin.

SOAPY: Okay, so... one, I'm not skinny. I'm the perfect weight for my height. And two, there's a basin where the river meets the sea, we cleared it when we flew off the ice. It's at least two feet deep, meaning so is the stream; and that's plenty for me to swim up. Pillock.

(She then stomped up to the bottom of the ice, raised her middle finger at the snarling wraiths then jumped down into the basin at the bottom of the slope. A few seconds later, her unit-mates watched her as she swam upstream.)

AMBRE: Remember you can breathe, remember you can breathe.

NIVEA: Ambre, she'll be fine.

AMBRE: I hope so.

SIKA: She will. One thing nobody can say about Soapy is that she's not good at what she does. Even if she does like to brag about it morning, noon and night. She's so annoying.

NIVEA: Says you.

SIKA: Yeah, right, Nivea. You're the most annoying person I know.

CAYLEY: Pack it in!

(She looked to Kasira.)

CAYLEY: Everyone's cold and irritable, Kasira. Tempers are starting to fray.

(Kasira gave her a condescending glance.)

KASIRA: You don't fucking say. Nice observation, smart arse.

CAYLEY: Kasira...

(Kasira started to chuckle.)

KASIRA: I'm kidding, babes. You said everyone was getting irritable, so I figured it'd be funny to...

CAYLEY: It wasn't.

KASIRA: Right.

(She grimaced.)

KASIRA: You're tired and irritable too, huh?

CAYLEY: No. What you said was just a rubbish attempt at humour.

KASIRA: Oh. Ouch.

(Cayley chuckled.)

CAYLEY: Got you!

KASIRA: What???

(They two of them started giggling together.)

KASIRA: You shit.

CAYLEY: Right back at you.

(Nivea, Sika and Ambre could only look on in bewilderment.)

NIVEA: They're so childish.

SIKA: Right? No wonder we're all such screw-ups. They're setting a terrible example.

(Ambre sighed in defeat.)

AMBRE: I'm a screw up?

NIVEA: What? No. God, no. We weren't being serious, Ambre.

SIKA: Yeah, we're just kidding around. Trying to take our minds off the fact we're freezing our arses off and there's a pack of wraiths, ten million strong, snarling at us from a few feet away.

AMBRE: Oh. Sorry. I thought you meant it. You know how paranoid I get. I'm trying so hard *not* to be the screw up people always said I was, it unsettles me when I hear that kind of thing.

SIKA: We'll it shouldn't. Nobody here will *ever* call you that, babe. Not in seriousness. We all love you.

NIVEA: And we all know how awesome a soldier you are.

SIKA: And, of course, how drop dead gorgeous you are. You're not a screw up. You're fucking awesome.

NIVEA: Yup!

(Ambre beamed.)

AMBRE: Yay! Thanks, girls. I needed to hear that.

SIKA: Anytime, babes. You know we'll always take care of you.

(Suddenly, they heard an extremely loud boom, accompanied by the sound of ice shattering. At once, they shot a glance to the top of the stream and saw Soapy waving to them from the middle of the water. They then gasped and looked on in awe at the sight of a crack in the ice, snaking its way downstream towards them.)

KASIRA: Looks like we're in business, ladies.

NIVEA: Yup. I'll just finish it off by bashing it with my sword.

CAYLEY: No, you won't!

SIKA: She's unbelievable.

KASIRA: Leave it to Soapy. She knows what she's doing.

(She rolled her eyes then glanced up and saw Soapy duck down beneath the water again.)

KASIRA: She's swimming back now, I think.

(Another explosion and a shattering of ice then ensued.)

KASIRA: Yup. She is!

CAYLEY: Yeah... and looking damn good doing it.

(Sure enough, Soapy was swimming back down the stream, shooting at the ice every six feet or so. Explosions of ice crystals ensued with every release of her power, causing what looked like a chain reaction of well-timed detonations, making its way down the hillside. Explosion followed explosion, each one accompanied by a shower of sparking, icy shrapnel. Watching it unfold was simply breath-taking.)

AMBRE: That's so cool!

NIVEA: Uh-huh. Wow.

KASIRA: I've never seen anything so amazing in all my life.

CAYLEY: Right? This is just incredible.

SIKA: Yeah... right. She's such a show-off. She's gonna be boasting about this all night.

(They then watched on as the final explosion destroyed what was left of the ice. Moments later, Soapy sprung from the water like a leaping dolphin, performing a somersault and landing in a pose in the sea next to Ambre.)

SOAPY: Ta-da.

AMBRE: Wow! You're so cool!

NIVEA: Yeah, that was pretty fucking impressive.

CAYLEY: Nice work, love.

KASIRA: Outstanding.

SIKA: Did you really have to make such an exhibition of the dismount though? I mean, have some self-respect, Soapy. You're not gonna win any friends doing things like that, you know?

(She then watched on agape as her unit-mates all hurried to the other side of the stream and stepped onto dry land, telling Soapy all about how awesome her performance had been.)

SIKA: Whatever. I could do impressive things too, if I wanted to. I'm just not that desperate for attention.

(She then hurried after her friends. Moments later, she stepped onto dry land and exhaled.)

SIKA: That's better. Dry-ish land feels so good.

KASIRA: Yeah, well, don't relax just yet. Half the wraiths have taken off up the hill. They won't be gone for long. The other half...

(She gestured to where they were growling at them from across the river.)

KASIRA: Knock yourself out.

SIKA: What?

KASIRA: Shoot the fucking things, magic-doer!

SIKA: Oh, right. With pleasure!

(She then joined, Cayley and Soapy in blasting the wraiths from the safety of the opposite side of the river.)

KASIRA: Nice work, ladies. Nivea, Ambre and I will watch your backs and keep an eye out for the wraiths coming back down on this side of the river.

CAYLEY: With any luck, when they get here, the ones this side will be down to a manageable number.

KASIRA: Yup. Here's hoping.

SOAPY: Don't worry. We'll make it happen, right, Cayley? Sika?

CAYLEY: Absolutely!

SIKA: Fucking exhibitionist.

SOAPY: What?

SIKA: I said, yes.

KASIRA: Keep it up. As soon as we've finished with these bastards, it's biscuit time.

SIKA: Oh, yeah! I forgot about that!

(With that, she picked up her pace, blasting wraiths with deadly accuracy and precision.

Every wraith in the pack was standing between *her* and a biscuit break and she wasn't about to allow them to live.)

SIKA: Die, you bastards!!! I need chocolaty goodness!

SOAPY: Not to mention, the yummy cream filling.

SIKA: Oh, my god. To die for!

CAYLEY: Wrong!

SIKA: What?

CAYLEY: They're to kill for!

SIKA: Oh!

(She beamed.)

SIKA: I like your style, Cayley. It's a shame about Soapy.

SOAPY: What?

SIKA: Just kidding. For a show off, you're okay too.

SOAPY: Right.

(Watching on as the three of them blasted wraiths together, Ambre bit her lip. She'd never seen such focus in Sika's eyes before. She wasn't about to mention it and interrupt her, however. Wraiths were exploding into dust in great numbers and at tremendous speed, and even she knew it'd be a bad idea to disturb them.)

AMBRE: Kasira?

KASIRA: Yes, love?

AMBRE: Sika really, really loves biscuits, doesn't she?

KASIRA: You could say that, yes.

(She then glanced up the hillside.)

KASIRA: Okay, girls. What's the status quo over there?

CAYLEY: These ones are almost done, already. I feel like every blast of magic I do, is taking out two or three of them.

SIKA: I was thinking the same thing.

SOAPY: I think you've struck gold here, girls.

KASIRA: Gold?

SOAPY: Yeah. This seems to be the perfect distance for airborne folk to attack from.

CAYLEY: I think you might be right. When we were attacking from close up, down in the sea there, our vortexes didn't get the chance to expand before hitting anything. From this distance, they're at their optimum size, catching two or three at a time.

SIKA: Yeah, it could be that, or it could simply be that I'm awesome at what I do.

NIVEA: Yeah, but what's the likelihood of that?

SIKA: I knew you'd say that!

KASIRA: Yes, well, never mind that; keep going. If you can polish that lot off before the others get here, that'll be fucking amazing.

SIKA: We will. Then we'll butcher the others too! I need chocolate!

KASIRA: And chocolate, you'll get.

(She looked to Nivea.)

KASIRA: When they come, you and I should stay on *this* side and attack with our blades. The girls can cross the river and attack from there.

NIVEA: What??? Are you mad???

KASIRA: No! From across the river, they can do serious damage, right?

NIVEA: Yeah?

KASIRA: But if we all cross the river, the wraiths will run back up the hill again and they'll have nothing to shoot. It'll be an endless case of us crossing the river, and them running up and down the hill. They'll only stay on one side of the river, if there's someone to attack.

NIVEA: And you're volunteering me???

KASIRA: And me!

(Cayley glanced over her shoulder.)

CAYLEY: I'll keep throwing you heels, don't worry.

NIVEA: Well, okay, but... I'm not sure about this.

KASIRA: It's the only way to get this done, Nivea. The only way to get our biscuit break.

NIVEA: Right, well, fuck it. I'm in. I'm not doing it for you though, Kasira; I'm doing it for biscuits.

KASIRA: No, you're doing it because those were your orders.

NIVEA: That too.

(She grinned.)

NIVEA: But mostly for biscuits.

AMBRE: Aw, I feel really bad now. I left the biscuits in the changing room.

(Everyone stopped what they were doing and gasped at her in horror.)

SIKA: Ambre!!!

AMBRE: Just kidding! They're in Kasira's bag.

(She then sunk into herself and whimpered.)

AMBRE: Okay, no more jokes. Clearly I'm not very good at them.

NIVEA: No, you're not.

CAYLEY: Resume!

(Cayley, Sika and Soapy then resumed blasting wraiths.)

SOAPY: My love for Ambre withered and died for a moment there.

SIKA: Right?

CAYLEY: As did my respect for Kasira. It's bad enough that she forgot her weapon, but to come out here without the biscuits would have been unforgivable.

(They chuckled together then Soapy snarled.)

SOAPY: Big finish!!!

(She then unleashed an almighty blast of magic, so powerful she knocked herself backwards. In that moment, she'd obliterated the last twenty five wraiths with one hit.)

CAYLEY: Nice!

SIKA: It was adequate. Half decent, I guess.

SOAPY: It was a mistake, actually.

(She grimaced.)

SOAPY: Doing that particular spell makes me feel a bit dizzy. That's why I don't do it too often.

(Sika beamed.)

SIKA: Don't worry, we all make mistakes.

(She exhaled then looked to Nivea, happily.)

SIKA: She made a fuck up.

NIVEA: I'm glad you enjoyed it.

(She then rolled her eyes and helped Soapy to her feet.)

SOAPY: Okay, so now what?

KASIRA: Now you get over the other side of the river.

(She pointed up the hill.)

KASIRA: Here come the other half.

NIVEA: Uh-oh.

(Kasira and Nivea then drew their blades, while Ambre, Sika, Soapy and Cayley raced into the sea, charged across the shallows then scampered back onto land, the other side of the river.)

KASIRA: Ready?

CAYLEY: Yup!

NIVEA: Get shooting then!

KASIRA: Yeah, don't wait for them to reach us; get shooting. Just make sure to watch your backs!

SOAPY: On it!!!

(Soapy, Sika and Cayley then opened fire on the incoming wraiths. For her part, Ambre took control of the biggest one and set about doing her mind control work. Satisfied they had adequate cover, Kasira and Nivea then sank to the balls of their feet. The wraiths were now only moments away from reaching them.)

KASIRA: Ready?

NIVEA: Nope!

KASIRA: Gonna fight anyway?

NIVEA: Yup.

KASIRA: Let's do it then!

(With that, she leapt forward then set about the wraiths with tremendous speed. Such was the ferocity of her slashing, her hands were virtually a blur. At her side, Nivea was hacking into the wraiths with a ferocious snarl on her face. Heavily outnumbered by the wraiths, she knew she had to put her heart and soul into despatching them before herself or Kasira got hurt. Equally desperate for nobody to get hurt, Cayley was on tenterhooks. She'd blast the wraiths for a few seconds then repeatedly stop and check that Kasira and Nivea didn't need urgent assistance in the form of her healing powers. So far, she'd not been called upon. Facing no such distractions, Soapy was in her element. In no danger of being attacked herself, courtesy of the river, she was able to focus all her energies into blowing up multiple wraiths with every flick of her wrist. The explosion of wraith dust was a joy for her to see. Sika was experiencing a similar joy. At this distance, she was also obliterating two or three at a time and she was loving it. Ambre, on the other hand, looked extremely tortured. Such was the speed of her magical companions, every wraith she tried to control was instantly being obliterated. Entirely out of the game, this left her with only one task. Checking for wraiths approaching from the rear. It was a role she wasn't comfortable with. Not actively taking part in the battle, she was beginning to feel left out; something she absolutely hated.)

AMBRE: Um... can I have a wraith?

CAYLEY: What?

AMBRE: You lot keep killing the one I'm controlling.

SOAPY: Sorry, Ambre, but things are kinda desperate right now.

SIKA: We've got to kill everything in sight; we haven't got time to pick and choose.

AMBRE: Aw...

(She sighed despondently.)

AMBRE: I'll just watch our backs then.

CAYLEY: Good thinking, Ambre. Are you sure you're up to such an important task though? That's a *big* responsibility, love.

AMBRE: It is?

(Suddenly feeling ten feet tall, Ambre straightened her back and saluted.)

AMBRE: Yes, ma'am. You leave it to me! I'm gonna be super-duper professional.

(She then turned away from them and glowered across the island, keeping a focussed eye out for any sneaky wraiths. Having been given a big responsibility all to herself, her heart was fluttering with joy. This was yet more proof that she was indeed a valuable member of her unit. Delighted to have made Ambre happy, albeit by exaggerating the extremely easy and mind-numbingly boring task she'd given her, Cayley smiled.)

CAYLEY: We're getting there, girls.

SIKA: Yup.

SOAPY: We're cutting through them with ease right now.

CAYLEY: We are. And more importantly, Kasira and Nivea aren't getting swamped.

SIKA: No, but they're probably getting really knackered. Look at them go.

SOAPY: Right. Nivea's going to town on the little fuckers.

SIKA: Yeah... she really likes bashing things with her sword, doesn't she?

CAYLEY: Yup. Wraiths, inanimate objects, she really doesn't mind.

(Just then, Kasira then called out from across the river.)

KASIRA: Cayley!!!

CAYLEY: Ma'am?

KASIRA: They're surging! If this keeps on we'll get swamped.

CAYLEY: Shit! Looks like I spoke to soon.

SIKA: Heal them, Cayley. Leave the wraiths to me and Soapy.

SOAPY: Soapy and I!

SIKA: Wrong. Me and Soapy. I listed us in order of importance.

SOAPY: Then *I'd* be first, what with me outranking you, you lowly corporal.

SIKA: Oh, no, you didn't. You did *not* just go there again.

CAYLEY: Pack it in, you two.

(She then yelled across the river.)

CAYLEY: I'm gonna heal you both, okay? Constantly.

KASIRA: Actually, Cayley, just heal Nivea.

CAYLEY: What?

(Kasira looked to Nivea.)

KASIRA: I'm gonna step back and leave you to it for a second.

NIVEA: What? No! I'm gonna get swarmed on if you do that!

KASIRA: No. Cayley's gonna heal you, and once I'm at a safe distance, you can spin. Your increased attack range might stop them from *surging* too badly.

NIVEA: Right... true.

(She grimaced.)

NIVEA: Kasira?

KASIRA: Yes.

NIVEA: When you stop fighting to retreat to a safe distance...

KASIRA: Yeah?

NIVEA: Do it quickly!

KASIRA: You've got it.

(She looked to Cayley.)

KASIRA: Spam heal her constantly, love.

CAYLEY: I already started.

KASIRA: Cool. Okay, I'm off, Nivea.

NIVEA: Be quick!

KASIRA: I will.

(She then raced backwards a good twenty feet from Nivea and stepped into the sea. As she did so, a large swarm of wraiths followed her, desperately trying to savage her with their razor sharp fangs or talons. As soon as she stepped into the water, however, they turned and raged at Nivea instead.)

KASIRA: Spin!!!

NIVEA: On it!!!

(She then proceeded to rotate in a circle, steadily going faster and faster until she was a blur, and a whooshing sound rose up from the air caught beneath her blade. At once, a vast cloud of wraith dust shot into the air.)

KASIRA: Nice work, Captain.

NIVEA: Thanks!

(Kasira then raced across the shallows and joined Cayley on the other side of the river.)

KASIRA: Thank fuck for that. The fight started off okay, then they started to surge and push us back. Nivea's spinning trick was our only hope.

(She grimaced.)

KASIRA: I was just worried she'd have trouble getting going with so many wraiths already on her.

CAYLEY: So was I. I mean, I was healing her like crazy but she'd been have bitten and scratched to kingdom come from the second you left her to the moment she got her spin up and running. That must have sucked.

SIKA: We *tried* to keep them away from her. I mean, we took out as many as we could, but I'm a bit worried about attacking wraiths when they're too close to a team-mate.

SOAPY: Babe, we all get worried when *you're* attacking wraiths too close to a team-mate.

SIKA: You...

SOAPY: Kasira's tales of seeing the world from ten thousand feet still haunt me today.

SIKA: Soapy...

KASIRA: Enough! Just focus on blasting the wraiths!

(She rolled her eyes then stepped aside Ambre.)

KASIRA: Ambre?

(Remaining entirely focussed on her task, Ambre didn't even look at her.)

AMBRE: I can't talk now, ma'am. I'm on a special assignment.

KASIRA: I know. I was just checking in with you. Anything to report?

AMBRE: No, ma'am. No enemies sighted yet.

KASIRA: Excellent. Keep up the good work, corporal.

AMBRE: Ma'am!

(She then returned to Cayley, gushing with love.)

KASIRA: She's too adorable.

CAYLEY: Yes. Yes, she is.

(Nivea then called out to them from where she was spinning at tremendous speed.)

NIVEA: I'm not sure how much longer I can keep this up for, guys.

KASIRA: Why, what's wrong?

NIVEA: The ground's really soggy beneath the snow. My feet are literally starting to drill down into it. If this carries on, I'll end up standing in a fucking hole.

KASIRA: Shit.

(She looked to Sika and Soapy.)

KASIRA: How many wraiths are there left?

SOAPY: Not enough.

KASIRA: Not enough? What do you mean, not enough?

SIKA: She means, she really wanted to see Nivea drill a hole and get stuck, but we'll probably run out of wraiths before that happens.

SOAPY: I wasn't saying that at all! As funny as Nivea getting stuck down a hole would be, I said there's not enough because we're almost done and I'm really enjoying myself.

KASIRA: Almost done?

SOAPY: Yeah.

KASIRA: I like the sound of that.

SIKA: Me too. I reckon there's about fifty or so left.

(Kasira hurried around them then glanced at the remaining pack.)

KASIRA: Nice. Bring it home then, girls.

SOAPY: You've got it.

(She then stepped up the pace, blasting wraiths at such a pace, Sika didn't even know where to aim.)

SIKA: Stop shooting my targets!!!

SOAPY: Too late!

(She then blasted the last wraith and blew on her fingers.)

SOAPY: And that, ladies, is the end of that.

SIKA: You arrogant...

KASIRA: Stop it.

(She then looked to where Nivea was slowing to a halt and allowed herself a chuckle.)

KASIRA: I'm sure you used to be taller than that, Nivea.

NIVEA: See? See? What did I tell you?

(She stepped out of the one foot deep hole she'd drilled then started to chuckle.)

NIVEA: Another ten minutes and we could have tunnelled out of here.

CAYLEY: That'd save us *sailing* home.

KASIRA: Yeah, we...

SIKA: Never mind yapping, it's biscuit time.

KASIRA: Excuse me?

SIKA: Um...

CAYLEY: Blimey. That was poor, even for you. Even newbies know you don't interrupt your commanding officer to demand a tea break, Sika.

(Sika burned red.)

SIKA: Sorry, ma'am. It's just, the whole time I was battling those things, the only thing keeping me going was the thought of biscuits. Sorry, that was unprofessional.

KASIRA: Sika?

SIKA: Ma'am?

KASIRA: It's cold out here. Too fucking cold. As a result, we're all tired and off our game, so don't worry about it. If you ever interrupt me again though, I swear...

SIKA: I won't.

(Kasira just stared at her in disbelief.)

SIKA: Right... I literally just did it again, didn't I? What's wrong with me?

KASIRA: We don't have time to answer that question fully, love.

SOAPY: I was just thinking that.

SIKA: You would.

(Kasira stepped up to Sika and put her arm around her.)

KASIRA: Now, let's have ourselves a little biscuit break, shall we?

SIKA: Yay!

KASIRA: Ambre!

AMBRE: Ma'am?
KASIRA: Your mission's complete, love.
CAYLEY: It was a complete success too. Nice work.
(Ambre stood tall and beamed.)
AMBRE: Thank you. I gave it everything I had.
KASIRA: And now, you shall be rewarded with biscuits.
AMBRE: Woohoo!
(She exhaled.)
AMBRE: Best prize ever!

A few minutes later, having found some rocks to sit on, Kasira shared out some biscuits among her five subordinates then sat back to take a quick breather. Immediately going to town on her biscuits, Sika's face bore a look of unbridled joy.

SIKA: I've so been looking forward to this.
CAYLEY: Yeah, well, don't just scoff them down, try to savour them.
KASIRA: She's right. We won't be getting too many breaks, so try to make them last.
SIKA: Right. Makes sense.
(Cayley nodded then looked to Kasira.)
CAYLEY: Kasira, babe, can I make a suggestion for when we resume?
KASIRA: Of course you can.
CAYLEY: If we split up at any point, can we make it temporary?
KASIRA: Why? What are you thinking?
CAYLEY: Healing. It's stupidly cold out here and the only reason we're not shivering and turning blue is because I keep healing us. Therefore I don't want to be apart from anyone for too long.
(Kasira nodded.)
KASIRA: Okay. I didn't know you'd been doing that.
(She grimaced.)
KASIRA: I did wonder why our feet weren't burning yet, after standing in the river for so long.
CAYLEY: Yeah, that was me. I can keep healing us all day, as long as I have some energy left.
(She grimaced.)
CAYLEY: The only problem is, if the cold gets the better of *me* and I can't cast my magic anymore, we're in deep shit.
KASIRA: Is that likely then?
CAYLEY: Yes. Out here, it could happen to any of us, at any time. Feeling fine one minute then collapsing the next.
NIVEA: She's right. It used to happen to people in my hometown all the time. They'd venture out to hunt at night, and more often than not, one of them would end up being carried home on a stretcher. Defeated by the cold. We can't afford to have that happen to Cayley.
KASIRA: No... we really can't.
CAYLEY: See? That's why, if we split up, it can only be temporary. I need everyone close so I can heal them. Spare them from collapse. The only concern is if *I'm* the one who gets taken ill.
(Kasira nodded.)
KASIRA: Okay. In that case, Cayley, if you feel even slightly under the weather, you need to rest up. Even if we're in the middle of a massive fight. I don't care. I'll take the bites and scratches if I need to, just make sure you're okay.

CAYLEY: I will.

KASIRA: Thank you.

(She sighed.)

KASIRA: This is so shit. How the fuck did we end up in this mess?

NIVEA: Because General Forest is a cunt.

KASIRA: Right...

(She grinned.)

KASIRA: Rhetorical questions are lost on you, aren't they?

NIVEA: Just saying it as I see it, Kasira.

SIKA: And for a blind person, she sees it really well. That's exactly how it is.

SOAPY: Yup. Thanks to that idiot, we've been dragged from our comfortable base and dumped into this hell hole.

SIKA: It sucks. Really sucks.

AMBRE: Sucks to bits.

SIKA: Yeah, that.

(She shook her head.)

SIKA: It's actually really insulting. Why us? There was a whole building full of people back there, why just us lot?

CAYLEY: Because like Nivea said, General Forest is a chicken.

NIVEA: I said he was a cunt.

CAYLEY: Yeah, but *I'm* never gonna use that word, am I?

SIKA: It's so wrong. Like being arrested despite doing nothing wrong wasn't insulting enough. To make us come out here... I mean, what the fuck?

SOAPY: Right? It's ridiculous. And it could even get worse. We could actually end up clearing this island of wraiths for them, only for them to reward us by finding us guilty and sending us to the brig!

SIKA: I know, right? It kinda makes me think we'd be better off opening the door to the building and letting the wraiths go in *there*. With any luck, they'd eat the general *and* that stupid disciplinary panel. Then we could go home without punishment.

(Kasira gave a stifled laugh.)

KASIRA: You have a vivid imagination, Sika.

AMBRE: And a scary one.

KASIRA: Well, yeah; that too.

(She smiled.)

KASIRA: Girls, listen. I know this is shit, but try not to let it get you down.

NIVEA: That's easier said than done, Kasira.

KASIRA: I know, but being bitter isn't going to help us right now. Let's just knuckle down and get through this, okay? You can call the people responsible for this mess as many names as you like once this is over, but until then, keep your chins up.

SIKA: You heard her, Nivea. Keep your chins up.

NIVEA: You little shit!

SIKA: What? Just saying.

NIVEA: You're in for such a groping later.

SIKA: Hey! You keep your giant, man hands away from me.

NIVEA: I don't *have* giant hands, Sika. They just *look* big when they're groping your tiny boobs.

SIKA: I'm perfectly proportioned!

(She snarled.)

SIKA: And anyway, mine are bigger than...

CAYLEY: Here we go.

SIKA: Cayley's!

CAYLEY: Sika, one of these days I'm going to creep in your room at night and pluck out your head feathers!

(Sika screeched and reeled back from her.)

SIKA: Too mean!

CAYLEY: Shut up then!

(She then rolled her eyes and stood up to glance over what she could see of the island.

Having noticed her doing so, Kasira stood up and stepped to her side.)

KASIRA: What do you reckon?

CAYLEY: Wraiths. As far as I can see.

KASIRA: Yeah. Which luckily isn't very far. This is a very tiny island.

CAYLEY: I know, but it's getting crowded. And they're still trickling over here across the causeway.

KASIRA: Yeah. It's not good, Cayley; not good at all.

CAYLEY: So what are we going to do about it?

(Kasira glanced over the island quickly.)

KASIRA: They seem to prefer the middle of the island, up the slope. The areas nearer to the sea are much less busy.

CAYLEY: They seem to like gathering under the trees as well.

KASIRA: Yeah...

(She sucked her teeth.)

KASIRA: I'm thinking we should do what we did at Capsway Island during the haze break.

Split into two groups of three and head around the coast in separate directions.

CAYLEY: Okay, but remember, I don't want to be away from anyone for too long. I need to keep everyone healed.

KASIRA: I know. From time to time, you'll have to fly over the island and heal the group you're not in.

CAYLEY: Okay.

KASIRA: I'm thinking we only had to face that massive group just now because you gathered them all together. To avoid that happening again we need to stick to fighting as smaller groups as possible. With as little fuss as possible. I'm sure we can get around the coastline quite easily doing that. My worry is getting to the middle again where it's most populated.

CAYLEY: That's gonna suck.

KASIRA: It will, but to be honest, I think we're just gonna have to cross that bridge when we come to it. For now, let's just focus on circling the coastline in two groups of three.

CAYLEY: Yes, ma'am.

AMBRE: What group am I in?

KASIRA: You'll be with Soapy and myself, Ambre.

AMBRE: Yay!

KASIRA: The other team will be Cayley, Nivea and Sika, obviously.

NIVEA: I get to go with Cayley? Score!

CAYLEY: Wow. You love me that much?

SIKA: Gay!

SOAPY: *So* gay!

NIVEA: Shut up. I get physically attacked by wraiths, so of course I'm happy to have the healer on my team.

KASIRA: That was exactly my thinking. Fluffy can be our tank, and Soapy is ridiculously fast at killing, so I figured I won't get hit much. You'll need the healing more than I will.

SIKA: Why? Because I'm a poor substitute for Soapy? Is that what you're implying? Nice. No offence taken.

KASIRA: I wasn't saying your magic is inferior to Soapy's, Sika.

SIKA: No?

KASIRA: No. That goes *without* saying.

SIKA: Harsh!

(As everyone chuckled, Sika shook her head.)

SIKA: Oh, stop it.

NIVEA: Cheer up, you miserable sod. Soapy is lightning quick and you know it.

SIKA: Yeah, whatever.

KASIRA: Right, now that's established, there's only one thing left to do.

NIVEA: Get out there and fight!

KASIRA: No! Finish our biscuits.

(She then sat down and shook her head.)

KASIRA: Get out there and fight indeed. *I'm* entitled to a break too, you know.

AMBRE: Yeah!

(She giggled.)

AMBRE: Silly Nivea.

NIVEA: Right...

A few minutes later, feeling slightly better for having had something to eat, Kasira, Ambre and Soapy bade farewell to their colleagues then headed away to the east of the island, away from the base. Cayley, Nivea and Sika went west. Hoping they could make short work of the trip around the coastline and meet on the other side in relatively little time, they all had something of a determination about them. None, however, could match Ambre for eagerness. Delighted with her successful solo mission, she couldn't wait to be called into action again.

AMBRE: I'm gonna kill lots and lot of wraiths today, Kasira. I'm gonna kill them well too. Like a proper soldier.

KASIRA: You *are* a proper soldier.

AMBRE: Yay!

(She beamed.)

AMBRE: I love hearing that.

SOAPY: It's true though. You're essential part of the team.

KASIRA: Yeah. We absolutely couldn't do this *without* you.

AMBRE: Right...

(She grimaced.)

AMBRE: I don't usually mind when you patronise me, but right now you're taking it a bit too far.

SOAPY: Who's patronising you?

KASIRA: We weren't doing anything of the sort.

AMBRE: You weren't?

KASIRA: No. Each group needs a method for killing large numbers of wraiths in one go. The others have Cayley's healing. We have you.

SOAPY: See? I can't tank and nor can Kasira. We need *you* for that.

AMBRE: Oh.

(She giggled.)

AMBRE: I've never thought of it like that. I'm an *essential* member of the team, aren't I?

KASIRA: Yes. We're absolutely *relying* on you.

(Ambre bounced excitedly.)

AMBRE: Yay! I won't let you down, Captain Kasira.

KASIRA: Captain?

SOAPY: She hasn't been a captain for quite some time, Ambre.

AMBRE: Right. I forgot. Sorry.

KASIRA: Don't worry; we all forget things.

AMBRE: Yeah...

(She looked to Soapy.)

AMBRE: Speaking of forgetting things, are you okay now?

SOAPY: Ambre...

AMBRE: She remembers my name, that's a good sign.

(She placed her hands on her hips.)

AMBRE: Can you tell me how many fingers I'm holding up though?

(Soapy looked through her in bewilderment.)

SOAPY: You're not holding *any* fingers up. And how is that a test of...

AMBRE: She's fine, Kasira. We're good to go.

(Kasira chuckled.)

KASIRA: Good to know.

(She snarled.)

KASIRA: Very good to know. There's about 70 wraiths dead ahead.

AMBRE: Yay!

(She then snarled menacingly.)

AMBRE: Let's kill them.

SOAPY: You'll need to summon...

AMBRE: Permission to summon Fluffy, ma'am?

KASIRA: Granted.

AMBRE: Yay!

(She nodded.)

AMBRE: I'll bring him forth then you two can go nuts.

SOAPY: Wow. She's even cute when she's fired up and determined.

KASIRA: It's kind of her default setting.

SOAPY: Right?

(Just then, Fluffy appeared in front of them.)

AMBRE: Hi, Fluffy.

(Fluffy replied in a gruff, unintelligent voice.)

FLUFFY: Fluffy happy to see Ambre.

AMBRE: Ambre's happy to see you too. Sorry to call you out in the cold weather like this again, but we've got work to do.

KASIRA: He's made entirely of rocks, Ambre; I don't think the cold's really going to bother him.

AMBRE: Good. Being cold is no fun at all.

(She then nodded.)

AMBRE: Can you whistle to attract those wraiths over there and keep yourself healed, Fluffy?

FLUFFY: Fluffy Can.

AMBRE: Yay, we want to kill them, you see.

FLUFFY: Fluffy help.

(With that, Fluffy stomped towards the group of wraiths and proceeded to whistle, just loud enough for the wraiths nearby to hear him. At once, they all charged in to attack him. As they did so, he proceeded to heal himself.)

KASIRA: Okay, Soapy, we're up. Just don't shoot me.

SOAPY: I'm not Sika.

KASIRA: And I thank my lucky stars for that every day.

(She then proceeded to race towards the wraiths. Having only got half way, however, she stood and glanced back at Ambre.)

KASIRA: Ambre, love?

AMBRE: Yeah?

KASIRA: What's Fluffy doing?

AMBRE: Helping.

KASIRA: I see.

(She then shook her head in bewilderment. Fluffy wasn't just taking hits and standing there, he was hammering the wraiths into the floor with his heavy, rock-solid feet.)

KASIRA: I've seen it all now.

(She then charged in and started to attack the wraiths on the edge of the pack. For her part, Soapy made her way to the other side and blasted them from there. Having never seen Fluffy fight back before, she was also somewhat perplexed.)

SOAPY: Did you ask him to do that, Ambre?

AMBRE: Nope!

SOAPY: Then why is he...

AMBRE: Because he wants to protect me. Fluffy's my best friend, you see?

(Crestfallen, Soapy stopped blasting magic and looked to her in dismay.)

SOAPY: Wow! Fluffy too now, huh? So, Nivea and I are a poor fifth behind literally *everyone else* you know *and* a pile of fucking rocks!

AMBRE: Um...

(She blushed.)

AMBRE: I love all of you, actually.

SOAPY: Yeah... great. Some more than others though.

(She shook her head.)

SOAPY: Nivea's gonna be thrilled to bits when she hears about this.

KASIRA: Are you gonna stand there whinging or take part in this fight, Soapy?

SOAPY: Oh, right. Sorry, ma'am.

(She then resumed firing at the wraiths. What with Soapy's powerful attacks, Kasira's unwavering assault and Fluffy's determination to stamp every wraith into the ground, it was only a matter of thirty seconds or so before the final wraith in the group drew its terminal breath. Delighted with the speed of their cull, Kasira looked to Ambre then to Soapy.)

KASIRA: Nice! If we can...

AMBRE: Sorry, Kasira; can't stand and chat. I've got work to do.

(She then raced after Fluffy. Having seen another group of wraiths a short distance ahead, he'd charged onwards and attacked them too.)

AMBRE: Wait for me, Fluffy!

KASIRA: Ambre, I'm not happy about this, love. *We* need to decide what to attack. We can't have Fluffy picking and choosing.

AMBRE: Shall I call him back then?

KASIRA: No, not this time. Luckily that group are just the right size for us to handle.

SOAPY: And handle them we shall.

KASIRA: Uh-huh. Just let Fluffy know that *we* need to make the decisions when it comes to what to attack.

AMBRE: Okay.

(Having raced into place, Soapy steadied herself then opened fire on this fresh, new group of wraiths. Running up to take her place at the far side, Kasira sneered.)

KASIRA: Okay, let's get this shit done.

(She too then laid into the wraiths. Advancing into them as she lashed out, she couldn't help but smile to herself.)

KASIRA: Fluffy going on the offensive could well be a game changer.

(She then took a glance to her side. All of a sudden, Fluffy's movements had become slow and extremely laboured.)

KASIRA: Well, that can't be good.

(Stepping up her magic blasts, Soapy yelled over to her.)

SOAPY: Kasira, what's happening to Fluffy?

(Ambre then called to them with trepidation in her voice.)

AMBRE: He's getting all stiff! What's going on?

SOAPY: Can't you communicate with him mentally?

AMBRE: Yeah, why?

SOAPY: Ask him!

AMBRE: He doesn't know.

(Kasira growled.)

KASIRA: I fucking do! It's so bloody cold out here, he's starting to freeze.

AMBRE: No! I don't want him to freeze. I'll dismiss him!

KASIRA: No! They'll all attack *you* if you do that!

(Ambre whimpered.)

AMBRE: What do I do then???

KASIRA: Just keep him there until we can kill this lot off, *then* you can dismiss him.

SOAPY: Relax, Ambre; we're going as fast as we can!

AMBRE: Hurry!

KASIRA: I can assure you, love, there's no danger of us not doing *that*!

(Frantic with worry, Kasira and Soapy snarled ferociously as they threw every ounce of energy they had into the fight. By now Fluffy had become an inanimate object and his self-healing was starting to grow weak.)

SOAPY: How's it looking over there, Kasira?

KASIRA: There's about a dozen this side.

SOAPY: Thank fuck. I'm almost done here.

AMBRE: Quick, quick, quick, quick, quick!!!

KASIRA: We're going as fast as we can!

SOAPY: I'm done.

KASIRA: Just a few left.

(She then lashed out violently, even kicking a wraith away from Fluffy before plunging her blade into it. Moments later, the last wraith exploded and she span to face Ambre.)

KASIRA: Dismiss him!!!

(She then noticed Fluffy was no longer there.)

KASIRA: Is he...

AMBRE: He apologised for letting us down.

SOAPY: So he's okay?

AMBRE: Yeah. He lived.

(She sighed emptily.)

AMBRE: I feel really bad now though. I put him in danger.

KASIRA: Yeah, well; you weren't to know.

(She then paced back to Ambre and waved Soapy over.)

SOAPY: What are we gonna do now? We've got no tank.

KASIRA: We'll just have to rejoin the others.

AMBRE: A team of six again?

KASIRA: Yeah. We've got no other choice.

SOAPY: Fair enough.

AMBRE: Sorry, guys. I really wanted to be a super-duper soldier today, but I guess it wasn't to be.

SOAPY: Yeah, well, there's plenty of time yet, Ambre.

KASIRA: Yeah. Your skill for getting wraiths to attack one another is extremely effective, don't forget. There's more to you than just summoning a Saxum.

SOAPY: No other swift human can claim that.

KASIRA: Yeah. The other swift humans you met at the academy were in awe of your powers, remember?

AMBRE: Yeah... I know I'm pretty good at what I do. I just felt like I could be *even better* today.

KASIRA: And that's what makes you a brilliant soldier. The relentless pursuit of self-improvement.

AMBRE: Do you think so?

SOAPY: Of course. Your determination to get better is miles better than Sika's "that'll do" attitude to army life.

KASIRA: She's right. Miles better!

AMBRE: Yay!

(She beamed.)

AMBRE: Let's not tell her that though. She'll be hurt.

(Soapy beamed.)

SOAPY: I won't say a word.

KASIRA: It's gonna be the first thing you say to her isn't it?

SOAPY: You know me so well.

(They then shared a crafty chuckle together.)

KASIRA: Come on, let's go and find the others.

Just across the island at this time, Nivea was spinning with her sword, aided by Cayley's healing and Sika's speedy magic casting. They'd come across a group of one hundred or so wraiths and had straight away gone on the offensive. No arguments or dithering; they'd simply heeded Cayley's orders and gone to work. Cayley had been most impressed by their professionalism. Alas it was not to last. A few moments later, once the last wraith had evaporated on her sword, Nivea turned around to sheath her blade, only to get whacked full in the face with a snowball.

NIVEA: Hey!!!

(Sika was laughing her head off.)

SIKA: Right in the kisser!!!

NIVEA: You think that's funny do you?

(Cayley groaned in defeat.)

CAYLEY: For pity's sake. Here we go again.

(Sure enough, Nivea then charged after Sika and proceeded to chase her back down the coastline.)

NIVEA: You're gonna be so sorry you did that!!!

SIKA: Yeah, right. I'll *never* be sorry I did *that*!

NIVEA: Oh, you will!

(She chuckled.)

NIVEA: Get back here, you little shit!

SIKA: Like I'm gonna!

NIVEA: Fine, I'll come to you then!

(Cayley furrowed her brow.)

CAYLEY: Get back here, you idiots!

(Too busy laughing to hear her, Sika diverted towards the water, then attempted to make a dash back past Nivea.)

SIKA: Too slow!

NIVEA: Wrong!

(With that, she dived at full stretch and grabbed hold of Sika's boot.)

SIKA: No!!!

NIVEA: Afraid so, bitch!

(She then scrambled towards where Sika was writhing on the ground, grabbed a handful of snow and stuffed it down the back of her coat. At once, Sika's eyes bulged and she screamed in anguish.)

SIKA: That's cold!!!

(Nivea jumped to her feet, chuckling gleefully.)

NIVEA: Duh!

SIKA: Why would you do that? That's too mean.

(She then slowly climbed to her feet and stood there shivering.)

SIKA: Nivea, that was...

(A snowball then slammed her full in the face.)

NIVEA: Bullseye!

(Sika spat snow from her mouth then furrowed her brow.)

SIKA: You did *not* just do that!

NIVEA: Who did then? Cayley?

SIKA: You're so gonna pay for that!

(She then scooped a handful of snow and giggled menacingly.)

SIKA: Prepare to be humiliated, man-hands!

NIVEA: Bring it on!

(With that, she scooped up a handful of snow for herself then raised her eyebrows.)

NIVEA: Give it your best shot, tiny tits.

SIKA: Don't mind if I do!

(She then hurled the snowball at Nivea with all her might. Quick to react, Nivea contorted to one side then scoffed at her as the snowball flew harmlessly wide.)

NIVEA: Missed!

(Sika could only gulp.)

SIKA: If only I had!

NIVEA: What?

(She then turned around to see what Sika was whimpering about. Having been coming over to reprimand them, Cayley had taken the snowball full in the face. Standing there, burning red with rage, she flicked snow from her chin then growled.)

CAYLEY: You two...

(Nivea and Sika both saluted and stood to attention.)

NIVEA: You're in so much trouble right now, Sika.

SIKA: Me? *You're* the one who dodged it!

NIVEA: What sort of logic is that???

CAYLEY: Enough!

(She stepped up to them then cuffed them both about the head.)

NIVEA: Ouch!

SIKA: That hurt!

CAYLEY: Good!

(She snarled.)

CAYLEY: It's the haze break all over again, isn't it? You two messing about, and me left feeling like I'm babysitting two idiotic children!

NIVEA: Sorry, ma'am.

SIKA: Please don't take our biscuits away.

CAYLEY: Biscuits should be the least of your worries right now, Sika! We could die out here, you know? If the wraiths don't get us, the cold most definitely will. We need to get this done. It's urgent! And all you two can do is act like five year olds.

NIVEA: You're right. That was highly unprofessional. Sorry, ma'am.

CAYLEY: Yes, it was. You're a captain in rank, Nivea; act like it.

NIVEA: Ma'am.

CAYLEY: As for you, Sika...

SIKA: Um... ma'am, can I just say, in my defence...

CAYLEY: Go on then. Let's hear it. Justify yourself.

(Sika gaped for a moment then hung her head.)

SIKA: Best not. Sorry, ma'am. Won't happen again.

CAYLEY: Good. Now, come on. We've got work to do.

(She then turned and started to march towards the next group of wraiths.)

CAYLEY: I can't believe you annoyed me so much I felt compelled to resort to violence.

NIVEA: Don't feel bad, Cayley...

CAYLEY: I don't. You earned it.

NIVEA: I know. And you're right. I was just gonna say, that wasn't *really* violence.

SIKA: Yeah, that was just a light reprimand, which we fully deserved.

NIVEA: If you want to see *real* violence, I could demonstrate some on Sika, if you like.

SIKA: Hey!

CAYLEY: No, I would *not* like.

(She then paced on ahead, trying not to laugh at Nivea's comment.)

SIKA: Cayley?

(Cayley said nothing.)

SIKA: Your shoulders are bouncing. Are you crying?

(She then gasped.)

SIKA: You're laughing at Nivea threatening to use violence on me!

(Cayley spoke through a giggling voice.)

CAYLEY: No, I'm not.

SIKA: You are, aren't you?

CAYLEY: Well... a little bit.

(Sika started to giggle.)

SIKA: It is kinda funny, I guess. The thought of Nivea trying to use violence, I mean.

NIVEA: Oh, is it now?

SIKA: Yes!

CAYLEY: Stop that!

(She nodded.)

CAYLEY: Okay, ladies; wraiths up ahead. We'll just step out of your way then you can get spinning, Nivea.

SIKA: Yeah, swivel, bitch!

NIVEA: You've made that joke before.

SIKA: And it's as funny now as it was back then.

(Cayley then proceeded to drag Sika away to a safe distance.)

CAYLEY: Come on, you.

SIKA: Ma'am.

NIVEA: Ready?

CAYLEY: Yup. Go!

NIVEA: Ma'am!

(With that, Nivea proceeded to spin with all her might then started to head for the nearest pack of wraiths; a set of dog-sized insects, with razor sharp pincers.)

CAYLEY: Nice. Come on, Sika. Let's make short work of this lot, okay?

SIKA: Ma'am!

(With that, they fanned out either side of Nivea and proceeded to blast the wraiths on the outer edge of the pack with their vortex like magic.)

SIKA: Careful, Nivea, there's a tree stump right in front of you!

NIVEA: I know.

SIKA: Right...

NIVEA: Thanks for pointing it out though.

SIKA: You're welcome. As funny as it'd be if you fell over; I'd hate to see you get hurt.

NIVEA: I'm touched.

SIKA: That's hardly news, you touch yourself all the time.

NIVEA: Why you...

(Cayley furrowed her brow.)

CAYLEY: Stop it, just focus on the fight.

(She then started to giggle at Sika's comment.)

CAYLEY: Okay?

NIVEA: Why would you laugh at that?

CAYLEY: Just be quiet and fight!

NIVEA: Right...

SIKA: Um, girls, this pack is actually quite deep.

CAYLEY: Really? It seems quite thin on this side.

(She nodded.)

CAYLEY: Veer more towards Sika's side, Nivea.

NIVEA: Okay!

CAYLEY: Maintain your distance, Sika.

SIKA: Roger!

(Cayley watched closely for a moment then bit her lip.)

CAYLEY: There's a lot more here than I thought.

(Just then, several more wraiths started to explode on her side of the fight. At once, she glanced over her shoulder and saw Soapy firing off her magic from a few feet away. Just behind her, Kasira and Ambre were racing in to assist.)

CAYLEY: What gives?

SOAPY: We couldn't use Fluffy, so we didn't have a tank.

NIVEA: Couldn't use Fluffy? Why not?

SOAPY: He started to freeze.

CAYLEY: Right, well that's no good then.

SOAPY: Yeah, so we're back as a six.

(Cayley drew a sigh of relief.)

CAYLEY: Thanks heavens for that. Any longer with these two and I might have gone insane. I'm really not cut out to be a kindergarten teacher.

SIKA: What's that supposed to mean?

CAYLEY: You know damn well, what it means.

SIKA: Yeah...

(Just then, Kasira's voice rose up from behind Cayley.)

KASIRA: Do your stuff, Ambre.

AMBRE: Ma'am!

(Ambre then proceeded to focus hard on making the wraiths attack their own kind. Delighted with her attitude, Kasira nodded then looked to Cayley.)

KASIRA: We've had to come back because...

CAYLEY: No Fluffy; I heard.

KASIRA: Right. So that's it; we stay together as six from now on.

CAYLEY: Perfect.

(Soapy then started to laugh as she continued her attacks.)

KASIRA: What's so funny, Soapy?

SOAPY: These wraiths! They're extraordinarily weak.

KASIRA: They are?

SIKA: I'm killing three of four every time. It's almost like they're made of matchsticks.

NIVEA: And I'm barely feeling them on my blade.

CAYLEY: I've got to say, they feel a hell of a lot easier than everything else we've fought out here.

KASIRA: Okay... and that amuses you, does it, Soapy?

SOAPY: Well, no... I was actually picturing Nivea digging herself a hole again and it made me giggle.

NIVEA: I'm not standing still this time, so that's not gonna happen. I've learned my lesson on that one.

(She then nodded to herself.)

NIVEA: We're almost through this pack already.

SOAPY: Yeah, these are really rubbish wraiths.

KASIRA: Well, make the most of it. I'd put my money on it that there's much tougher to come.

CAYLEY: No doubt about it.

NIVEA: And... done!!!

(Sure enough, the last traces of wraith dust then started to rain down in front of her.

Delighted with her handiwork, she then proceeded to slow to a halt.)

KASIRA: Nice work, ladies.

(She looked to Cayley.)

KASIRA: So how was it?

CAYLEY: Put it this way, if you pair me with those two again, I'll resign my commission and leave the army forever.

KASIRA: I see...

(She looked to the blushing duo of Nivea and Sika.)

KASIRA: So not impressed! Do better!

SIKA: Ma'am.

NIVEA: Ma'am.

KASIRA: Okay.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: Listen up, girls. We're going to continue as a six from now on. Nivea is our only tank, so splitting up isn't an option.

NIVEA: I won't be able to spin then.

SIKA: Why not?

KASIRA: Because I don't want her chopping my legs off. I have to get up close to fight, remember?

NIVEA: Duh!

SIKA: I only asked.

KASIRA: Cayley, keep the healing going for both of us, but don't be shy about attacking as well.

CAYLEY: Understood.

KASIRA: We're gonna need to go all out if we want to get this finished any time soon.

(Cayley nodded.)

CAYLEY: Yes, we will. But like you said, if I feel lightheaded at any point, it's important I step back and gather myself.

KASIRA: It's imperative.

CAYLEY: Absolutely.

KASIRA: Okay, let's get on and kill the next group.

AMBRE: Um...

KASIRA: Ambre?

AMBRE: Before we do that...

(She whimpered.)

KASIRA: What? What's wrong?

AMBRE: I...

(She clamped her knees together.)

AMBRE: I need a wee-wee.

SOAPY: A wee-wee?

SIKA: Who says that?

AMBRE: I do! And I really need to go.

(Kasira glanced around herself then pointed to some rocks nearby.)

KASIRA: Crouch behind those, love.

AMBRE: Okay!

(She then scuttled away.)

SIKA: Come to think of it, *I* could use a piss too.

KASIRA: Then go, for fuck sake. This is the army, not prison.

NIVEA: There's a difference?

KASIRA: Nivea...

NIVEA: Um... I'll just go and take a pee as well.

KASIRA: Go! Be my guest.

(She rolled her eyes then looked to Cayley.)

KASIRA: When they come back, we're gonna have to get serious, babe. Time isn't on our side here. Okay, we've made an adequate start, but that's *all* we've done. We need to put a proper shift in and make real inroads.

CAYLEY: I couldn't agree more.

(She nodded.)

CAYLEY: So I'd better have a wee before we get started.

SOAPY: Actually, *that* sounds like a plan!

(Watching as her entire unit congregated behind the rocks, Kasira shook her head.)

KASIRA: All of you then, is it?

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: Fuck it!

(With that, she strode towards them.)

KASIRA: Room for one more?

AMBRE: Yay! Always!

SIKA: I swear, Nivea, if your trail of pee goes on my boots...

CAYLEY: Enough!

(She hung her head in defeat.)

CAYLEY: They can't even urinate like adults.

NIVEA: *They?* What do you mean, they? I didn't do anything!

SIKA: Yes, you did! You peed near me!

NIVEA: We're behind the same rock, dumb arse!

CAYLEY: Will you two cut it out?

KASIRA: Yes, do! All you two ever do lately is bicker like idiots, and mess about like children.

(Nivea shrugged.)

NIVEA: Yeah, but we also kill wraiths like seasoned warrior goddesses, so we're not all bad.

KASIRA: I'm glad to hear it. We're gonna *need* that kind of warrior spirit. We've got one hell of a day ahead of us, girls. I won't lie. It's really gonna suck.

(She then yanked her leggings down and screamed.)

KASIRA: Cold!!!

(She squatted down then sighed in defeat.)

KASIRA: I hate this place; I really do.

Back at Capsway Island at this time, Lycia and Eksi were standing in a corridor feeling more than a little hard done by. Eksi had a broom, and Lycia had a mop and bucket. Rather than using them to clean, however, they were leaning on them as they whiled away their time complaining. It was safe to say that the officer left in temporary charge of their unit, Captain Forshaw, was not their favourite person.

LYCIA: It's not right, Eksi.

EKSI: You can say that again.

LYCIA: And I will. It's not fucking right.

(Eksi sneered.)

EKSI: It really isn't. It's wrong; that's what it is.

LYCIA: Exactly.

(She sighed.)

LYCIA: We get no respect. None. Why?

EKSI: Because we're young.

LYCIA: Precisely. I mean, no. Well, yeah... but *also* because we're girls. Being young and female is a terrible combination in this army.

EKSI: And then some. He wouldn't have told us to help clean the academy if we were older, *male* soldiers.

LYCIA: Exactly my point.

(She shook her head.)

LYCIA: When they said they were closing the academy until Kasira and Cayley get back, I was picturing us sunning ourselves and drinking orange juice for a few days. Well so much for that.

EKSI: Yeah. Instead we're forced to work like slaves.

LYCIA: Yeah!

(She sighed.)

LYCIA: The sooner Kasira comes back the better. Captain Forehead is a moron.

EKSI: His name's Forshaw!

LYCIA: Whatever. He's still a moron.

EKSI: For sure.

LYCIA: Yeah, him.

EKSI: What?

LYCIA: Forshaw.

EKSI: Huh?

(She sighed.)

EKSI: Never mind. You're dead right about Kasira, Lycia. The sooner she comes back, the better. I'm worried.

LYCIA: About Kasira?

EKSI: No, that my hair might randomly fall out if I eat too much cheese. Of course I'm taking about Kasira.

LYCIA: Right...

EKSI: What if that disciplinary panel find her guilty of a dereliction of duty?

LYCIA: That'd really suck.

EKSI: She could be stripped of her rank and sent to her brig. And what would become of our unit?

LYCIA: It doesn't bear thinking about.

EKSI: It really doesn't.

(She pouted.)

EKSI: If she ends up with a dishonourable discharge, it'll ruin her life.

LYCIA: Yeah, people who get kicked out of the army struggle to find employment, I heard.

EKSI: They do. She'll be screwed.

(She sighed.)

EKSI: She'll never be able to return to our hometown, that's for certain. My mum and dad already think she's a screw up. If she gets kicked out they'll disown her completely.

(She grimaced.)

EKSI: That's if they haven't already.

LYCIA: That'd be rough.

EKSI: Yeah...

(Lycia looked to her uneasily for a moment then tilted her head to one side.)

LYCIA: So...

EKSI: Huh?

LYCIA: If you don't mind me asking, why *do* your parents have such a downer on her?

(Eksi grimaced.)

EKSI: You don't know?

LYCIA: How could I possibly?

EKSI: I thought I'd told you.

LYCIA: No. You said they didn't like her very much, but you never said why.

EKSI: Oh.

(She bit her lip.)

EKSI: Well... put it this way... when she was fifteen like us, she was... what's a polite way of saying this? She was a little bit... overly affectionate with boys.

LYCIA: Overly affectionate?

EKSI: Yeah. You know... like...

LYCIA: What?

EKSI: She went through a lot of boyfriends.

LYCIA: She was promiscuous?

EKSI: You could say that, yeah. Most people opted for 'outrageous slut'.

LYCIA: Oh?

(She stepped forward.)

LYCIA: Do tell.

EKSI: Tell you what?

LYCIA: How did she get *that* reputation?

EKSI: Well... simple really... it was true.

LYCIA: Really?

EKSI: Yeah. A lot of girls are sluts at our age, the difference being, she got caught.

(She grimaced.)

EKSI: Her captain at the academy walked in on her and her friend, partying with five boys.

LYCIA: That doesn't make her a slut.

EKSI: They were all naked.

LYCIA: Right. But even so, there might have been a perfectly innocent explanation for that.

EKSI: Not really. One of them was giving her a seeing to in the corner.

LYCIA: Oh!

EKSI: She got seriously reprimanded for that.

(She shrugged.)

EKSI: Which was fair enough; that's to be expected. Writing a letter home to our parents on the other hand, was a bit unfair.

LYCIA: Ouch!

EKSI: Yeah, that was awful.

LYCIA: The worst!

EKSI: Um... no, actually, the worst was yet to come. Word of the incident spread around the academy like wildfire.

LYCIA: Oh, shit.

EKSI: That's not even the bad part.

LYCIA: It gets worse?

EKSI: Much worse. The landlord of my parent's local pub... his son was in the same academy as Kasira. He told his dad everything. And his dad told literally everyone he knew.

LYCIA: Oh, hell no.

EKSI: Of course, being the local landlord, he knew nearly everyone in town.

LYCIA: Not good.

EKSI: You think? In the coming months, people from our neighbourhood would creep up to the house at night and paint obscene things on the front wall. Slut. Whore. You name it.

LYCIA: Holy crap.

EKSI: Yeah...

(She shook her head.)

EKSI: So as you can imagine, when Kasira came home on leave a short while later, they were far from happy to see her.

LYCIA: What did they say?

EKSI: Well, let's just say they had words. Most of them were swear words. It was horrible.

(She smiled.)

EKSI: Kasira didn't come back very often after that. And when she did, it was only to see me.

(She nodded proudly.)

EKSI: She'd always tell me how sorry she was for any trouble she'd caused me. She didn't have to do that. I didn't really get any grief over it. Our neighbour's disdain was very much reserved for my parents.

LYCIA: Well, that's something, I guess.

EKSI: Yeah. I mean, I was young at the time, so even if they *had* called me things, I wouldn't have understood what they were on about. None of it made any sense to me.

(She shrugged.)

EKSI: And by the time I *was* old enough to understand, it didn't matter. She was already my hero by then. I wanted to be just like her. To be everything she is. Mature, kind, loving, assertive...

(Lycia giggled.)

LYCIA: Not to mention, an almighty slut.

EKSI: What can I tell you, Lycia? Kasira and I are two of a kind.

(They then stood there chuckling.)

EKSI: I don't know why I'm laughing; I wasn't even kidding.

LYCIA: I know.

EKSI: In the end, the only difference between my sister and I is that *she* got found out.

LYCIA: It's not the *only* difference. *She's* good looking.

EKSI: Yeah... hey!

(Lycia laughed out loud.)

LYCIA: I'm joking, Eksi. You two look alike.

EKSI: Right. Thank you.

LYCIA: She's just sexier.

EKSI: Lycia...

LYCIA: She's more intelligent too.

EKSI: I'm quickly going off you, Lycia.

(They shared an amused grin.)

EKSI: Anyway... yeah... that was a horrible time in her life, but she grew. As a person I mean. She's worked hard and she's become someone. If that all gets taken away now, because of some stupid, trumped up charge... well... that'd be heart-breaking.

LYCIA: Beyond cruel.

EKSI: Yeah. I tell you, that General...

(Just then, a booming voice echoed out from a few feet up the corridor.)

FORSHAW: That general what?

EKSI: Um...

FORSHAW: Well???

LYCIA: She was saying we need more sponges and that *general* store in town is selling them for half price.

(Captain Forshaw just blinked at her nonchalantly.)

FORSHAW: How stupid do you think I am?

LYCIA: Does it matter?

FORSHAW: No, I don't suppose it does.

(He folded his arms arrogantly.)

FORSHAW: You know what else doesn't matter?

EKSI: Us?

FORSHAW: Correct.

(He nodded.)

FORSHAW: And in the spirit of you not mattering one iota, once you've finished cleaning this corridor, you can clean the toilets!

LYCIA: But that's not fair.

FORSHAW: And I don't care.

(Lycia signed.)

LYCIA: Fine.

EKSI: Upstairs toilets or the downstairs toilets?

FORSHAW: Downstairs.

EKSI: Fine.

FORSHAW: Then the upstairs ones. Now get on with it, and no more insulting your superiors.

EKSI: Sir.

LYCIA: Yes, sir.

FORSHAW: Good!

(He then about turned and stomped away. Having watched him march around the corner, Lycia and Eksi both sighed in defeat then hung their heads.)

LYCIA: Eksi?
EKSI: Yeah?
LYCIA: Army life sucks.
EKSI: Yes. Yes, it does.

Way up north, in the snow wilderness of Vallae Island, a short while later, Kasira and her five subordinates charged forth into a group of wraiths. Reaching them first, Kasira and Nivea set about them with their blades, ably assisted by Cayley's healing magic. Backing them up, Sika and Soapy positioned themselves to proceed blasting their magic, and Ambre stepped up to Cayley's side to commence using her mind to manipulate the wraiths into attacking each other. Determined to slaughter as many wraiths as possible in a short amount of time, they were all extremely focussed. Lowering the wraith numbers would require a gargantuan effort on their part, and they weren't about to shirk that responsibility. This particular group of wraiths, however, weren't about to make it easy for them.

KASIRA: Have you seen the fangs on these things, Nivea?

NIVEA: It'd be hard not to.

KASIRA: Right?

(She sneered.)

KASIRA: I hate these ones the most. Wolf-type bastards like this have bitten me more times than I can remember.

NIVEA: A pain I'm all too familiar with.

KASIRA: Sucks, doesn't it?

NIVEA: And then some.

KASIRA: Nivea?

NIVEA: Yeah?

KASIRA: I think we're too close to each other. Could you take a step to the right?

NIVEA: Ma'am.

KASIRA: Thank you.

(She lashed her blades into the face of a snarling wraith then sneered.)

KASIRA: Don't gnash your teeth at me, you arse wipe.

NIVEA: I didn't!

KASIRA: Not you; the wraith.

NIVEA: Oh.

KASIRA: Paranoid much?

NIVEA: I usually end up fighting alongside Sika, Kasira. I've come to *expect* name calling.

KASIRA: Fair enough.

(She snarled.)

KASIRA: I want to mow these bastards down like you wouldn't believe, Nivea. Fucking wraiths are the bane of our existence.

NIVEA: Amen to that.

(Watching on from aside Cayley, Ambre grimaced.)

AMBRE: Kasira looks really, really angry, Cayley.

CAYLEY: She's just leading by example, darling. She asked *us* to give it everything we've got, so *she's* doing it too.

AMBRE: Yeah...

(She grimaced.)

AMBRE: Everyone's working so hard. I'm uncomfortable now.

CAYLEY: Why?

AMBRE: Because when I do this mind control thing, it looks like I'm just standing here, doing nothing. I'm not though.

CAYLEY: I know.

AMBRE: I'm really, really not. *I'm* working hard too.

CAYLEY: Yes, love; I know.

AMBRE: Well, as long as you know.

CAYLEY: I do.

(She then threw healing spells at Kasira and Nivea before glancing towards Sika.)

CAYLEY: Sika. Step back a couple of paces, love; you'll maximise your attack potential then.

SIKA: Ma'am.

AMBRE: Wow, she did as she was told without complaining or making a weird joke that I don't get.

CAYLEY: See? Everyone's giving it their all.

AMBRE: Yay!

SOAPY: Kasira, ma'am.

KASIRA: Soapy?

SOAPY: There's a really large group of wraiths latching onto the back of this one. I mean, really large. Several hundred strong.

(Kasira looked up then frowned. She couldn't see anything too far ahead because of the flurry of wraith dust before her.)

KASIRA: Too many for us to handle, you think?

SOAPY: I'm not sure. If they surge, it might get ugly. And if they come around the other side at Sika, she's in deep shit.

KASIRA: What if they come around *this* side at *you*?

SOAPY: Well... you know... I reckon, probably... at a push...

KASIRA: Soapy, put your ego to one side for a minute and be honest with me. If they all rushed you at once, could you handle it?

(Soapy sighed.)

SOAPY: No. Not without my sonic blast and I wouldn't have time to cast it.

KASIRA: Shit.

(She gritted her teeth.)

KASIRA: Keep an eye on them, Soapy. Let me know what they do.

SOAPY: Ma'am.

KASIRA: Good girl.

(She furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: Nivea?

NIVEA: Ma'am?

KASIRA: We might get surged at again in a minute.

NIVEA: I heard.

KASIRA: So we've got two options. We either retreat to the sea or pick up the pace.

NIVEA: I don't think we could possibly *go* any faster, could we?

KASIRA: That's what I wanted to ask you. Is the two of us fighting side by side like this slower than you spinning alone?

NIVEA: It's about the same. Fighting like this slows *me* down immensely, but you make up the shortfall. The only advantage to me spinning alone is the increase in attack range, like you mentioned earlier. No speed increase.

KASIRA: So this is as fast as we're gonna get then.

NIVEA: I'd say so.

KASIRA: Bollocks. An increase in range alone probably won't help against this many. They could still surge through it.

NIVEA: Definitely.

KASIRA: Shit.

(She grimaced.)

KASIRA: We'd better pray they *don't* surge then.

NIVEA: I always do.

(Slashing violently at the wraiths, Kasira thought long and hard.)

KASIRA: We need to find a way to speed this up. Perhaps... if you were spinning and blowing on a wraith whistle, I could attack the ones at the back without needing to be healed.

NIVEA: You could, yes, but last time we used the wraith whistle, the affect was only temporary. If it wears off while you're at the back, out of sight of Cayley, you'll be fucked.

KASIRA: Shit.

(She growled.)

KASIRA: There has to be *something* we can do.

SIKA: Kasira?

KASIRA: Yeah?

SIKA: It's getting really lively at the back of this pack.

SOAPY: To put it mildly! They're coming over the causeway, straight into the back of this group.

KASIRA: Fuck. Cayley?

CAYLEY: Ma'am.

KASIRA: Fly up and take a look at the back of the pack, would you?

CAYLEY: Yes, ma'am.

(With that, Cayley sprouted her wings and hovered a good ten feet in the air.)

CAYLEY: Kasira?

KASIRA: Break it to me gently!

CAYLEY: The pack gets wider, the further back it goes. And it's swelling. Every new wraith that's coming over the causeway seems to be attracted to the throng.

KASIRA: Damn it!

(She snarled.)

KASIRA: You know what that means, don't you, Nivea?

NIVEA: They're going to surge. Hard!

KASIRA: And if we're not quick enough to retreat they'll have us off our feet and devour us both in seconds.

NIVEA: No. Not today, Kasira. I'm not gonna die today. Nope.

KASIRA: Damn *right* you're not gonna die today. As soon as we feel the slightest surge, I'll signal the retreat.

NIVEA: Okay. What's the signal?

KASIRA: I'll shout, "Run, Nivea!"

NIVEA: Really? Can't you make it something more simple?

KASIRA: I...

(She gave a stifled laugh.)

KASIRA: Only you could joke at a time like this.

(Suddenly, the front of the pack surged forwards under the weight of the wraiths at the back. Startled by the suddenness of the surge, Kasira and Nivea both tripped backwards.)

KASIRA: Leg it!!!

NIVEA: That's not the signal!

KASIRA: Fucking stay there then!!!

NIVEA: Not fucking likely!!!

(They then took off as fast as their legs would allow, towards the sea. Reacting to Kasira's call to "leg it", Soapy and Ambre also took to their heels. For her part, Sika just flew upwards and watched on from the air as her four unit-mates sprinted to the water. Already hovering, Cayley looked to her anxiously.)

CAYLEY: We need to take out the wraiths at the front, Sika.

SIKA: Ma'am!

(The two of them then zoomed forth, over the top of the wraiths. By now, despite having started to run first, Kasira was already bringing up the rear. With hundreds of snarling, wolfish wraiths on her tail, she was very much in fear for her life.)

KASIRA: I exercise every day! I eat well! Why do I run like a fucking snail???

(She then glanced behind her and shrieked. Two wraiths had gained to within inches and were bearing down on her with their fangs.)

KASIRA: Holy mother of...

(Just then, both wraiths were blown to smithereens by a vortex from above.)

SIKA: All me, baby!

CAYLEY: That was *me*! You missed!

SIKA: Prove it!

KASIRA: Thanks, girls. Keep them coming, I'm in deep shit here.

SIKA: Not as long as *I'm* around, you're not.

CAYLEY: Wow.

(Sweating profusely, Kasira glanced over her shoulder once again, then gulped. The wolfish wraiths had more speed than she could ever muster and would keep on gaining on her. In this moment, she was holy reliant on Sika and Cayley to spare her from their deadly jaws.)

KASIRA: Sika!

SIKA: Yeah?

KASIRA: If you keep me alive today, I'll double your biscuit allowance.

SIKA: Double???

(With that, Sika's casting speed accelerated immensely. Firing off spells with alternative hands, she'd never been so focussed in all her life.)

SIKA: Now that one was *definitely* me!

CAYLEY: I never claimed otherwise!

SIKA: That one was me too.

CAYLEY: Really? You shot it with Soapy's magic, did you?

SIKA: Soapy's not even here.

CAYLEY: She's over by the water's edge, firing at the wraiths. *Accurately*.

SIKA: Yeah, right. You all think Soapy's so great, don't you? Well check this out! You want accuracy, do you? Watch this!

(She then blasted magic with both hands straight into the wraiths behind Kasira. Such was the force of the spell, however, it blasted through the wraiths and continued on, blowing up the ground just behind Kasira's feet.)

SIKA: Shit!!!

(Before she could even begin to react, Kasira was thrown high into the air. Screaming as she hurtled towards the ocean, her face bore a horrified expression.)

KASIRA: Why??? Why, Sika???

(Spam healing Kasira in a bid to minimise any damage she might receive on impact, Cayley shook her head.)

CAYLEY: Accuracy, Sika. Accuracy! Not power. Accuracy, you clumsy oaf.

SIKA: Yeah...

(She gulped.)

SIKA: I haven't heard the last of this one, have I?

CAYLEY: Nope. But you *have* seen the last of your biscuit allowance, I'd wager.

SIKA: No!!!

(She then watched in horror as Ambre, Soapy and Nivea raced into the shallows with Kasira hurtling a good fifty feet over their heads.)

NIVEA: Made it!

AMBRE: Yay!

SOAPY: Phew.

(They then glanced upwards and gulped. Before their very eyes, Kasira whizzed a hundred feet out to sea, before plunging into the water, cursing like a frontierswoman.)

KASIRA: Shit!!! Fuck!!! Bollocks!!!

(Watching from the shallows as she disappeared beneath the waves, Ambre, clung onto Nivea and whimpered.)

AMBRE: It happened again, Nivea.

NIVEA: Yeah...

SOAPY: Don't worry, Ambre, I'll go and retrieve her.

AMBRE: Please do.

(Having landed quite a way out to sea, Kasira splashed back through the surface of the water some twenty seconds later, wearing a tortured expression.)

KASIRA: Deep!!!

(Much to her relief, Soapy's voice then rose up from beside her.)

SOAPY: Don't worry, I've got you.

KASIRA: Soapy?

(Soapy then jumped beneath the water, before resurfacing with Kasira on her back.)

KASIRA: Wow. Thanks, Soapy.

(Soapy then swam her back to the shallows where their four unit mates awaited them.

Drawing a sigh of relief, she climbed from Soapy's back then placed her hands on her hips.)

KASIRA: Shit. Hell, no. That was fucking terrifying.

(Suddenly, Ambre zoomed to her side and hugged her with everything she had.)

AMBRE: Your safe!

KASIRA: Uh-huh.

AMBRE: Are you okay? I was really scared.

KASIRA: I'm fine, love. It's okay. Relax.

AMBRE: Yay!

(Laying in the shallow water next to her, waiting for her fish-like legs to return to normal, Soapy smiled.)

SOAPY: You're just lucky you didn't go in flat. Doing a belly flop from that height would have stung like hell.

KASIRA: True. If I was looking for small mercies that would definitely count.

(She then glanced ahead to where Sika was peering around Cayley with a horrified expression on her face.)

KASIRA: You!

SIKA: Uh-oh.

(She whimpered.)

SIKA: Pray for me.

NIVEA: Nope!

SIKA: She's gonna throttle me!

CAYLEY: Probably.

NIVEA: I know I would if *I* was in her shoes. That's the *third* time you've blown her ten million feet into the sky. It's beginning to feel like you're doing it on purpose.

SIKA: Nope. Fuck this; I'm gonna fly away.

(Cayley grabbed her by the collar.)

CAYLEY: Don't you dare.

SIKA: But, Cayley, she's gonna kill me.

(She then glanced at where Kasira was stamping through the water towards her.)

SIKA: Um... ma'am. I can explain.

CAYLEY: She was trying to outdo Soapy for accuracy, but once again her ego bought a hat three sizes too big for her talent's head.

SIKA: That's a really harsh assessment! I was trying my damndest to save her! I really was. I just didn't expect my spell to follow through and... do that.

(She gulped then looked into Kasira's eyes.)

SIKA: You're going to shout at me now, aren't you?

KASIRA: Nope.

(She smiled.)

KASIRA: You made a mistake. And yes, you were trying to save me. I appreciate that, love. Your heart was in the right place.

SIKA: It was! It really was!

KASIRA: Yup. I can't fault your intentions.

SIKA: Thank you.

KASIRA: There's no need to thank me, love. And don't look so scared. Even if it is the third time you've blown me up with your magic, I'm hardly going to tell you off for trying to save me, am I?

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: I will give you one small piece of advice though, if that's okay?

(Sika gulped.)

SIKA: Um... is this one of those situations where you pretend to be calm then slap me senseless?

KASIRA: Don't be ridiculous. I just want to advise you like a good leader should.

SIKA: Okay...

KASIRA: You say you fired your magic too hard, right? Because you were trying to match Soapy.

(Sika pouted.)

SIKA: Um... yeah? I went for accuracy, but got power instead.

KASIRA: Then the answer is simple, love. In future, don't try to emulate Soapy. She's out of your league when it comes to magic casting.

SIKA: Ouch.

KASIRA: I'm just saying, don't try to be something you're not. Stop deluding yourself that you're some magic-casting goddess. Accept the level you're at. Then you won't make these mistakes, okay?

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: And that's all I have to say on the matter.

(Soapy looked most disappointed.)

SOAPY: What? You're not gonna rip her a new one?

KASIRA: No. Hurtling through the air like a bird with no wings was a terrifying experience, but then so was having a hundred wolf-like wraiths trying to bite my arse.

(She shrugged.)

KASIRA: I might not have made it if Sika wasn't such a hopelessly inadequate magic caster. So she well may have saved my life there. I'm not going to chastise her for that.

SIKA: No, you're just going to call me hopelessly inadequate and crush my spirit entirely; right in the middle of a huge battle.

KASIRA: Right... yeah... that was actually a bit harsh. What I mean is, if it wasn't for your lack of talent, I might not have made it.

SIKA: Lack of talent? Like that's any kinder!

KASIRA: Don't pout, love. That lack of talent actually saved the day in this case, so cheer up, okay?

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: Just remember what I said. You're not a patch on Soapy, so stop trying to match her, love? I'm sure you'll be a lot happier for it then long run.

(Sika pouted.)

SIKA: Harsh. Too harsh.

SOAPY: She's right though. And don't worry, Sika; I'll keep reminding you so you don't forget. Starting now. You're good, but you're no me!

SIKA: Go away!

(Soapy chuckled.)

SOAPY: Nope.

KASIRA: Okay, guys; now what? How are things looking?

CAYLEY: We're back to square one. Standing in the freezing cold water, being snarled at by hundreds of hungry wraiths.

KASIRA: Right...

(She hung her head.)

KASIRA: This cull just isn't happening, is it?

NIVEA: I won't lie, Kasira. It's not going well.

KASIRA: Yeah...

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: And it's just going to get harder unless we can stop new wraiths from crossing the causeway.

AMBRE: How do we do that?

KASIRA: Well, it won't be easy, but...

(She bit her lip.)

KASIRA: The causeway is right near the base, right?

CAYLEY: And?

KASIRA: I've had an idea. Cayley, Sika, can you sky-lift Soapy to the roof of the base?

(Sika replied with a sulking tone in her voice.)

SIKA: Ma'am.

CAYLEY: We can, yes. Are you suggesting we try to destroy the causeway with our magic?

KASIRA: That's exactly what I'm suggesting. Why? Do you think it's overly ambitious?

CAYLEY: Actually, Kasira, right now I think *anything* is worth a try.

KASIRA: Cool. Off you go then.

(She grimaced.)

KASIRA: In the meantime, Nivea, Ambre and I will wait here in the sea, trying not to freeze to death.

SOAPY: A noble goal if ever there was one.

NIVEA: Right?

CAYLEY: Yup.

(She nodded.)

CAYLEY: Anyway...

(She then stepped up beside Sika.)

CAYLEY: Let's go, Soapy.

SOAPY: Okay... just don't drop me.

SIKA: I make no such promises.

KASIRA: Yes, you fucking do!

SIKA: I stand corrected.

KASIRA: Drop her, or even pretend to drop her and you'll never eat a biscuit ever again.

CAYLEY: Or a cake!

(Sika gasped.)

SIKA: I'll be good!

CAYLEY: Thank you.

(She nodded.)

CAYLEY: Let's go then.

SOAPY: Ma'am!

(With that, Soapy sunk into a seated position then allowed Sika and Cayley to rise from the ground with her.)

SOAPY: I hate heights!

SIKA: Good to know.

CAYLEY: Behave, Sika! Don't go getting any ideas!

SIKA: Right...

CAYLEY: Let's go.

(With that, the three of them flew off towards the building. Left behind, Kasira nodded then looked to Ambre and Nivea.)

KASIRA: So...

NIVEA: Yup.

AMBRE: Um...

KASIRA: It's really cold!

NIVEA: Yup.

(She whimpered.)

NIVEA: I really hope they succeed, Kasira. Until that causeway is removed, wraiths will keep on coming, and *we* 'll keep ending up back in here!

KASIRA: Where we'll end up dying an agonising death from exposure.

NIVEA: And our dead bodies will float out to sea, to get devoured by the marine life.

(Tears welled in Ambre's eyes.)

AMBRE: Is that what's going to happen?

(Trying to keep her calm, Kasira forced an encouraging smile.)

KASIRA: I doubt it, love.

NIVEA: But it might.

KASIRA: It's unlikely though.

NIVEA: Is it? We can't go on land because, well, look.

(She gestured to the plethora of angry wraiths that were snapping at her from the shoreline.)

NIVEA: That means staying *here*. And if we stay here too long we're done for. Finished. Fish food.

(Ambre shrieked.)

AMBRE: I don't want to be fish food!

KASIRA: We *won't* become fish food, Ambre!

(She glowered at Nivea.)

KASIRA: Can you stop scaring the living crap of her, please?

NIVEA: I was only telling her how it is, Kasira. And *you're* the one who said we'd all die of exposure.

KASIRA: Yes... well, I shouldn't have.

AMBRE: So, what then? Tell me the truth. I'm a big girl now; I can handle it.

NIVEA: Things are looking bleak, sweetheart.

AMBRE: No!!!

KASIRA: We'll be fine!

AMBRE: Really? Phew!

NIVEA: If you call freezing to death fine.

AMBRE: No!!!

KASIRA: We're not gonna freeze to death!

AMBRE: We're not?

(She grimaced.)

AMBRE: I'm getting really mixed messages here.

KASIRA: Just ignore Nivea, love. She's being a dick.

NIVEA: On the contrary, ma'am, *you're* the one being a dick. *I'm* doing the right thing. *I'm* being honest with her.

(She nodded.)

NIVEA: It's all very sweet that you want her to reassure her, an' all, but that's not what she needs. All she's ever wanted is to be treated equally. That means letting her know the truth; even if it's bad news. Just like we wouldn't flannel Sika or Soapy, we shouldn't flannel Ambre either. Don't treat her differently; she hates that!

(Kasira glowered at her.)

KASIRA: Don't tell me how to run my unit!

NIVEA: I'm not. I'm telling you to stop treating Ambre like a child.

AMBRE: Um...

KASIRA: I'm not treating her like a child!

NIVEA: You're treating her differently though, aren't you?

KASIRA: No, actually. If you must know, *Nivea*, I wouldn't tell Soapy or Sika we're in danger of freezing to death either!

NIVEA: Why?

KASIRA: Because they're only kids!

NIVEA: Exactly! *Ambre* isn't!

(Kasira stared at her emptily for a moment then grimaced.)

KASIRA: Shit. Shit, shit, shit.

NIVEA: What?

KASIRA: You're right.

(She looked to Ambre and smiled.)

KASIRA: Sorry, love. *I was* treating like you a child.

(Ambre blushed.)

AMBRE: Kasira, you sit me on your knee and listen while I read books written for five year olds. I think it's fair to say, I don't mind being treated like a child sometimes.

KASIRA: I know, but...maybe this isn't one of those times.

(She looked to Nivea.)

KASIRA: Thanks for pointing that out.

NIVEA: You're welcome.

(Kasira smirked.)

KASIRA: You're still a dick though.

NIVEA: Right back at you. The difference being you're a *Major* Dick.

KASIRA: Yeah, but that's still better than being known as Captain Dick.

NIVEA: Right... yeah... that makes me sound like the ring leader.

(Kasira giggled.)

KASIRA: Pun intended?

NIVEA: Pun?

(She looked enlightened.)

NIVEA: The anal sex pun. No. Complete unintended. Unlike you, I don't have a one track mind.

KASIRA: Yeah, right.

(They chuckled some more then Kasira looked to Ambre.)

KASIRA: Truth is, darling, prolonged exposure to cold temperatures like this can kill. Cayley's been keep us healed against the effects of the cold, but... I have no idea how effective her heals will be. All I know is, we can't stay here much longer. We're in real trouble here.

(Ambre sighed.)

AMBRE: I feared as much.

(She hung her head.)

AMBRE: I'm already starting to feel unwell.

NIVEA: Tired? Heavy limbs? Like you just want to lay down?

AMBRE: Yeah, pretty much.

NIVEA: I'm feeling it too.

KASIRA: So am I.

(She grimaced.)

KASIRA: You look really pale, Ambre.

AMBRE: So do you.

KASIRA: Nivea, you look... um...

NIVEA: I look the same; I know. My kind are ridiculously pale anyway.

KASIRA: Actually, I was gonna say you look even paler, except your nose is turning red.

NIVEA: Yeah... I figured it might.

AMBRE: We're dying!

KASIRA: No, Ambre. We're in danger. We're not dying. We'll find a way out of this if we can, you mark my words.

AMBRE: Okay.

KASIRA: The main thing is, we need to stay positive. We have to believe we can get through this. We've been through shit times before and came out of the other side, so we have to have faith that we can do it again.

(She then glanced at her fingernails nonchalantly.)

KASIRA: I personally won't be admitting defeat until...

(She then screamed and jumped back in horror at the sight before her.)

KASIRA: My nail polish!!! It's cracking!!!

(She whimpered.)

KASIRA: They were immaculate when we set out. I polished them especially before the General arrested us all. And now look at them? Cracked and chipping. Ugly.

(Tears welled in her eyes.)

KASIRA: This is a sign. We're not getting out of here alive, are we?

NIVEA: Right... that's your idea of positive thinking, is it?

KASIRA: What's there to be positive about? Look at my nails.

(She daintily held her fingers out in Nivea's direction.)

KASIRA: Just look at them!

NIVEA: I am. They look fine.

KASIRA: Look closer then!

NIVEA: No.

(She rolled her eyes.)

NIVEA: Kasira, it's not a sign. It's just how nail polish reacts to the cold. Trust me, I know. When I lived in this part of the world, mine was always cracking if I ventured out in the snow for too long without gloves on.

KASIRA: Gloves! We should go back and get some of those!

NIVEA: What for? Our blades would fly out of our hands if we had gloves on, and the magic casters would just blow theirs up the first time they tried to cast a spell.

KASIRA: Right, yeah... true. I actually knew that. Sorry. I'm just upset.

NIVEA: Don't apologise. You were just being you. When danger rears its ugly head, you come out fighting. When your make-up isn't perfect or you have a hair out of place, however, you turn into a whimpering diva.

(Ambre giggled.)

AMBRE: She's does. She's such a girl.

KASIRA: Don't you start.

(She shook her head then forced a smile.)

KASIRA: Sorry, girls. Weak moment.

NIVEA: Girly moment.

AMBRE: A Kasira moment.

KASIRA: I get it!

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: Seriously though, sorry. I shouldn't have called you a dick and I shouldn't be stressing about my gorgeous fingernails. That was weak.

NIVEA: It's fine, ma'am. There's nothing we can do right now except stand here and hope we survive. It's pretty much out of our hands. That's enough to do anyone's head in.

KASIRA: It's not great leadership though, is it?

NIVEA: No, but then again, where are you gonna lead us to? A slow decent into a pneumonia? There's nowhere you *can* lead us to right now?

KASIRA: True. Right now, we're just three girls up shit creek without a paddle.

NIVEA: Exactly. Once we get back out there and start fighting though; different story. You'll be back to your old self. You were born to lead, babe.

AMBRE: Yup! Best leader ever! We love you lots and lots.

NIVEA: We do! And if it all goes tits up, well... it'll be an honour to die at your side, ma'am.

(Suddenly looking alive, Kasira growled.)

KASIRA: Fuck off, will it? I'm not dying today and nor are you two!!!

(Nivea beamed.)

NIVEA: And she's back.

KASIRA: Let's give it everything we got, girls. We're cold, we're tired and our nail polish is in a bad way, but we're not dead yet. And as long as there's life in this body, I'm going to fight to keep it that way. Come on, Nivea. Let's kill some shit. You fall in line behind us, Ambre!

(With that, she hurried to the coastline and went to town on the wraiths before her. Snarling menacingly, Nivea then did the same. Matching their determination, Ambre stepped up behind them then proceeded to set her mind control spell into action.)

KASIRA: That's the way, girls. If we're going down, we're going down fighting! No pun intended!

NIVEA: There wasn't a pun *in* there!

KASIRA: Right...

(She grimaced.)

KASIRA: Did I mention I was tired?

(She then continued her relentless assault on the wraiths, matched for aggression by her two determined subordinates.)

Up on the roof of the base at this time, Sika, Soapy and Cayley were focussing hard on the snowy causeway between Vallae Island and the mainland. Releasing one spell after another, they were showing no sign of letting up. Their magic, however, was having very little effect. The causeway was showing no sign of shifting and it was beginning to get frustrating.

CAYLEY: This is starting to annoy me now. We're basically putting all our energies into blowing a thin layer of snow a few feet across the island, only for the wind to blow it straight back again!

SIKA: Right? That wind is such a twat.

SOAPY: It is. We're getting absolutely nowhere here.

CAYLEY: Our only saving grace is that we've at least managed to kill every wraith that's tried to cross since we came up here.

SIKA: True.

(She furrowed her brow.)

SIKA: Cheeky bastards. Here we are, giving everything we've got to destroy the path, and they just come waltzing across without a care in the world. It's almost like they're taking the piss.

SOAPY: Kinda feels that way, doesn't it?

SIKA: It does.

CAYLEY: Yup.

(She sighed.)

CAYLEY: Girls, this is starting to get futile. We've been at it for several minutes now and that causeway's no smaller than it was when we started.

SIKA: Yeah... we're wasting our time, aren't we?

CAYLEY: *I* think we are, yes.

(Soapy grimaced.)

SOAPY: Cayley?

CAYLEY: Yes?

SOAPY: The problem is, the spells we're doing aren't strong enough.

CAYLEY: Nice deduction, detective.

SIKA: You must have been the pride of your academy.

CAYLEY: Right?

(Sika and Cayley shared a giggle together, much to Soapy's annoyance.)

SOAPY: Sorry to break up your feather-headed giggling convention, but I was going to make a suggestion.

SIKA: Don't get personal, fish-face.

SOAPY: Sika...

CAYLEY: Stop it, you two. What were you going to suggest, Soapy?

SOAPY: You know that spell I did earlier? The powerful one that made me feel dizzy?

CAYLEY: Yeah?

SIKA: What about it?

(Soapy furrowed her brow.)

SOAPY: What do you mean, what about it? I was going to suggest that I use it, obviously.

CAYLEY: Go on then. Why are you asking *me*?

SOAPY: I thought you might get annoyed if I did something that made me feel dizzy.

SIKA: Why would she get annoyed? You staggering sideways then falling over would be comedy gold.

SOAPY: Sika...

CAYLEY: Don't start, you two.

(She nodded as she blasted her magic forth.)

CAYLEY: Dizziness isn't something I can heal, but nor is it something that will do you any lasting damage. Of course, I won't be annoyed.

SOAPY: Cool.

CAYLEY: It'd be different if we were on the ground where the wraiths could attack us. Dizziness would be a disaster down there, but up here... go nuts.

SOAPY: Okay.

(With that, she focussed hard on the causeway below then snarled.)

SOAPY: Go!!!

(With that, she released an almighty blast from her fingertips. Within seconds of releasing it, however, she spun around then fell flat on her face. Utterly disorientated, she shook her head to clear her delirium then furrowed her brow. Sika had stopped firing her magic and was pointing at her, laughing hysterically.)

SIKA: Splat! Face first in the snow! That was almost as funny as when I hit Nivea with a snowball earlier. Priceless! What a moron.

CAYLEY: Is she? She's blown half the causeway to smithereens. Look!

SIKA: Huh!

(Sika glanced down at the causeway and gasped.)

SIKA: Oh, wow.

SOAPY: Now who's a moron?

SIKA: Still the person who fell flat on her face.

(Soapy staggered to her feet and sneered.)

SOAPY: A small price to pay for getting the job done.

(With that, she faced the causeway again, snarled then unleashed a second blast. This time, she crumpled to the snow backwards.)

SIKA: Oh, my god. Tell me you saw that, Cayley!

CAYLEY: No, I didn't. I was focussing on doing my job. And unless I see you doing the same, two seconds from now, your life won't be worth living.

SIKA: Aw, crap.

(With that, she glanced down at the causeway then resumed firing.)

SIKA: Wow. There's just one tiny bit left. Like a teeny-weeny thin strip.

CAYLEY: I know. Unlike you, I was paying attention to Soapy's efforts, rather than pissing myself with joy at the fact she fell over.

SIKA: My way was better.

CAYLEY: Sika...

SIKA: I'm kidding, I'm kidding.

(She then unleashed another spell, and much to her delight, managed to blast the final, thin piece of the causeway into the river.)

SIKA: I did it.

CAYLEY: Good shot.

SIKA: I destroyed the causeway!

(Soapy glowered at her from the ground.)

SOAPY: Excuse me?

SIKA: No, no, don't get up. You take a break; I've done it now.

CAYLEY: Wow.

SIKA: What? You saw it. I held out my hand, fired off my magic and boom... the causeway exploded and rained down into the river.

(She exhaled with satisfaction.)

SIKA: That showed you lot. Barely adequate magic caster, indeed.

(Soapy staggered to her feet then fell down again.)

SOAPY: Shit!

SIKA: Keep doing that, Soapy, it's hilarious!

SOAPY: Not as hilarious as you claiming you destroyed the causeway! That was me!

SIKA: No, it wasn't. You were sitting on the floor.

SOAPY: Because I'd just destroyed 99 percent of it with two dizzying spells.

SIKA: More like 40 percent, I'd say. *I* finished it off. *I* was the one who put the final nail in its coffin. It was *me* who...

CAYLEY: Enough!

(She rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: You both did well, okay? Soapy, however, is the one responsible for destroying the causeway. Now stop arguing.

(Soapy smirked.)

SOAPY: See? You're good Sika, but like I told you before, you're no me. You'll never be me. You suck.

SIKA: You...

(Her whole face then dropped and she stared at the snow beneath her feet, solemnly.)

SOAPY: Don't pout. You *might* become powerful like me one day. If one of my arms falls off or something. Perhaps I'll get a head injury and forget how to do magic altogether, then I'll be *just* like you. Rubbish.

(Sika looked to her angrily then shouted.)

SIKA: Shut up.

(She then turned her back and started to cry. Feeling more than a little uncomfortable, Cayley and Soapy grimaced at one another.)

CAYLEY: Um... Sika? Are you okay, love?

(Sika then replied in a tearful voice.)

SIKA: It's been the same thing since I was a kid. Sika's a moron who can't heal people.

Sika's rubbish. Sika sucks. I was the only kid who at my school who couldn't heal; and at my academy. So they all picked on me.

(She shook her head.)

SIKA: All I was good at was vortexes. Gravity magic. With my dexterity I was the best at that by far. It was my thing. It was all I had. The only thing that got me accepted. So I worked hard on it, and ended up graduating the academy with excellent grades. Thanks to my magic skills, I wasn't being made to feel inadequate anymore, but now...

(She turned to face them and pouted.)

SIKA: Now *you're* all doing it! Sika's barely adequate. Sika's rubbish. Sika sucks. I thought you were all nicer than that, but you're just like everyone else.

(Cayley and Soapy looked to one another then Cayley offered Sika a loving smile.)

CAYLEY: Sika, love...

SIKA: What?

CAYLEY: Would you like me to play the violin for you, or are you happy to sulk in silence?

SOAPY: Damn, Cayley; that was really mean.

CAYLEY: No, it wasn't. She's feeling sorry for herself and she needs to get over it.

SIKA: Cayley...

CAYLEY: No. You listen to me, Sika. We all respect you for what you *can* do. We love you, you silly girl. You don't *need* to exaggerate and brag about things in a bid to be accepted by *us*, because we accept you anyway.

SOAPY: She's right. You're great fun.

SIKA: Fun? I'm not talking about fun. I'm talking about being a capable magic-doer.

CAYLEY: And you are. Be satisfied with what you *can* do. That's all we ask. Like you've already been told once today, stop trying to be something you're not and accept yourself for who you are.

SOAPY: A fun-loving girl who's really bad at magic!

CAYLEY: Soapy!

SOAPY: It was a joke!

SIKA: A joke???

(She then forced a smile.)

SIKA: I guess it was. It was the sort of joke *I* tend to make, actually.

SOAPY: I know.

SIKA: It really hurts to be on the receiving end.

SOAPY: I know!

CAYLEY: We *all* know!

(Sika blushed.)

SIKA: Right...

CAYLEY: Now cheer up. You did well, both of you. You worked really hard. Yes, Soapy is the one who got the job done. She's uniquely talented, but I'm delighted with both of you for your hard work, okay?

SOAPY: Ma'am!

(Sika sighed.)

SIKA: Yes, ma'am.

CAYLEY: Okay, now listen up. We need to rescue Kasira, Ambre and Nivea from the sea. The poor so and so's must be frozen by now.

SIKA: Not literally, I hope.

CAYLEY: Of course not, but judging by the way they're doing battle down there, they quite clearly want out of the sea as soon as possible, and we're gonna help.

(She looked to Sika.)

CAYLEY: Take your wraith whistle and fly...

SIKA: Um... I may have forgotten it again.

(Cayley rolled her eyes then held out her own wraith whistle.)

CAYLEY: Fine, take *my* wraith whistle. Take it and fly over the wraiths they're fighting.

Lead the wraiths to the other side of the island, giving them time to get out of the water.

Once you've done that, fly away and lose their attention then come back here to Soapy, okay?

SOAPY: Wait. Whistling them away didn't work last time, so...

CAYLEY: Yes, it did. The wraiths just gave up chasing me after a while and ran back. This time, we only need her to get the wraiths out of the way long enough for those three to get out of the water. It'll be fine.

SOAPY: Right.

SIKA: Duh!

SOAPY: Shut up, you.

CAYLEY: Soapy stay here.

SIKA: Yeah, you can't help with this mission. Don't get me wrong, you're good, but when it comes to flying, let's face it, you're no me.

(Soapy grinned.)

SOAPY: Touché. I asked for that, didn't I?

SIKA: Yes!

SOAPY: Fair play, tiny tits; you win!

SIKA: Hey! I'm perfectly proportioned, and besides, mine are bigger than...

CAYLEY: Do you want a slap, Sika?

SIKA: Um... no.

CAYLEY: Then go! Fly away. While you're doing that, I'll fly down and heal the others while I let them know what we're doing.

SIKA: Ma'am.

CAYLEY: Good girl.

(Sika then took to the skies and flew away. Left behind, Cayley looked to Soapy.)

CAYLEY: I'll heal the others then bring them back here I think. We could use a break.

SOAPY: I couldn't agree more.

CAYLEY: Okay then, see you in a bit.

(She then took off and flew towards Kasira, Ambre and Nivea. Upon arrival, she looked to where Sika was leading the wraiths away then quickly threw heals at her three comrades.)

KASIRA: Are we glad to see you.

(The three of them then hurried onto dry land.)

NIVEA: Thank fuck.

CAYLEY: Guys, hurry. While Sika's got the wraith's distracted we should head back to the base for some dry boots and a warm drink.

KASIRA: Agreed.

NIVEA: Right? We've fucking earned it.

(With that, they all raced away towards the base. Looking forward to warming themselves, even if it was only for five minutes, their hearts soared. This break might just make all the difference. Such was their excitement, they raced onwards in silence, thinking only of the rest they were about to enjoy.

A brief while later, having run as fast as they possibly could under the circumstances, they arrived outside the base just in time to see Soapy clambering down off the roof.)

SOAPY: Welcome back, guys.

(She beamed.)

SOAPY: Biscuit time!

CAYLEY: It's more than that, love. We're gonna get inside and have a tea break!

AMBRE: And put on some dry boots!

KASIRA: Heaven!

NIVEA: And then some. Come on, what are we waiting for?

CAYLEY: We're waiting for Sika to come back!

(Nivea scoffed.)

NIVEA: Sika? Forget, Sika. I'm going indoors. She can join us later.

SOAPY: Don't, Nivea. We can't leave her out. She's a bit sensitive right now.

NIVEA: She's *always* sensitive, that's what makes her so much fun to antagonise.

SOAPY: I know, but...

NIVEA: Whatever. You wait here then. I'm *more* than happy to leave her out.

(Ambre quite literally growled.)

AMBRE: What sort of vile human being leaves a person out???

(Nivea whimpered then quickly shied away.)

NIVEA: I was kidding!

AMBRE: Oh.

(She giggled.)

AMBRE: Sorry. I thought you were serious. I was actually tempted to butt you with my antlers then.

KASIRA: No, Ambre. Never do that to a friend.

AMBRE: Yeah...

(She blushed.)

AMBRE: Sorry. It's just, leaving people out is really, really cruel.

KASIRA: I know, love, I know.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: We'll wait for Sika. But as soon as she comes, I'm getting my arse indoors!

(A hearty cheer from the four subordinates ensued.)

NIVEA: Damned right.

Having waited a full two minutes for Sika's return, two minutes which felt more like an hour, Kasira and her crew couldn't have been more relieved when she came into sight, flying towards them from out above the ocean. Cursed with the task of losing hundreds of wraith's attention, she'd had to take quite the detour over the sea to get the job done. Fully understanding this would be the case, nobody complained about how long she'd taken. They simply stood together and watched her approach with excited expressions on their faces. Her arrival would bring forth the opportunity for a cup of tea and some dry footwear; something they were all craving immensely.

AMBRE: Yay. As soon as Sika lands we can finally go indoors. My feet are so happy about that.

CAYLEY: So's my belly.

NIVEA: Your belly?

(She grimaced.)

NIVEA: You got the trots or something?

CAYLEY: What? No! If I had the trots, it'd be my large bowel who's pleased to see her. I want to warm my belly up with a cup of tea.

NIVEA: Right. Gotcha.

CAYLEY: The trots indeed.

NIVEA: What? It wasn't that silly. When you need a poo, you get a stomach ache sometimes; so when you said your belly was happy to see her, it wasn't *that* ridiculous to assume you needed to go indoors for a shit.

CAYLEY: Well I don't!

NIVEA: Yeah, alright. There's no need to bite my head off.

AMBRE: My bum hurts!

KASIRA: Really? Are you okay? Did you fall on it or something?

AMBRE: What? No. I mean, when *I* need a poo, my bum hurts.

KASIRA: Oh. Right...

(Having blasted a group of ten wraiths who'd wandered too close to them, Soapy furrowed her brow.)

SOAPY: It's okay, *team*. I'll handle the wraiths on my own, shall I? You just stare at the sky and continue your spectacularly stupid conversation about Cayley needing a dump.

CAYLEY: I *don't* need a dump!

SOAPY: Yeah... like that was the point I was making.

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: Sorry, Soapy, we got a bit distracted there. I'll help you kill off...

(She then glanced ahead of her and flinched.)

KASIRA: What wraiths? There aren't any!

SOAPY: There aren't any *now*, no! I just killed them!

(She shook her head.)

SOAPY: Unbelievable.

(Just then, Ambre cooed excitedly.)

AMBRE: Yay! Here she comes.

NIVEA: Thank fuck.

(Sure enough, Sika then descended from the sky and touched down just in front them.

Having done so, she then performed a pirouette and struck a pose, desperately hoping to match Soapy's impressive display from earlier.)

SIKA: Ta-da! And that, ladies, is how it's done!

(Much to her annoyance, however, nobody had seen her little performance. As soon as her feet hit terra firma, they'd all turned and headed for the doors of the base.)

SIKA: Hey! Where are you going?

AMBRE: Dry boots!

CAYLEY: And a nice cup of tea!

SIKA: Ooh, me likey.

(She then strutted after them.)

KASIRA: I'm so looking forward to this.

(With that, she reached for the door handle and yanked on it excitedly. Much to her dismay, however, the door didn't even budge.)

KASIRA: What the fuck?

SOAPY: You're meant to push it!

KASIRA: It says pull!

(She then attempted to pull the door again, only to get the same result. Much to her further dismay, it didn't budge when she pushed it either.)

KASIRA: What the fuck? It's stuck!

NIVEA: Not for bloody long, it's not.

SIKA: What are *you* gonna do? Bash it with your sword?

SOAPY: Of course, she is. She doesn't know anything else.

NIVEA: Shut up, you two.

(She then strutted to the front and yanked at the door. Irrked by its refusal to budge, she then barged it with her shoulder.)

NIVEA: Open, you cock!

(She growled.)

NIVEA: What's wrong with this fucking thing?

(She rattled it several more times then snarled.)

NIVEA: That's done it. I'm bashing it with my sword!

SIKA: Uh-huh.

SOAPY: You called it.

SIKA: Yup!

NIVEA: I don't care what you two clowns think. Bashing things works sometimes.

CAYLEY: Nivea, don't bother!

NIVEA: But it's stuck and I want a cup of tea.

CAYLEY: It's not stuck.

(She furrowed her brow.)

CAYLEY: It's locked.

KASIRA: Locked? Locked??? They locked us out???

SIKA: Bastards!!!

KASIRA: What the hell???

(She then proceeded to rattle the door, furiously.)

KASIRA: Hey!!! Fucking open it!!! Hey!!!

(Just then, General Forest nervously popped his head around the staff room door.)

KASIRA: You!!! Open up!!!

(Looking extremely uneasy, the general crept forwards nervously until he reached the other side of the door.)

FOREST: Are they dead? All of them? Are you sure?

KASIRA: No, they're not. We just came back for some dry boots and a quick break; it's freezing cold out here!

FOREST: A quick break??? A quick fucking break??? Are you on drugs or something, woman?

KASIRA: Drugs? No!

FOREST: Then piss off and kill those wraiths, for fuck sake. And don't come back until you have.

KASIRA: We're working on it. We just need a few minutes.

FOREST: Tough. This door is staying locked until all those wraiths are dead, you hear me?

KASIRA: But, sir...

FOREST: No, buts! This is the army, you stupid bint. You don't say but or ask why; you do as you're bloody well told. Now go!

KASIRA: With all due respect, general, it's ice cold out here and we could catch hyperthermia! Die even.

FOREST: Then you'd better hurry up and get the job done before that happens.

KASIRA: Sir...

FOREST: What? What do you want? Sympathy? Compassion? Grow up. You're in the army now, missy. You're soldiers. Soldiers have to deal with adversity from time to time. And sometimes they die. You knew that when you signed up.

KASIRA: We *didn't* sign up! We were legally obliged to join whether we want to or not.

FOREST: Nobody cares. The point is, the sooner you kill all the wraiths, the sooner you can come back inside. And the less likely it is you'll freeze to death. Common sense, you daft cow.

(He nodded sternly.)

FOREST: Now bugger off and don't come back until it's done.

(He then charged back to the staff room, anxious to barricade the door again. Mortified by his actions, Kasira and her five subordinates watched him go with stunned expressions on their faces.)

NIVEA: Did he really do that?

AMBRE: No dry boots?

SIKA: Tea break... denied?

(They all hung their heads in defeat.)

SOAPY: This is bad.

(She sucked her teeth.)

SOAPY: I'm no doctor, but even *I* know you guys aren't gonna last much longer out here.

(Ambre whimpered.)

AMBRE: We're not?

SOAPY: Well...

AMBRE: We're not, are we?

CAYLEY: I won't lie to you, love; things don't look great right now. We've stopped new wraiths coming onto the island, but look at what's left.

KASIRA: About the same number as when we started. And it was a daunting task even then. Now we're exhausted, it's gonna be twice as hard.

SOAPY: Then we need to get started.

(Kasira nodded.)

KASIRA: Yeah. If we give it everything there's a slim chance we might survive. If we just stand here, on the other hand, we're doomed for certain.

SIKA: What are waiting for then?

NIVEA: Right? Let's go.

(With that, they all proceeded to march ahead determinedly. Kasira's suggestion that they'd be doomed for certain if they just stood there, had very much struck a chord with her subordinates.)

NIVEA: What the plan, Kasira? Just go out there and kill everything in sight as quickly as possible? Only that really appeals to me right now.

KASIRA: Really? Sounds suicidal to me. We'll do what we always do. We'll access each group we come across *before* we go to town on the buggers. We're not just gonna go wild and hope for the best.

SIKA: I must be ill or something. I kind of like Nivea's suggestion better.

SOAPY: Going out there and attacking everything like a mad person until you pass out?

NIVEA: That wasn't my suggestion. I just... I dunno.

KASIRA: I do. I understand the temptation completely. You just want to get it done, so going all berserker on them feels kinda right.

NIVEA: Yeah!

KASIRA: See? I get it. Trouble is, you'd be exhausted in no time.

(She grimaced.)

KASIRA: And once we've run out of energy, it's game over.

NIVEA: I hear you.

(Just then, a hoard of just over one hundred wraiths charged over the side of the hill at the centre of the island. Snarling venomously, they very much had the girls of the 123rd wraith containment unit in their sights.)

KASIRA: Looks like this lot got tired of waiting for us.

CAYLEY: They want to die that badly?

KASIRA: Looks that way.

SIKA: Then let's not disappoint them!

(With that, they all raced forth to meet the wraiths head on.)

KASIRA: Go to the flanks, magic doers! You too, Ambre!

AMBRE: Ma'am!

KASIRA: You ready, Nivea?

NIVEA: Hell yeah!

(She then snarled and sprung forth, aiming a powerful swipe across the incoming wraiths, taking out three of them in one hit. At her side, Kasira set her swift fists in motion as soon the first wraith came into blade range. Flashing her blades with immense speed, she had a fixed snarl on her face. To her right, Sika stood firm, aiming blast after blast into the wraiths, defying them to come any closer. Standing just behind her, Ambre assisted by controlling the mind of the wraith she considered the biggest threat. On the other extreme, Cayley was matching Sika's ferocity in attack and making sure to throw heals in Kasira's and Nivea's direction at the same time. Beside her, Soapy stood there with a big grin on her face, going to town on the wraiths with a joy that had come to typify her battle style. She simply loved killing wraiths more than anything else in the world.)

SOAPY: Look at them. They thought they were so tough when they charged at us, snarling at growling. They're not so bloody cocky now they're exploding into dust though, are they? Tossers.

(She smiled at Cayley expecting a reply, only to see her staring dead ahead, as if she was unable to take her eyes off the fight, even for a moment.)

SOAPY: Right... *you're* no fun.

(Keeping up her attacks, she sneered then paced to the side a little further and unleashed even more of her powerful magic into those at the back. The thicker the pack, the more wraiths there were, the happier she was.)

SOAPY: Fun!

(Far from sharing her assessment, Kasira and Nivea continued their assaults, merely inches from the wraiths, snarling jaws. Mowing them down continuously, they weren't about to let

up even for a moment. Such was the burden of those who fought close up, one minor lapse in concentration could prove fatal and they knew it. Fighting this way was anything *but* fun.)

KASIRA: How's it looking? Once again, I can't see shit for dust.

SIKA: There's about twenty to go, I think.

NIVEA: Thank fuck.

KASIRA: Keep it up, everyone!!!

AMBRE: Ma'am!

SOAPY: Ma'am!

CAYLEY: Almost there. I'll go into healing mode now.

(She then proceeded to heal Kasira and Nivea consecutively with rapid flicks of her wrists.

Once a pack of wraiths dwindled to a mere few, it was down to the close-up fighters to finish them off. The magic casters couldn't risk aiming for the final few as they were too close to their unit-mates. Well aware of this, Kasira and Nivea stepped up their attacks and a few moments later, Nivea flashed her sword through the final one.)

SOAPY: Wow! We were awesome! Not that that's unusual. I mean we were *fantastic* that time. Almost in perfect harmony with each other.

(She exhaled.)

SOAPY: Next!

(She then proceeded to pace forth, only for Kasira to steal her thunder almost immediately.)

KASIRA: Wait!

SOAPY: Wait?

(She then turned and glanced at her five comrades. Kasira and Nivea were gasping for breath, as if they'd just ran a marathon. Cayley was on her knees and Sika and Ambre were propping each other up. They all looked entirely devoid of energy.)

SOAPY: Holy crap. You guys look well and truly buggered.

KASIRA: We're not though. I got buggered several times by rapey townsfolk and let me tell you, this is far worse. I'm not sure I can go on.

NIVEA: I hear that.

CAYLEY: I've got nothing left.

(Soapy bit her lip.)

SOAPY: You're all really pale. Even Nivea, and I didn't think she could get any paler.

NIVEA: If we live, I'll punish you for that later.

SOAPY: Guys, this is really bad. I had no idea cold could do that to a person.

KASIRA: Well now you do. When you're cold, your body stops trying to produce energy. It just tries to produce heat instead.

SOAPY: It doesn't produce any energy at all?

KASIRA: None. I learned that in school.

SOAPY: Fuck. So you're not going to get *any* energy back unless you get warm, are you?

CAYLEY: Nope. We'll just get weaker and weaker until...

(She shook her head.)

SOAPY: No. No fucker's dying on my watch!

(She snarled.)

SOAPY: There's only one thing for it. I need to do my sonic boom.

KASIRA: I know. Why do you think we're trying to get you to the middle of the island?

SOAPY: Kasira, ma'am; you're not getting me anywhere *near* the middle of the island.

You're just not. You physically can't.

CAYLEY: Well... she's not wrong.

SOAPY: I need to do it here.

(Nivea glanced up.)

NIVEA: Here? Is that gonna work?

SOAPY: It might not kill *all of them*, but I can say with one hundred percent certainty, it'll kill the vast majority.

(Kasira bit her lip.)

KASIRA: And aggravate every single survivor into attacking us at the same time?

SOAPY: Unfortunately, yes. But what's the alternative? Just stay here and die?

AMBRE: I don't like the alternative.

SIKA: Me either.

KASIRA: Wait, wait. Let me think.

(She looked to Soapy.)

KASIRA: What could go wrong? Worst case scenario.

SOAPY: The blast *could* knock some of you out.

KASIRA: Right. You're not selling this very well, are you?

SOAPY: Would you rather be knocked out or just do nothing and die of exposure?

KASIRA: I stand corrected.

SOAPY: The other downsides are, it'll smash every window in the base, and the general will go fucking ballistic.

KASIRA: I can live with that.

SOAPY: Plus, there's a chance it'll cause another avalanche. In fact, it *will* cause an avalanche *somewhere*. We just have to hope the snow doesn't create another causeway to this island.

(She glanced up at the hillside on the mainland.)

SOAPY: There's very little snow left up there, come to think of it, so I reckon we'll be fine on that score.

(Kasira nodded to herself.)

KASIRA: After you've cast it, you're gonna be out of action for about half an hour or so, aren't you? Drained of energy. Worse than we are now.

SOAPY: Yeah. You five will have to find the energy to fight the surviving wraiths without me.

KASIRA: Yeah... I don't like those odds.

(She grimaced.)

KASIRA: But I like the odds of us surviving if you *don't* do it even less.

CAYLEY: Kasira... babe... we don't have a choice. We have to let her try it.

NIVEA: Uh-huh.

SIKA: I agree.

AMBRE: Kasira's right.

SIKA: Kasira hasn't decided yet, Ambre.

AMBRE: Oh. Still. Doesn't matter. She *always* chooses the right option.

KASIRA: Yeah, well, I wish *I* had your faith in me, I really do.

(She then looked to Soapy.)

KASIRA: It's unanimous. Your plan is silly and dangerous, but... not going with your plan is even sillier. Do it.

SOAPY: Ma'am.

(She nodded.)

SOAPY: I need you all to move at least twenty metres away from me. And don't hide behind a rock. If you do that, the blast waves will blow the rock right on top of you. Find an open space, lay face down and brace for impact.

KASIRA: You heard the girl.

(With that, they all hurried away, albeit wearily. Sika was so tired, she was virtually limping. Watching her go, Soapy shook her head.)

SOAPY: Yeah... I really need to do this before one of them ends up...

(She shuddered.)

SOAPY: It doesn't bear thinking about.

(Placing herself down in the snow, a good twenty five metres away, Kasira glanced up.)

KASIRA: Once everyone's down, Soapy, you're up.

SOAPY: Okay. Just don't forget to guard my exhausted body once the wraiths come.

NIVEA: I'll do that!

SOAPY: Thank you.

(She then watched her five comrades all lower their heads and puffed out.)

SOAPY: Okay then...

(With that, she puffed out twice to limper up before bouncing on the balls of her feet.)

SOAPY: One sonic death blast coming right up.

(She then leapt upwards before crouching down and thumping the ground with her fists. At once, a deafening boom echoed across the sky, accompanied by a powerful blast of magical wind. Too weak to hold on, Kasira, Cayley, Nivea, Ambre and Sika were all blown away across the snow by it. At the same time, every pane of glass in the base and a small section of the roof shattered into tiny fragments. This most powerful spell, was indeed a force to be reckoned with. Every wraith in its path was blown to smithereens in an instant. All across the island, clouds of wraith dust exploded into the sky, as they met with a doom they could never have seen coming. Unfortunately, however, a good few hundred of them had been loitering in the trees on the far side of the island, and had been shielded from the blast. Having merely been blown sideways, they were now enraged. And when something enraged them, they attacked. As such, each and every surviving wraith took to their heels immediately and charged in the direction of the spell caster.

Well aware that a stampede of wraiths was on the way, Kasira staggered to her feet then called to her unit mates.)

KASIRA: Incoming!

(Slowly Nivea climbed to her feet, followed by Sika and Ambre. Cayley and Soapy, however, remained floored.)

KASIRA: Cayley!!!

(Seeing her fail to even move, she gulped then hurried over to her. Seeing her lying motionlessly on the ground, she shrieked then quickly ducked down to check her pulse.)

KASIRA: Are you...

(She drew a sigh of relief.)

KASIRA: Thank fuck.

(She grimaced.)

KASIRA: But then again... oh, shit. Of all the people to get knocked unconscious.

(She then glanced towards where Nivea was trying to lift Soapy.)

KASIRA: Cayley's out cold.

NIVEA: Shit!

SIKA: Soapy's done for too.

AMBRE: So there's just the four of us?

KASIRA: Yeah!

(She glanced toward the hillside and grimaced.)

KASIRA: Any minute now, a fuck load of wraiths are gonna come charging over that hill.

NIVEA: Not good!

AMBRE: Not happy!

SIKA: This is gonna suck!

KASIRA: Look, never mind whining. We need to get Cayley and Soapy to the front of the base!

NIVEA: Why?

KASIRA: So we can stand in front of them as a shield while we fight. Sika, help Nivea with Soapy. Ambre, you can help me with Cayley!

AMBRE: Ma'am.

(In a blinding hurry, and very much struggling against their exhaustion, they then proceeded to drag their comrades towards the base. With the building behind them, there was no way their stricken comrades could be attacked from behind while they were occupied. Very much focussed on making sure this would be the case, they struggled and snarled as they hauled them forth.)

KASIRA: It's not far, it's not far, it's not far.

AMBRE: I know.

KASIRA: I was trying to convince myself.

AMBRE: Oh.

(She nodded.)

AMBRE: Kasira?

KASIRA: Yes?

AMBRE: Don't worry, it's not far.

KASIRA: Right... thanks.

(Also struggling forth as they dragged Soapy along, Sika looked to Nivea.)

SIKA: We've lost the powerful one and the healer, Nivea. This is really, really shit.

NIVEA: You don't have to tell *me* that, Sika.

SIKA: I do. You're really dim and probably couldn't have figured it out for yourself.

(Nivea gave a stifled laugh.)

NIVEA: Always cracking jokes, even now. I love you, Sika; you know that?

SIKA: You're saying you love me?

(She grimaced.)

SIKA: We're doomed, aren't we?

NIVEA: Well... who knows?

SIKA: Right. Very reassuring.

(Having reached the building, they propped the exhausted Soapy against the wall then hurried over to help Kasira and Ambre. With them all pulling together, it wasn't long before Cayley was also propped up against the wall. With that task complete then they glanced towards the hillside and whimpered.)

SIKA: Any moment now.

(Barely able to move her head, Soapy tried to smile.)

SOAPY: You can do this. I believe in you.

(Her head then flopped down and she tilted to one side; her head nestling against Cayley's. Having not heard Soapy's tired words of encouragement, Kasira stared at the hillside then tightened her grasp on her blades.)

KASIRA: Any second now...

NIVEA: Uh-huh.

(She grimaced.)

NIVEA: We can do this. I have no idea how, but we've still got *some* energy left. Let's use it wisely.

KASIRA: That energy is pure adrenaline, I think, Nivea. Not proper energy, but I'll take it.

AMBRE: What's adrenaline?

KASIRA: This really isn't the time for a scientific explanation, love; we've got work to do.

(Just then, the howls of the incoming wraith hoard rose into the air. The waves of wraiths that were charging in their direction had just come into view.)

KASIRA: Oh, boy. Brace yourselves, ladies. This is about to get really nasty.

(At once, everyone sank into their fighting positions and stared hard at their incoming enemies. They'd never been so ready to fight in all their time on the planet. Right now, the lives of their entire unit were hanging in the balance. It was a simple case of win or die. There'd be no medals for coming second, only the brutal sting of death.)

KASIRA: Okay, girls, this is the final hurdle. It'll feel like we're trying to clear it with only one leg and a fifty ton sack of rocks on our backs, but...

NIVEA: Clear it we must!

SIKA: Fucking right!

AMBRE: Then we can all have tea and biscuits!

(Staring hard at the snarling wraiths before them, Kasira, Sika and Nivea all allowed themselves a brief smile.)

NIVEA: Tea and biscuits it is.

KASIRA: Yup. But first... Sika, once they're in range, you open fire first and we'll block them for you.

SIKA: Ma'am!

KASIRA: Really? Good girl.

(At this point, Kasira couldn't help but grimace. Normally, Sika would protest at the idea of attracting the wraith's aggression onto herself first, but such was their dire situation, she'd simply accepted it was necessary. It very much highlighted just how desperate things had become.)

AMBRE: I can control them from here. Can I start?

KASIRA: God, yes! Thanks, Ambre.

AMBRE: Starting now!

(Sika then snarled furiously.)

SIKA: Cover me, bitches!!! I'm going for it!

(Sika then set about firing off her magic, blowing up several wraiths in the front line.)

NIVEA: Bitches? Really?

KASIRA: I think we can let that one slide for now, given the circumstances, don't you, Nivea?

NIVEA: Sure. For now.

(She then snarled furiously.)

NIVEA: Okay, here they come!!!

SIKA: Cover me!!!

KASIRA: We are!!!

(With that, Nivea and Kasira sprung forwards and instantly went to town on the front of the pack with their razor sharp blades. Having been spared from their aggression by the move, Sika drew a sigh of relief then edged sideways to blast wraiths from the right side.)

SIKA: Well *this* aint gonna work! There's nobody covering the other side!

NIVEA: Fuck.

KASIRA: Stand behind us then, Sika. Just block off the fuckers trying to come round the sides, okay? Leave the front wraiths to us and cover both sides from the middle.

SIKA: On it!

(Sika then hurried in position and swiftly found herself turning from left to right every few seconds as the swelling hoard tried to bypass Kasira and Nivea.)

SIKA: How fucking many are there???

KASIRA: Too fucking many to count!!!

NIVEA: Just keep going!!!

SIKA: Well, fucking... duh!

KASIRA: Ambre, how are you doing back there?

(Ambre whimpered.)

AMBRE: I've killed five! I'm really trying, Kasira. I am! Promise.

KASIRA: I never doubted it for a minute.

(She then growled and lashed out even harder.)

KASIRA: We're doing great, girls.

(She then pulled a pained grimace and yelped.)

NIVEA: I hear that, Kasira. I'm being bit to shit over here too.

KASIRA: I know.

(She gritted her teeth.)

KASIRA: Losing energy, losing blood...

NIVEA: Losing hope?

(Kasira said nothing.)

NIVEA: Yeah... me too.

(She then shook her head. Taking on so many wraiths at once had always been a longshot, but only now was the sheer size of the task they'd set for themselves really setting in. The wraiths were ferocious and there were far too many for four exhausted people to realistically handle; especially without a healer. They'd bitten off way more than they could chew and their chances of winning this one were virtually zero. Despite making this realisation, however, Kasira and Nivea fought on determinedly. Very much expecting this fight to be their last action upon this mortal coil, they were resolved to giving it everything they had.)

KASIRA: Fucking wraiths! Fuck the lot of them!!!

(She then allowed herself a resolved sigh.)

KASIRA: Ambre, darling? How many wraiths do you think there are?

AMBRE: Lots and lots!

KASIRA: Thought so.

NIVEA: Why did you ask her that? Have you had an idea or something?

KASIRA: No. I just wanted to hear her say it one last time.

(Nivea's heart sunk in that moment. It had confirmed that Kasira felt the same as she did. Doomed to die.)

NIVEA: Ma'am?

KASIRA: What?

NIVEA: I just want to say, it's been an honour working with you. I'm blessed to have had you as a friend.

(Kasira laid into the wraiths even harder then puffed out.)

KASIRA: It's been a pleasure, Nivea. You girls meant the world to me. Truly.

(She smiled.)

KASIRA: I love you, Ambre!

AMBRE: Yay!

KASIRA: Right...

AMBRE: I love you too. Lots and lots.

(Kasira's heart broke in that moment and tears started to stream down her face.)

KASIRA: It can't end like this!

NIVEA: Tell that to the fucking wraiths!

KASIRA: Ambre!

AMBRE: Ma'am?

KASIRA: Turn into a gazelle and run!!! Just get where these fuckers aren't. And Sika...

SIKA: I'm staying!

KASIRA: No! Fuck off! Fly away!!! That's an order!

(Sika burst into tears.)

SIKA: No, I won't fuck off! We die together!

KASIRA: Don't be a twat!

SIKA: I'm not! I'm being a fucking soldier!

AMBRE: I'm not going anywhere either!

KASIRA: Ambre...

AMBRE: I'd rather die than be left out!!!

KASIRA: Then you'll die!

AMBRE: I don't care.

(Kasira couldn't help but allow herself a stifled laugh.)

KASIRA: Of all the times for Sika to suddenly become a devoted professional.

NIVEA: And for Ambre to finally disobey and order.

KASIRA: Their timing really, really sucks.

(Nivea laughed.)

NIVEA: Yup.

(She then nodded to affirm her thoughts.)

NIVEA: I'm going all out now, Kasira. Berserker mode. I'm gonna take out as many as I can before my body gives up. I won't speak again.

(Kasira said nothing then nodded.)

KASIRA: Then I'm doing it too.

(With that, they both screamed a primal scream, before embarking on a frenzied final assault. They both had the same thought in mind. Seeing as death was coming, they were going to meet it on their own terms.)

SIKA: I can't handle this many for much longer!!!

AMBRE: I love you, Sika!!!

SIKA: How is that even relevant???

AMBRE: Because we're about to get swamped!!!

SIKA: Fuck!!!

(Suddenly, the doors to the base crashed open and six of the girls from the admin team leapt into action. Their blades flashed at the wraiths and their magic whooshed from their fingers in waves. Best of all, a myriad of heals cascaded down into Kasira, Nivea, Sika and Ambre's exhausted bodies. At the last minute, the cavalry had arrived. Fresh and full of energy, the admin girls set about the wraiths with ruthless savagery. Kasira was dumbfounded. Having been expecting to feel the sharp sting of a thousand fangs only a few moments ago, she was now standing there unscathed without a single wraith within five feet of her. The admin girls had taken all the aggression from the wraiths away from them leaving them nothing to fight.)

KASIRA: Well...

(She shrugged.)

KASIRA: That's handy.

(She then passed out from exhaustion. Too weak to help, Nivea simply collapsed onto her backside. Sika just sunk to her knees. For her part, Ambre skulked backwards then slid down the wall next to Soapy. Barely lucid, Soapy opened one eye.)

SOAPY: Ambre?

AMBRE: Hi, Soapy.

(She sighed with relief.)

AMBRE: I think we won.

(Suddenly, Fluffy appeared at her side. Slowly, he sunk down to his knees then proceeded to gently stroke her hair with a sort of tenderness that seemed ridiculous for such a colossal creature made entirely of rock. Watching it happen, Nivea smirked.)

NIVEA: Where was he when we were fighting, Ambre?

AMBRE: I blocked him from coming. He'd stay too long and freeze.

NIVEA: Oh.

(She smiled.)

NIVEA: You really love him, don't you?

AMBRE: I love *all* my friends.

(Soapy then opened one eye again.)

SOAPY: Some more than others, huh?

AMBRE: Stop saying that.

(She then glanced up and smiled. Brimming with fresh energy, the six admin girls were already in the throes of killing off the last few wraiths.)

AMBRE: And...

(As the last one exploded into dust, she exhaled.)

AMBRE: Done. Can we have a cup of tea now?

(Sika glanced at her and chuckled.)

SIKA: Well, nobody can saw we haven't earned one.

A short while later, barely able to walk for extreme exhaustion, the six ladies of the 123rd wraith containment unit were helped back into the building by the base's admin team and two of the disciplinary board's legal advisors. Leading the operation was Saxa Halen. Her focus was very much on helping the girls recover from their ordeal. As such, she'd ordered the base's airborne folk to heal them all thoroughly, before managing to revive the unconscious duo of Kasira and Cayley. The next step would be to help them warm up, something she was determined to get done as soon as possible.

SAXA HALEN: As quick as you can team. Once they're in the recovery room, make them comfortable then get a fire going in the hearth. Oh, and they'll need tea. Piping hot tea.

Clean clothes too. Especially dry boots.

(She nodded then looked to the weary Kasira as she hung off the shoulder of the girl helping her walk.)

SAXA HALEN: Don't worry. An hour or so in the recovery room and you'll be as right as rain.

KASIRA: What's the recovery room?

SAXA HALEN: It's where our staff go to recuperate after being out in the cold. It's important to heat the body up again and get the blood flowing. Healing can only do so much, you see?

(She sucked her teeth.)

SAXA HALEN: You poor buggers were out there for over three hours? Did you know that?

KASIRA: Really?

(She puffed out.)

KASIRA: Felt like longer.

SAXA HALEN: I'm sure it did. Usually, if someone's not back after thirty minutes, we send out a search party. Do you realise what extreme temperatures like that can do to a person?

(Cayley gave her a sideways glance.)

CAYLEY: We have a fair idea, yes.

SAXA HALEN: You should never have been out there that long. Not even close to it.

KASIRA: Well, we tried to come back, but the general refused to let us in.

NIVEA: He was so determined to keep us out there, I'm amazed he's letting you bring us back in *now*!

KASIRA: Right? And even *more* amazed that he let you help us end the fight.

(Saxa Halen shook her head.)

SAXA HALEN: He didn't *let* us do anything. He had absolutely nothing to do with it. Right now, he's somewhat indisposed, you see?

SIKA: Didn't kill him, did you? Only we'd understand the temptation.

SAXA HALEN: No. Far from it.

(She shook her head contemptuously.)

SAXA HALEN: I won't tell you what happened. It'll be easier to show you.

(She then paced ahead and beckoned everybody forth. Struggling, they all limped into the staff room then Saxa Halen gestured to a side door.)

SAXA HALEN: He's in there. The stock cupboard.

KASIRA: What?

(Saxa Halen looked to the door then raised her voice.)

SAXA HALEN: General?

(The general's terrified voice rose up from the other side of the door.)

GENERAL: Have they killed them all yet? The wraiths haven't come inside the building have they? Speak to me!!!

(Saxa Halen shook her head.)

SAXA HALEN: We're keeping them at bay, sir.

GENERAL: Good! Don't let them in whatever you do!!! I couldn't bear it if anything happened to me!

SAXA HALEN: Right...

(She rolled her eyes.)

SAXA HALEN: I'll come and get you once they're all dead.

GENERAL: The wraiths or those bimbos I sent out there?

SAXA HALEN: The wraiths!

GENERAL: Right. Good, good. Be quick about it.

(She then looked to where Kasira, her subordinates and the entire admin team were silently laughing into their sleeves. Smirking, Saxa Halen then led the girls back out into the corridor.)

SAXA HALEN: So there you have it. He didn't *let* us help you end the fight. He didn't give *anyone* permission to do anything. As soon as the windows smashed, he locked himself in the cupboard, crying like a little girl. So the girls took it upon themselves to head to the changing rooms, gear up then come running.

KASIRA: And just in the nick of time, thank god.

SAXA HALEN: Apparently so.

(She nodded.)

SAXA HALEN: Right then, let's get you all set up in the recovery room, shall we?

SIKA: Sounds good to me.

SOAPY: And me. Not that I *need* to warm up. I don't feel the cold. I just want a nice cup of tea while I get my energy back after doing my sonic boom.

SAXA HALEN: Well, for whatever the reason. It'll do you good.

(Just then, three other members of the admin crew paced back past them, carrying shovels. Ambre was mortified.)

AMBRE: Shovels? You said we were going to be okay!

SAXA HALEN: What?

(She then grinned.)

SAXA HALEN: No, those shovels aren't for graves. They're for digging out the general's ship, so he can fuck off home.

AMBRE: Oh.

(She blushed.)

AMBRE: I'm silly.

SIKA: Yet ridiculous.

AMBRE: Hey!

SIKA: I was going to say ridiculously adorable.

AMBRE: You were?

(She grimaced at Kasira.)

AMBRE: Sika tells lies.

NIVEA: I know, right? It's a good thing she's... never mind. I was going to say it's a good thing she's pretty, but then *I'd* be lying too.

SIKA: Hey!

(Seeing her five weary subordinates slightly perking up already, Kasira allowed herself a smile.)

KASIRA: They're back to their usual selves already. Everything's gonna be okay.

SAXA HALEN: Everything *is* going to be okay, yes. The annoying thing is, there was never any reason for it *not* to be okay. We have protocols for a haze break here. Protocols that should have applied when those wraiths came streaming over. We have enough staff here to have two teams going out for thirty minutes, then recovering for thirty minutes while the other team take over. Two teams, taking it turns to fight then recover. With you six girls, that could have been three teams. That icy causeway from the mainland to here could have been destroyed, the ship freed *and* all the wraiths slain with nobody suffering from exposure. But no. The general decide to take charge. And look what happened.

(She shook her head.)

SAXA HALEN: What a cunt.

KASIRA: And then some.

SAXA HALEN: Honestly, I've never met a bigger cockwomble in all my life.

(She rolled her eyes.)

SAXA HALEN: Still, I can't stay and chat. The girls will take you to the recovery room and see you're all set up. It's nice and cosy in there, you'll love it.

KASIRA: Thank you.

SAXA HALEN: You're most welcome.

(She nodded.)

SAXA HALEN: Right... I'll leave you to it then. I have to free Lady Hasham from the cupboard. The general has the only key and for some reason, the door is being a total bastard. No bugger can shift it. I'll get it sorted though, then she can come and see you. With the general's behaviour as it's been today, I'm sure she'll dismiss all charges against you.

KASIRA: Really?

SAXA HALEN: *I'll* certainly be advising it. So will Miss Taiyang. That general's the only witness and having observed his conduct today, no court in the world would consider *him* a reliable witness. The man's not all there! I mean, for pity's sake, he's currently hiding in a cupboard, pissing in his trousers.

(She then started to head away, shaking her head as she did so.)

SAXA HALEN: I've met some outrageous fuck-nuggets in my time, but let me tell you, that cunt takes the fucking biscuit.

(Delighted to hear Saxa Halen's take on the charges, Kasira exhaled with relief.)

KASIRA: Girls?

AMBRE: Ma'am?

KASIRA: Rest up well in that recovery room. We've got a long trip home later.

(She then exhaled merrily.)

KASIRA: Home.

Some fifty minutes later, having dozed off briefly, Nivea opened her eyes then glanced around at her surroundings. The recovery room was indeed a wonderful place to be. The

sofas were extremely comfortable and a roaring fire was burning away in the fire place, heating up the room. After they day they'd had it felt very much like paradise.

Upon arriving in the recovery room, they'd all been brought their own clothes back from the changing room, and given blankets to laze under. Removing their wet clothes was a most wonderful feeling, and finally getting to dry their feet felt like heaven. Best of all, having changed their outfits they were then given a piping hot cup of tea. It had been most welcome. Naturally, having drunk their beverage, they then sat back and relaxed. It truly was a most satisfying experience. Having thought they were knocking at death's door only a few moments earlier, it almost felt too good to be true.

Revelling in a feeling of great satisfaction, Nivea exhaled then sat up and smile at her unit-mates. Ambre was resting her eyes, Soapy was hypnotised by the flames, Cayley was sitting there quietly, with a contented smile on her face and Kasira was slouching with her head resting on the back of the sofa, staring at the ceiling. Sika, on the other hand, was staring at the wall with a solemn expression on her face.

NIVEA: Sika?

SIKA: What?

NIVEA: You alright?

(Sika sighed.)

SIKA: Yeah.

NIVEA: Well, that's a lie. You look miserable.

SIKA: No, I don't. I'm just thinking, that's all.

NIVEA: About something miserable?

SIKA: About life.

NIVEA: Right...

(Kasira then tilted her head in their direction.)

KASIRA: What about life? How close we came to losing ours?

(Sika half-nodded.)

SIKA: Kinda. Among other things.

(She sighed.)

SIKA: Kasira, ma'am?

KASIRA: Yeah?

SIKA: I'm sorry I blew you fifty million feet into the air again. I can't believe I screwed up that badly again.

KASIRA: Don't worry about it, love.

(She then started to chuckle.)

KASIRA: As I was charging down the hill, fearing I'd get savaged from behind, it actually crossed my mind that I envied your ability to fly. Next thing I knew, I was up there in the sky with the birds, staring down at Ambre from above. The ability to fly suddenly didn't seem so appealing.

(Everyone chuckled except Sika.)

SIKA: So sorry about that.

KASIRA: Sorry for what? I was in dire trouble, Sika. I'd have been savaged if you girls weren't blowing up the wraiths that were right behind me. You were just unlucky, that's all. Missing the wraiths was always a possibility, but it was a risk you had to take.

(She shrugged.)

KASIRA: I mean, you can't hit the target all the time, love, you just can't.

SOAPY: I can. Just saying.

KASIRA: Yes, but Sika can't. And that's okay.

CAYLEY: That's the thing though, Kasira. She *did* hit the target. She got the wraiths she was aiming at, but she fired too hard and the blast followed through into the ground behind your feet.

KASIRA: Then there really is nothing to apologise *for*, is there?

SIKA: Maybe. I just feel like... I dunno. I wish I was better than I am. I can't control my magic like Soapy can. Or Cayley come to that. I wanted accuracy and ended up with too much power.

CAYLEY: It happens, love. You're only young, for crying out loud. Control will come with experience. In the meantime, just accept the level you're at. Like we keep telling you.

SIKA: I guess.

(She sighed.)

SIKA: Ignore me. I'm just a bit disappointed in myself, that's all. I wish... I wish I was a better soldier, I guess.

(Kasira sat up and glowered at her.)

KASIRA: A better soldier? A *better* soldier? Out there just now, I'd given up. I'd accepted my fate. I was ready to die. So I told you to leave. To save yourself! And you refused.

SIKA: I know. I disobeyed direct orders.

KASIRA: You did, yes. But you know what? I'm fucking glad.

SIKA: Glad?

KASIRA: Yes! You fought on until the end, flatly refusing to leave your unit behind. What you did there absolutely heroic. You're more than a soldier, Sika; you're a fucking warrior. The chips were down but you fought on at our side, even though you didn't have to. You could have flown away and left us to it. You could have saved yourself, but you didn't, even though you knew it could mean the end. Honestly, I'm so fucking proud of you right now, I'm tempted to get your name tattooed on my minge.

(An extremely uncomfortable groan then rose up from all her subordinates.)

SIKA: Gross!

CAYLEY: Really, Kasira?

KASIRA: I didn't mean it literally, you idiots. I was just trying to hammer home my point, that's all. Sika really impressed me today. As did Ambre.

AMBRE: Yay! Wait. What?

KASIRA: You refused to abandon the fight too. You're a fucking star, you are.

AMBRE: Aw, you're too nice.

(She shrugged.)

AMBRE: I just didn't want to be left out. And I didn't want to run away knowing you were all in big trouble. I couldn't do that. I'm a good girl.

SIKA: Too cute.

AMBRE: Too patronising!

(She beamed.)

AMBRE: And yet, I love it.

KASIRA: And if you were wondering, or feeling hard done by, Cayley, Soapy and Nivea, you're were bloody brilliant today too. The work you had to go through with healing everyone as well as attacking was immense, Cayley. You never cease to amaze me.

CAYLEY: Aw. Thanks, babe.

KASIRA: As for you, Soapy. Once again, you killed at least eighty percent of the wraiths out there, all by yourself. As a unit, we're so damned lucky to have you, we really are. The haze break, the underground bunker, the new uninhabited island and now here. You've shone like a diamond every time.

(Soapy beamed.)

SOAPY: Yeah, well, I...

SIKA: Aw, crap; she's gonna boast again, isn't she?

SOAPY: Excuse me?

SIKA: What? You were!

KASIRA: Do you mind? I'm trying to make a point here!

SIKA: Right. Sorry.

KASIRA: Nivea.

NIVEA: Ma'am?

KASIRA: You were awesome today.

NIVEA: Yeah?

SIKA: No, she's just being kind. You were actually pretty shit.

(Everyone laughed.)

NIVEA: You're just *begging* for a groping, you are!

KASIRA: Seriously, Nivea; you really were awesome. Not only did you fight like a goddess today, but... having you by my side at what we thought was the end, was extremely comforting. That meant a lot to me, babe. Thank you.

NIVEA: Oddly enough, I know exactly what you mean. It was a unique, shared experience.

KASIRA: It was.

NIVEA: Let's never repeat it though.

KASIRA: Right? It was horrifying.

NIVEA: It was the worst.

KASIRA: Yup.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: What I'm saying is, you girls can go home later feeling extremely proud of yourselves. You had fuck all to prove but, once again, you proved yourselves anyway. Seriously, you girls fucking rule.

NIVEA: Hell, yeah!

SOAPY: And then some.

CAYLEY: Yup. This unit is awesome, that's for sure. Largely because our leader is an absolute...

SIKA: Tyrant?

NIVEA: Diva?

CAYLEY: Legend!

KASIRA: Tyrant? Really, Sika?

(Sika chuckled.)

SIKA: Sorry. You know I can't resist a joke.

KASIRA: No. Nor can your hairdresser!

(Everyone chuckled, except of course, Sika.)

SIKA: Harsh!

KASIRA: Anyway, I just wanted you all to know, how proud of you I am.

(She beamed.)

KASIRA: Now, if you don't mind. I'm gonna take a nap. Being in this room is heavenly, so until they tell us to get out, I'm gonna sit here and chill out like a mother-fucker.

NIVEA: Now that, Kasira, is the best plan you've *ever* come up with.

SOAPY: Yup. I can definitely get behind that one.

CAYLEY: Amen!

AMBRE: Yay!

SIKA: Nap time it is then.

(Just then, much to everyone's absolute annoyance, Saxa Halen entered the room and completely and utterly shattered their plans.)

SAXA HALEN: Sorry, ladies, we've just rescued the soldiers from the ship and they're freezing cold. Their heater gave up and they were trapped inside in the cold. We're going to need this room.

SIKA: It's occupied!

SAXA HALEN: Please. You've been in here for an hour. With all the healing you've had, plus the resting time, you should be fine. Those poor boys need it more.

(Kasira and Cayley shared a sorrowful glance.)

KASIRA: So much for our nap.

CAYLEY: Right.

(With that, they all slowly climbed to their feet then trudged towards the door.)

SAXA HALEN: Sorry. I'd have let you stay in there longer if it wasn't important.

KASIRA: No, no. It's fine. If they're anywhere near as cold as we were, they definitely need it.

SAXA HALEN: Thank you for understanding.

(She then led them all out in the corridor and headed towards the staff room.)

SAXA HALEN: You'll be warm enough in the staff room. It's just a bit cold in this corridor because the girls aren't quite finished replacing the windows.

SIKA: Wow, really? They've dug out a ship and now they're replacing windows?

SAXA HALEN: This is an important military installation, young lady. We have people with *all* kinds of talents here.

SIKA: Yeah... a bit like *our* unit.

SAXA HALEN: Oh?

SIKA: Cayley makes great cakes, I'm the funny one, Kasira is an excellent beautician and Nivea has mastered seventeen different types of sexual perversion.

NIVEA: Six of which I'll be practicing on Sika later for being a cheeky gob-shite.

SIKA: You keep away from me, weirdo.

SAXA HALEN: Right...

(She then flinched at the sight of the men from the ship being led towards them.)

SAXA HALEN: Ooh, superb. Stick around for this, girls; I have a feeling you might enjoy this.

(With a grin she then paced towards the oncoming ensemble of male soldiers.)

SAXA HALEN: Ah, gentlemen. Hello there. I wonder if you'd indulge me for a moment.

(The general's second in command stepped forth.)

MAJOR: How can we be of assistance?

SAXA HALEN: I just wondered if you'd like to come and collect your general.

MAJOR: Collect him?

SAXA HALEN: You'll see.

(She nodded towards the staff room.)

SAXA HALEN: He's just through here.

(With that, she paced forth through the staff room door, followed by the male soldiers.

Wearing devilish smirks, Kasira and all her crew, hurried after them. Once inside the room, Saxa Halen stopped by the cupboard door and smiled.)

SAXA HALEN: Here.

MAJOR: What? Where?

SAXA HALEN: Here!

(She then turned to face the cupboard door.)

SAXA HALEN: It's okay, general. You can come out now. We've killed all the wraiths for you. There's nothing to be afraid of.

(A small voice then rose up from behind the door.)

GENERAL: Are you sure?

SAXA HALEN: Yes. It's perfectly safe. Come on, out you pop.

GENERAL: Well... alright then.

(The door then slowly unlocked and the general stuck his head out.)

GENERAL: Killed them all, did you? And you're certain about that?

SAXA HALEN: Absolutely.

(Looking mightily relieved, the general then stepped out and drew a sigh of relief.)

GENERAL: Blimey, that was...

(He then froze in horror at the sight before him. His entire crew were staring back at him with a mix of amusement, embarrassment and disdain etched upon their brows. Gaping in disbelief for a moment, he whimpered then suddenly stood tall.)

GENERAL: Excellent. That's that room cleared of those pesky wraiths! Handled it all by myself, I did.

SAXA HALEN: That's a stock cupboard, dear; there were no wraiths in there.

GENERAL: Excuse me??? How dare you question the word of a general???

(He then spotted Kasira and her subordinates, standing aside his men, silently laughing into their hands; tears streaming down their faces.)

GENERAL: What the...

(He growled.)

GENERAL: Hey!

(He shook his fist.)

GENERAL: Laugh at me, will you???

(He glowered at his second in command then pointed to Kasira and her team.)

GENERAL: Arrest them! All six of them!!!

KASIRA: What? Why???

SIKA: What for?

NIVEA: Yeah!

CAYLEY: Why the hell would you arrest us?

GENERAL: Why? Why???

(He sneered.)

GENERAL: Not only did you do a half-arsed job killing those wraiths, but you blew out every window in this building. That's criminal damage!!! Not only that, but in doing so, you put civilian lives in danger!

SAXA HALEN: What civilians?

GENERAL: You lot. Court staff and all that bollocks.

SAXA HALEN: We're all serving soldiers!

GENERAL: Did I ask your opinion?

SAXA HALEN: No, but...

GENERAL: Be quiet then!

(He growled.)

GENERAL: What are you waiting for men? Arrest them! That's an order.

(Not about to disobey a direct order, several of his men stepped among the girls and proceeded to place them in handcuffs.)

GENERAL: Ha! Not so funny now, are you?

AMBRE: Why is he being such a big fat meany, Kasira?

KASIRA: I don't know; maybe he got bullied at school.

NIVEA: He's on a power trip.

SIKA: Overcompensating for his tiny...

GENERAL: Don't you dare finish this sentence.

KASIRA: General, this is an outrage and you know it.

GENERAL: Do I?

KASIRA: We did nothing wrong. You asked us to kill the wraiths and we did. And almost died doing so!

CAYLEY: Why would you arrest us for that???

(An angry female voice then rose up from behind them.)

LADY HASHAM: Unhand those girls, this instant.

(One of the male soldiers grimaced.)

ROY: The general said...

LADY HASHAM: Then he can *unsay* it, can't he?

(The general rolled his eyes.)

GENERAL: Not you again. Who let you out?

SAXA HALEN: I did! Twenty minutes ago. And I filled her in on everything that's happened today.

GENERAL: Yeah? I'll fill *you* in in a minute!

LADY HASHAM: Enough!

(She shook her head.)

LADY HASHAM: Why would you arrest these girls? Just, why?

GENERAL: That's none of your business.

LADY HASHAM: Humour me!

GENERAL: Fine.

(He nodded.)

GENERAL: They wrecked the building and put people's lives in danger. Gross misconduct, if ever I saw it.

KASIRA: We were just doing the job *you* sent us out to do!

SIKA: A job that almost killed us!

CAYLEY: A job that could have been done a hell of a lot faster and a hell of a lot more efficiently if *you* weren't such a quivering coward!

GENERAL: Coward??? Coward??? How dare you? This is an outrage! You're going to do time in the brig for this. Hard labour! And don't think that when it's over you can go back to braiding each other's hair again, because I'm going to see to it you're all split up into different units and sent to the nastiest hell holes the army can offer! I'm also going to be excessively mean to you on the ship, all the way from here to the brig! And it's a bloody long way!

LADY HASHAM: Oh, good god. You are such a child!

GENERAL: Do you want to go back in the cupboard again???

LADY HASHAM: Are you serious right now?

GENERAL: Yes! I don't have to take all this crap from some feeble administrator!

LADY HASHAM: I'm a judge.

GENERAL: Some feeble *legal* administrator then! I'm a general, now show me some respect.

(Lady Hasham gave a stifled laugh.)

LADY HASHAM: You have no idea who I am, do you? Or indeed who my husband is.

GENERAL: I don't care if he's the King of Fish-land.

LADY HASHAM: He isn't. He's Major...

GENERAL: Major? I'm a fucking general! I went way past major years ago.

LADY HASHAM: Please, allow me to finish.

GENERAL: Why should I?

LADY HASHAM: Because if my husband, Major-General Hasham was here, he'd fucking insist on it!

GENERAL: Yes well...

(His jaw then dropped and a chill ran down his spine.)

GENERAL: Did you say... Major-General?

(By now, his entire crew had looked away, grimacing uncomfortably. Kasira and her team, on the other hand, were all grinning at him fiendishly.)

LADY HASHAM: Correct, General. I did. One rank below the supreme commander, and one of only four regional Major-General's in the entire army.

GENERAL: Right...

LADY HASHAM: And as I'm sure you know, by law, a Major-General and his wife, share power of attorney.

(The general whimpered.)

GENERAL: Actually, I *didn't* know that.

LADY HASHAM: Well, now you do.

(She nodded.)

LADY HASHAM: I've listened to several reports from my staff here since my illegal incarceration...

GENERAL: About that...

LADY HASHAM: Don't interrupt!

GENERAL: Yes, ma'am.

LADY HASHAM: As I was saying, I've had several reports from the staff here regarding events today and quite frankly I'm horrified.

(She glanced towards Saxa Halen.)

LADY HASHAM: Saxa Halen, if you wouldn't mind assisting me here, I think the general might need help grasping the gravity of his situation.

SAXA HALEN: Gladly.

LADY HASHAM: To begin with, something I was going to raise with you after the trial. You transported six female soldiers here in a ship with an all-male crew. Female soldiers can only legally be transported on a ship with a majority *female* crew.

SAXA HALEN: A gross dereliction of duty.

GENERAL: But...

LADY HASHAM: Don't interrupt! And besides, that was mild compared to the rest of it. I'm just *getting* to the good stuff.

GENERAL: Oh boy.

LADY HASHAM: First, you assumed command from a superior officer, me.

SAXA HALEN: Mutiny.

LADY HASHAM: Then you locked me in a cupboard.

SAXA HALEN: False imprisonment.

LADY HASHAM: You then ignored protocols for a wraith infestation.

SAXA HALEN: Gross misconduct.

LADY HASHAM: You then sent a team of defendants out to do the local unit's job.

SAXA HALEN: Misuse of powers.

LADY HASHAM: During their battle with the wraiths, you then flatly refused to let them re-enter the base, despite the fact they'd been outside in freezing conditions for hours.

SAXA HALEN: Attempted murder.

LADY HASHAM: You then hid in a cupboard and ordered the rest of the staff to kill the wraiths for you.

SAXA HALEN: Criminal cowardice.

LADY HASHAM: Shall I go on, or would you like the charges in writing?

(The general whimpered.)

GENERAL: Um... did I mention I was sorry?

LADY HASHAM: No. You didn't.

GENERAL: I see.

(He then sunk to his knees and burst into tears.)

GENERAL: I'm sorry! Please!!! Have mercy on me. I had a truly traumatic childhood. My father was eaten alive right in front of me. I made it through the academy by hiding in trees while my training partners did all the work. And I only made it through the ranks because I joined the military jazz band and didn't have to fight. I made it to captain then they gave me a unit to run, so I made my subordinates do all the fighting. I'm terrified of wraiths, you see? Please, have a heart! I'm a victim, don't you see? A victim of these awful wraiths. I need counselling, not punishment. I beg you.

(Lady Hasham smiled sympathetically.)

LADY HASHAM: I had no idea. Please. Stand up.

(The general nervously climbed to his feet.)

GENERAL: Ma'am. I throw myself at your mercy. Please try to understand.

LADY HASHAM: I do understand. Your fear of wraiths is terrible. Sadly for you, however, it doesn't excuse the fact you're an arrogant, pig-headed cunt. I'll see to it you're busted all the way back down to private as soon as you leave the brig, many years from now!

GENERAL: No!!!

LADY HASHAM: Major?

MAJOR: Ma'am!

LADY HASHAM: Arrest this embarrassing shit show.

MAJOR: Gladly!

LADY HASHAM: Lock him up in the ship then take him to the brig to await trial!

GENERAL: But, please! You can't!!!

LADY HASHAM: Yes, I can.

GENERAL: Okay, but don't!

LADY HASHAM: Just get out of my sight.

(She then turned her back on him and encouraged everyone else to do the same.)

GENERAL: No, not the exit of shame!!!

MAJOR: Afraid so, sunshine. Now let's get you back to the ship.

LADY HASHAM: You do that, major. Lock him up then come back here. Once my girls have fixed the ship's heater and your boys have warmed up a bit, you can take these fine young ladies back home.

(She nodded.)

LADY HASHAM: All the charges against them are dropped. Take them back to their base and make sure the people occupying it leave immediately.

MAJOR: Ma'am!

(He then dragged the crying general out of the door. Left behind, Lady Hasham turned to face Kasira then smiled.)

LADY HASHAM: By law, you can only travel back with a female majority crew. Therefore I'm going to send three of my girls with you. I'll just swear you all in as temporary crew members, then you're good to go. Don't worry, you won't be asked to do any crewman duties.

KASIRA: Thank you, ma'am.

LADY HASHAM: You're very welcome.

(She sighed.)

LADY HASHAM: I'm sorry you and your team had to go through all that today.

KASIRA: Thank you, ma'am. I won't lie. It was hell.

LADY HASHAM: I heard. And yet, somehow, despite all the odds, you managed to kill all but a hundred of the wraiths *before* my team joined in.

SIKA: We're awesome, that's why.

SOAPY: It wasn't our first rodeo.

LADY HASHAM: So I gather. You're the female crew who cleared an enormous haze break in a single evening, are you not?

CAYLEY: We are indeed.

KASIRA: Then we had to clear a massive underground infestation before being dumped on an abandoned island and forced to clear *that* of thousands of wraiths as well.

AMBRE: Wraith's get everywhere.

KASIRA: Yup. We're kinda cursed. This is our fourth time.

LADY HASHAM: And you came up trumps once again.

(She nodded.)

LADY HASHAM: I'm impressed. And believe me when I say this. Your heroics today won't go unrewarded.

AMBRE: I know. Cayley says we can have chocolate cake when get home.

LADY HASHAM: I was thinking of something a little more substantial than that, but chocolate cake is nothing to be sniffed at either.

AMBRE: It is. I always sniff mine. It smells really, really nice.

LADY HASHAM: Right...

(She grimaced at Kasira.)

LADY HASHAM: Has she got concussion?

AMBRE: Why? Did I say something silly again?

LADY HASHAM: Well...

(Ambre hung her head.)

AMBRE: I can't help it. I'm not intelligent like everyone else.

LADY HASHAM: I see.

(She smiled.)

LADY HASHAM: Who cares? You seem like a lovely girl, not to mention an excellent soldier.

AMBRE: I am?

LADY HASHAM: Well you must be. Any unit that can handle massive wraith infestations, must be rock solid with no weak links whatsoever, I'd assume.

KASIRA: That's right. Every single one of these girls is a superb soldier, a wonderful human being and an even better friend. That's why our unit works so well.

(She smiled.)

KASIRA: They're also a bunch of lunatics. It's never dull.

(Lady Hasham laughed.)

LADY HASHAM: I'll bet.

(She nodded.)

LADY HASHAM: Okay, here's what's going to happen. As you know, you'll travel back on the general's ship. And as you literally just heard, I've given an order for your base's occupiers to hand it back *immediately*. Just make sure you report it to *me* if they try anything funny. You know what men are like. Demanding blow jobs in return for doing things they're meant to do anyway.

KASIRA: We're familiar with it.

LADY HASHAM: I'll also order the major to keep an eye on his men. If any of those crewman lay a finger on you, I want to know about it.

KASIRA: Yes, ma'am.

NIVEA: What if the finger they lay on us... isn't uninvited?

(Kasira winced.)

KASIRA: Seriously, Nivea?

NIVEA: I like men!

CAYLEY: We know!

SIKA: How could we not?

AMBRE: She likes boobs too.

SOAPY: Right? I'm more worried about *her* groping me than the crewmen!

KASIRA: Nobody's going to grope anybody!

(She looked at Nivea.)

KASIRA: Understood?

(Nivea sighed despondently.)

NIVEA: Yeah... alright.

LADY HASHAM: Excellent.

(She smiled.)

LADY HASHAM: Now, if you'll excuse us, Saxa Halen and I will just escort these young men to the recovery room. Feel free to wait here and help yourselves to tea and biscuits.

SIKA: Score!

KASIRA: She means thank you.

SIKA: Yeah. Sorry.

LADY HASHAM: It's quite alright, dear.

(She nodded.)

LADY HASHAM: If I don't see you again before you leave, have a safe trip home, ladies. And thanks again for everything you did for us. Like I said, it won't go unrewarded.

KASIRA: Thank you, ma'am.

LADY HASHAM: You're most welcome.

(She nodded.)

LADY HASHAM: Now, if you'll excuse me...

(With that, she paced away towards the staff room exit, with Saxa Halen in tow. Having watched them go, Kasira and Cayley took a seat while the others made a beeline for the biscuit tin. Watching them slap each other's hands as they tried to reach into the tin at the same time, Kasira couldn't help but smile. Their nightmare was over and the moment they'd thought they might not live to see was only a short while away. At last, they'd be going home.)

Two weeks later.

It was a gloriously warm weekend morning on New Capsway Island and the six members of the 123rd Wraith Containment Unit were enjoying a very lazy start to the day. Ambre was sitting at the dining room table, drawing a picture, while Nivea was lazing on the sofa, complaining that it was too hot and that her goggles were making her cheeks sweat. The others were out in the courtyard. Soapy was sitting in the shady corner, reading a book about the army's most ruthless wraith killers, while Sika, Cayley and Kasira sunbathed naked on hammocks before her. They'd had a busy few weeks since returning from Vallae Island, and this was the first chance they'd had to truly relax. Kasira and Cayley were determined to make the most of it. Sika, on the other hand, wasn't done complaining. She'd been miffed about events upon their return and wasn't about to let them go and time soon.

SIKA: Stupid men! Lazy, they are! All that time they spent occupying our base and they didn't even bother fixing that gaping hole in the wall. As for the mess... well. My room looked like a bomb hit it!

CAYLEY: Your room *always* looks like a bomb hit it!

SIKA: Then you can understand my outrage. Even *I* thought it was a mess!

(She shook her head.)

SIKA: After all our traumas in that silly snowed-up hell hole, I just wanted to get back here and relax. Two days it took us to clean up their mess. Two days! Men live like pigs.

(Soapy smirked.)

SOAPY: That's what this base would look like if there was six of you in it, Sika.

SIKA: Hey!

CAYLEY: No, she's right. I spend half my day cleaning up after you. You're a very messy person.

SOAPY: Basically a dude.

(Sika furrowed her brow.)

SIKA: Stop picking on me. This isn't about me! All I'm saying is, after what we went through, we should been able to come back here and relax. It wasn't much to ask. Instead we had to rebuild that wall. Then, when it fell back down again in the night, we had to get professionals in to do it. It was incredibly stressful!

KASIRA: It was, yes. But it's done now, so we can relax.

SIKA: Finally.

KASIRA: Sika?

SIKA: Yes?

KASIRA: I said we can relax.

SIKA: I know.

KASIRA: Then why won't you?

SIKA: What?

KASIRA: You heard. You're wasting valuable time when you could be relaxing, by stressing about the fact you couldn't relax two weeks ago!

SOAPY: Which is really, really dumb, by the way.

CAYLEY: And then some.

(Sika furrowed her brow.)

SIKA: That's a bit harsh.

CAYLEY: Right...

SIKA: Ok, fine. Have it your way. I'll relax then.

(She then folded her arms and pouted bitterly.)

KASIRA: Sika?

SIKA: What?

KASIRA: Sitting there stewing isn't relaxing!

SIKA: I'll relax how *I* want to relax!

(Cayley rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: Sika. Just close your eyes, listen to the sea and think about sexy, naked men or something.

(Sika glanced at her emotionlessly.)

SIKA: Hmm. You might be onto something there. I think I might just do that.

(She then laid her head back and exhaled, before nestling her back into the hammock.)

SIKA: Ooh, comfy.

(A wry smile then appeared on her face.)

SIKA: Is there a limit to how *many* naked men?

KASIRA: It's your fantasy, love. That said, there should *never* be a limit on that!

CAYLEY: Right?

(The three of them shared a devious chuckle, forcing an eye roll from Soapy.)

SOAPY: I'm going inside.

(As she headed back inside the base, Sika took a deep, soothing breath then smiled.)

SIKA: I'm picturing the perfect man, right now.

CAYLEY: Mute and obedient?

SIKA: Of course!

(She beamed.)

SIKA: And he has a butt to die for. You can't beat a tight, firm backside.

CAYLEY: It's his upper arms that do it for me. The sexy curves of his biceps.

KASIRA: Both great things, but for me it's all about the torso.

(She exhaled.)

KASIRA: A big, muscly torso.

(Sika and Cayley both nodded gleefully.)

SIKA: Like those strippers.

KASIRA: Exactly.

SIKA: I was so glad we managed to find time to go to that show.

CAYLEY: Right? I really didn't want to miss that.

KASIRA: And we were never going to. Yes, we had a shit load of busy work to do, but I was always going to make sure we found time to see that.

CAYLEY: And that's why we say you're the best boss ever.

SIKA: Yup.

(She chuckled.)

SIKA: *I also* say it because when you're as prone to getting into bother as I am, a little arse-kissing goes a long, long way.

(They all chuckled for a moment then Sika exhaled.)

SIKA: That was a great night out.

KASIRA: Yeah...

(She grimaced.)

KASIRA: Though I can't say I really enjoyed the funny looks we got when we entered the venue.

CAYLEY: No, that *was* a little disconcerting.

KASIRA: Right? We were the only women in there.

SIKA: We should have seen that coming really. The venue's called Peter's Parlour and has two cowboy's hugging on its logo.

KASIRA: Right?

(She shrugged.)

KASIRA: Still... the show was awesome.

SIKA: It really was.

CAYLEY: Yup.

SIKA: Plus we had the added joy of watching Nivea try to chat up the strippers afterwards, only to get shot down in flames.

KASIRA: Yeah... what the hell was she thinking?

CAYLEY: I know. She really does live in hope, that woman. Those guys quite clearly had no interest in women whatsoever, and yet off she went.

KASIRA: Yup.

SIKA: And she wonders why we all mocked her.

KASIRA: Yes, well, I kind of wish we hadn't now.

(She furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: Because of our mocking, I had to spend ten minutes explaining what a homosexual is to Ambre. That was no fun at all. As soon as I told her it was someone who likes to do things of a sexual nature to someone of their own gender, she looked straight at Nivea.

(She shook her head.)

KASIRA: So I had explain it all over again.

(She shrugged.)

KASIRA: Still... fun night.

SIKA: It was. Nothing beats a night out with your friends watching naked men prance about.
(She beamed.)

SIKA: I'm picturing them now, prancing about on the beach naked. Except in my fantasy, they like women. Especially brunette, airborne women with perfectly proportioned bodies like me. In fact, only me.

CAYLEY: Wow.

SIKA: What? It's *my* fantasy; they can have whatever traits I *want* them to have.

KASIRA: She's right. In your own fantasy, the world is entirely yours to shape however you want.

(Cayley gave a stifled laugh.)

CAYLEY: Well, you say that. My old room-mate at the academy told me *her* fantasy once. She went into great detail explaining her perfect man. Tall, nice tan, long hair, rippling biceps. Sparkling blue eyes, you know? She spelled it out for me so vividly. So I told her, he sounds perfect. And she said...

(She chuckled.)

CAYLEY: Not really, he doesn't fancy me!

(Sika and Kasira laughed.)

CAYLEY: Right? I told her, for pity's sake, girl; it's *your* fantasy! Why would make it so he's not attracted to you?

(She shook a despairing head.)

CAYLEY: She said, she didn't want to get her hopes up. Like he was real!!! Honestly, I gave up at that point. There's no hope for some people.

(Kasira giggled.)

KASIRA: That's crazy.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: But then so is deluding ourselves that the perfect man exists in the first place. He doesn't. In the end, like everyone else in the entire world, we'll have to settle for someone who's *reasonably* compatible with our needs, and try not to get driven crazy by their flaws.

SIKA: True... but *some* things are non-negotiable. The cute butt for example.

CAYLEY: A nice smile. He has to have that or it's a deal breaker.

KASIRA: For me, he has to be tall.

(She chuckled.)

KASIRA: A tiny penis is out of the question too.

CAYLEY: Right?

SIKA: Definitely.

(She mused to herself.)

SIKA: Ideally, and I mean going back to the realms of fantasy again, he'd have *two* penises.

(Cayley and Kasira gave each other a troubled glance.)

SIKA: He could pleasure both our holes then. Nivea says...

KASIRA: Right, well, here endeth *that* conversation.

CAYLEY: Yup! Let's talk about what we're having for lunch.

KASIRA: Agreed! Anything but what *Sika* was about to talk about.

SIKA: But Nivea says, a second in the bum is double the fun. And she ought to know, she's had more men than General Forest.

KASIRA: No. Enough, Sika. We're not discussing this anymore. You've completely killed that conversation.

CAYLEY: Although we'd be remiss if we didn't remind you that Nivea is a very strange person, and what's good for her, probably isn't good for the rest of womankind.

KASIRA: Right?

SIKA: So you don't recommend it then?

KASIRA: You can do whatever you like with *whoever* you like in your free time, love, but no, I wouldn't recommend *anything* Nivea suggests for the bedroom.

CAYLEY: Exactly. Go down that road and you could well end up hog-tied to the kitchen table with an orange in your mouth and a cucumber in the *other* end.

(Sika shuddered.)

SIKA: Why the hell would...

KASIRA: Because she's very kinky.

SIKA: Right... I'll give her advice a miss then.

CAYLEY: If you've got any savvy, yes; you will.

(Just then, the gate to the base crashed open and Eksi rushed in with an extremely urgent look on her face. At once, Cayley, Kasira and Sika covered their nakedness and bellowed at her.)

KASIRA: Shut the gate!!!

CAYLEY: Shut it!!!

SIKA: Quick!!!

(Eksi hurriedly slammed the gate behind her then looked to Kasira.)

EKSI: VIP!!!

KASIRA: What?

EKSI: At the academy. I got Lycia to take over the booth while I ran back here to warn you. He's going to meet the staff briefly then come here!

KASIRA: Who?

EKSI: The VIP! Major-General Hasham!!!

(Silence ensued for a moment then Kasira, Cayley and Sika all screamed before leaping from their hammocks and racing indoors. Left behind, Eksi rolled her eyes then kicked the ground.)

EKSI: Right... no, no. Please. Don't mention it, Kasira. You're very welcome.

(She then skulked back out of the gate again. She was leaving behind a base filled with panicking soldiers. The Major-General could well take an hour to get there, but on the other hand, he could well be there in ten minutes. Far from ready to see him, they all set about preparing themselves in a blinding hurry. Kasira, Cayley and Sika hurried to their rooms to get dressed, Ambre set about putting her crayons away and Nivea and Soapy frantically set about brushing their hair. A visit from a Major-General was a big deal and they knew that everything had to be perfect. They'd have to be in immaculately smart uniforms without a hair out of place, and the base would have to be as clean as a whistle. Mercifully, having already done the housework the night before, making everything perfect wouldn't be a difficult task. Depending on how long it took their VIP guest to arrive, however, getting everything perfect in time would be touch and go. Well aware of this, Nivea was in no mood for jokes.)

NIVEA: Soapy?

SOAPY: What?

NIVEA: No fucking about now. Is my hair right?

SOAPY: Yup. It's the *only* right thing about you though.

NIVEA: You'll pay for that later.

SOAPY: Shit!

(Nivea then looked to where Ambre was stashing her crayons in the cupboard.)

NIVEA: Ambre, get your uniform on. Come on. Chop, chop. Put it on then I'll help you with your hair.

AMBRE: Can't I do my hair *first*?

NIVEA: No. You know the drill. Uniform first, hair then make-up.

AMBRE: Then why are you two doing your hair? You're not in uniform either!

(Soapy and Nivea looked to one another then screeched.)

NIVEA: Our uniforms!

SOAPY: Shit!

(They then charged from the room in a blind panic. Left alone, Ambre shrugged to herself then followed their example by screaming then bolting out of the door. The base's living room then remained empty and silent for a full ten minutes until Kasira came rushing back in, desperate to tidy anything up that looked out of place.)

KASIRA: Crayons... no. Sika's usual mess... nothing? Wow. Ambre's shoes?

(She flinched.)

KASIRA: She put them away for once. Wow.

(Just then, Cayley came marching in with Nivea.)

KASIRA: Nice work, you two; you look perfect.

NIVEA: Right back at you, ma'am.

CAYLEY: It's amazing how quickly we can get ready when we need to, isn't it?

KASIRA: Yes, but never let a man know that.

CAYLEY: Right?

(Just then, Ambre strode in wearing a bikini and wellington boots.)

KASIRA: What the hell, Ambre?

(Ambre looked to them all in horror for a moment then charged back out again.)

AMBRE: Sika!!! Why???

(Kasira hung her head.)

KASIRA: I might have known.

(A few seconds later, Sika walked in, chuckling heartily.)

SIKA: Priceless! I told her the big guy was coming to check out our preparedness for a soggy day underfoot in the tropics. A bikini and wellie boots day.

(Nivea smirked.)

NIVEA: Preparedness? Is that another example of your ingenious vocabulary? Another word only *you* know about?

CAYLEY: Actually, Nivea, preparedness *is* a word.

NIVEA: It is? Shit!

SIKA: Ha!

(Beaming with delight she looked to Kasira and her face dropped. Kasira was glowering at her bitterly.)

SIKA: I'll just go and help Ambre.

(She then sprinted back out of the room again, leaving Kasira shaking her head.)

KASIRA: I despair of that girl, I really do.

Some twenty minutes later, after a somewhat nervous wait, the gates to the compound opened and Eksi stepped inside, escorting Major-General Hasham and his good wife on their visit.

With a smile, she gestured to the front door then nodded.

EKSI: Please. The base is just through that door.

MAJOR- GENERAL: Why, thank you, young lady.

LADY HASHAM: Thank you, dear.

(She smiled.)

LADY HASHAM: And I apologise once again for mistaking you for your sister.

EKSI: It's fine, ma'am. You're not the first. We look very much alike.

LADY HASHAM: Yes, you do.

(Eksi nodded.)

EKSI: Enjoy your visit. I'll stay here while I await your return.

LADY HASHAM: Very well.

(The two VIP guests then headed through the door. Strolling into the base, they were greeted by the sight of its six inhabitants standing to attention, in a line against the wall, saluting.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Blimey. That was unexpected. Do you stand there all day, every day, just in case a VIP happens to pop in?

(Kasira replied in her most professional voice.)

KASIRA: No, sir! We were warned of your arrival, and when he heard the gate we arranged ourselves accordingly.

MAJOR-GENERAL: How professional.

(He nodded.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: But way too formal for me. Stand at ease, everyone.

(At once, they all relaxed their stances.)

LADY HASHAM: You must be sweating buckets in those uniforms. It's extremely hot today.

(Ambre beamed.)

AMBRE: It's extremely hot *every* day, ma'am. Just how I like it.

LADY HASHAM: Then being in the frozen north must have been hell for you, I'd wager.

AMBRE: It was horrible.

LADY HASHAM: Of course.

(She then looked to husband.)

LADY HASHAM: Would you like to get the formalities out of the way, dear? They must be aching to change back into their everyday wear.

MAJOR-GENERAL: Sounds good to me. We'll get the formalities done, you can all get changed then we can have a nice cup of tea. How's that?

KASIRA: Perfect, sir. Thank you.

MAJOR-GENERAL: Right...

(He then stepped up to the end of the line where Soapy was standing.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Name and rank, please, young lady.

SOAPY: Captain Soapy Candiru, sir.

MAJOR-GENERAL: Candiru, eh?

(He grimaced.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Really? Candiru? I've heard a few horror stories about those little buggers.

(Soapy winced. Right now, she was praying he didn't elaborate. Alas, it was not to be her day.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Yes, yes... Candiru. Also known as the penis fish. They've been known to swim inside human genitals and devour them from within, you know?

(At once, her five unit-mates had to force their mouths shut. Soapy absolutely hated being called a fish, so for him to reveal that her family were named after one was glorious. And having been told about the fish's pseudonym and vulgar trait, they couldn't wait to give her a hard time over it.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: What's going on? Why are you all smirking like that?

(He looked to Sika.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Well?

SIKA: We're not smirking, we're smiling, sir. It's nice to learn new things, you see? And we didn't know that about a Candiru. So, thank you. Thank you very much indeed. You have no idea how grateful we are to you for sharing that with us.

(She smirked at Soapy.)

SIKA: No idea at all.

(Lady Hasham rolled her eyes sarcastically.)

LADY HASHAM: Nice work, darling. Thank you for telling everyone about that. I'm sure they'll all be especially careful not to tease the poor girl about it remorselessly for the rest of her life. Unit-mates are kind like that.

(The Major-General grimaced.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Right. I see. Whoops.

(He flinched.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Oh, well, what's done is done.

(He then checked his notes.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Soapy... hmm... it says here, you've been ear-marked as a potential leader someday. Excellent skill, power and accuracy, I'm informed. And as a survivor of four major wraith infestations at the age of what, 16?

SOAPY: Almost.

MAJOR-GENERAL: The future is bright for you, Brigadier.

SOAPY: Brigadier?

MAJOR-GENERAL: Congratulations on your promotion.

SOAPY: Thank you, sir.

(He then took a step to the side where Sika was standing.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Name and rank, please.

SIKA: Corporal Sika Owsley, sir.

MAJOR-GENERAL: Nice to meet you.

(He then checked his notes.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Your leader wrote in her report on the incident at Vallae Island, that you proved yourself to be, beyond any doubt, a brave and dedicated warrior.

(Sika beamed.)

SIKA: Well, you know. I've always been pretty awesome; a cut above, *some* would say. It just takes people a while to notice. I think they're dazzled by my brilliance at first, you see? Absolutely confounded by it, so it doesn't register on them right away. After a while though, they begin to realise I'm pretty special. Yeah, I truly am...

MAJOR-GENERAL: Her report also said you were prone to delusions of grandeur, so I'm going to stop you there.

SIKA: Harsh!

(She looked to Kasira.)

SIKA: Why would you write that?

MAJOR-GENERAL: She didn't. It was radiating from you in waves and I just wanted you to shut up.

(Sika shrunk on the spot.)

SIKA: Right. Sorry. Sorry, sir.

MAJOR-GENERAL: That's quite alright, Sergeant.

SIKA: Sergeant?

MAJOR-GENERAL: Yes! Congratulations.

(Sika clenched a triumphant fist.)

SIKA: Yes!

(The major general then took another step to the side.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Name and rank, please?

NIVEA: Captain Nivea Visage, sir.

MAJOR-GENERAL: Thank you.

(He looked to his notes again.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Reliable and virtually fearless, it says here. Remained steadfastly at your leader's side during what looked like a case of certain death.

NIVEA: Yes, sir. But then so did everyone else. We were *all* there. As a unit; fighting together at the end.

MAJOR-GENERAL: I see. Modest.

(He gave Sika a condescending glance.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: I like that.

NIVEA: Thank you, sir.

MAJOR-GENERAL: No, no. Thank *you*, Brigadier. Congratulations on your promotion.

NIVEA: Thank you.

(The general then took one step to his side.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: This is where I'd normally ask for your name and rank, but there's absolutely no need this time, is there, Miss Solaire?

(Ambre looked to him with wide-eyes and said nothing. She was trembling all over. Having seen her three unit-mates all promoted, she was excited that it might happen to her as well. Such a thing would further cement her place as valuable member of society.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Are you okay? You look terrified?

AMBRE: Nervous...

MAJOR-GENERAL: I see. Well don't be.

(He smiled.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: You see, I've heard all about *you*, young lady. You're famous. Tales of you have been spreading around the high-command, my dear. You're the girl the army tried to throw away. The girl expected to become nothing but wraith food. The girl who then cast aside all her difficulties and went on to excel as a soldier, mastering skills with her Saxum that were hitherto unheard of. Nay, hitherto incomprehensible. You, young lady, are the pride of your regiment.

(He glanced over his shoulder at his wife.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Um... why are tears streaming down her face?

LADY HASHAM: I have no idea.

AMBRE: Happy!

MAJOR-GENERAL: What?

KASIRA: If I may, sir...

MAJOR-GENERAL: You may.

KASIRA: She lives in constant fear of rejection; of being considered not good enough. She's been told she's useless all her life, you see? That she doesn't matter. So every time a higher up comes and compliments her for her excellent work, she feels kind of overwhelmed.

You're not just saying well done, you're vindicating her as a person. Someone who matters.

MAJOR-GENERAL: I see.

(He nodded then glanced up and down the line.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: So why are the rest of you crying?

KASIRA: Ambre's happiness is our happiness, sir.

MAJOR-GENERAL: Right...

(He rolled his eyes.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Must be a woman thing.

LADY HASHAM: Just do the formalities, dear; nobody wants to hear your opinion.

MAJOR-GENERAL: Quite. Yes.

(He nodded.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Well, Ambre. You, my dear, have nothing left to prove. You're now a sergeant. Congratulation on your promotion.

(He nodded.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Just remember this one thing if you're ever doubting yourself in future. *Useless* people don't become a sergeant in the army. We don't hand out stripes for poops and

giggles, you know? You have to earn them. And boy, have you! Four wraith infestations and you're *still* going strong. What's more, you've outshone every other member of your race when it comes to using a Saxum. That's absolutely outstanding. Your successes have made you the talk of high command HQ, like I said! Seriously, Ambre; you truly are a superstar, and the army is lucky to have you. Well done, girl. Bloody well done.

(Ambre whimpered her reply though a highly emotional voice.)

AMBRE: Thank you.

(At once, a heartfelt "aw" rose up from either side of her.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Good god.

(He rolled his eyes then stepped to the side.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Name and rank, please?

CAYLEY: Brigadier Cayley Avanti, sir.

MAJOR-GENERAL: Thank you.

(He then consulted his notes.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: It says here, that during the battle in the snow, you played the roles of two people. Healer *and* damage dealer.

CAYLEY: We were desperate, sir.

MAJOR-GENERAL: Quite. So is the army. Desperate for more people like you.

(He nodded.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Congratulations on your promotion, Commander.

CAYLEY: Wow. Thank you, sir.

MAJOR-GENERAL: You're welcome.

(He then took one final step to the side.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: And finally, Major Kasira Ashwood.

KASIRA: Yes, sir!

MAJOR-GENERAL: Major, let me tell you. During that infestation in the frozen wastelands of the north, what can I say?

(He nodded.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: You did well too. And that concludes our meeting.

LADY HASHAM: Don't tease her, dear!

(She looked to Kasira.)

LADY HASHAM: Don't worry, you're getting a promotion too.

MAJOR-GENERAL: Oh, you've ruined it now.

LADY HASHAM: Ruined what?

MAJOR-GENERAL: The fun! Major Miles said she likes a practical joke; she'd have appreciated that.

(Kasira's nostrils twitched. As did Lady Hasham's.)

LADY HASHAM: That was Major Miles' idea, was it?

MAJOR-GENERAL: Yes, and you ruined it.

(He rolled his eyes then looked to Kasira.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Seriously, now my wife has ruined the joke, I want you know something. As the leader of these women, you've put together a unit that will go down in military history. No other unit has ever faced four wraith infestations. The most one unit faced was two and the second one wiped them all out. You're pretty special, Miss Ashwood. (He nodded.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Therefore we're going to skip the next ranks and bump you straight up to general.

(A loud gasp filled the room, then the Major-General watched as Kasira fainted and collapsed to the ground.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: I think it's fair to say she wasn't expecting that!

LADY HASHAM: Do you think?

MAJOR-GENERAL: I do.

(He nodded.)

MAJOR-GENERAL: Anyway, that really *does* conclude our meeting. Now someone revive Miss Ashwood, so we can all sit down and have tea together. I'm parched.

CAYLEY: Yes, sir.

(She then stooped to help revive Kasira. Seeing she was busy, Nivea hurried out to the kitchen to start boiling the water in her place. Watching Cayley bring her good friend back round, Sika smiled then looked Ambre.)

SIKA: We're sergeants now, Ambre. You know what that means?

AMBRE: Everybody else still outranks us?

(Sika face then dropped.)

SIKA: Why do you have to ruin everything?

(She then sauntered away towards the kitchen, mumbling under her breath. Having watched her go, Lady Hasham took a seat at the table then smiled at her husband.)

LADY HASHAM: Nice work, dear.

MAJOR-GENERAL: Thank you. Though, if any of them prove unworthy, just remember that promoting them all was *your* idea.

LADY HASHAM: I'm sure they won't, dear.

(She nodded.)

LADY HASHAM: Like I said on the trip over here. *Any* unit that can survive four wraith infestations, has to be worthy of its rewards.

MAJOR-GENERAL: Well, you're not wrong there. These girls can be very proud.

LADY HASHAM: Yes, they can.

MAJOR-GENERAL: Indeed.

LADY HASHAM: Now stop staring at their boobs.

MAJOR-GENERAL: Right...

That evening, Kasira, Sika, Ambre and Nivea were relaxing in their base's luxurious spa bath. To say they were feeling pleased with themselves would be quite the understatement. To have received another round of promotions was extremely gratifying and they simply couldn't stop smiling. Sitting at the edge of the bath, dunking her toes, Cayley shared their sense of achievement. Such a grand reward *almost* justified the misery they'd been put through.

CAYLEY: It's funny how life has these little twists and turns, isn't it? One minute we were here on the island, going about our business diligently and enjoying life, then all of a sudden we were dragged away to hell and almost killed. Now we're *back* here enjoying life again; almost as if nothing happened.

KASIRA: Right?

AMBRE: Something *did* happen though. It was a nightmare that I'll never forget.

CAYLEY: I doubt any of us will, love.

AMBRE: Still, it wasn't all bad.

(She beamed.)

AMBRE: We all got promoted.

CAYLEY: And more importantly, we all got pay rises.

NIVEA: Right? Promotions and juicy pay rises. It almost makes the hell seem worth it.

KASIRA: It actually does.

(She furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: Not that I'd want to go through that hell *again*; no matter *what* the reward.

SIKA: Reward?

(She scoffed.)

SIKA: What reward? There was no reward!

NIVEA: Yes, there was. Promotions and pay rises, dumb arse.

SIKA: Hey! Don't call me dumb arse, Nokia!

NIVEA: Hey!

SIKA: Suck it up, buttercup.

NIVEA: You just don't learn, do you?

KASIRA: Hush, Nivea. I want to hear what Sika has to say.

CAYLEY: Said nobody ever.

SIKA: Harsh!

KASIRA: Never mind that. What do you mean there was no reward?

(Sika ruffled her neck.)

SIKA: Well... sorry, but I refuse to see our promotions as a reward. As far as I'm concerned they were a grovelling apology, not a reward. Compensation even! Promoting us was the *least* the army could do seeing as it was *their* general who dragged us up there in the first place. For no reason! Then sent us all out to die.

(She nodded.)

SIKA: If anything, *not* giving us promotions and pay rises would have been an insult!

(Her four unit-mates glanced at each other briefly then looked back at the defiant Sika.)

KASIRA: She's right, you know?

NIVEA: Yup. They're the fuckers who almost got us killed, so *damned right* they should compensate us.

CAYLEY: I can't argue with that.

SIKA: Of course you can't. I hit the nail right on the head, like I always do.

CAYLEY: Right... always...

(She looked to Kasira.)

CAYLEY: Anyway, is it sinking it yet? You're a general, Kasira.

KASIRA: Nope. It still sounds ridiculous in my head. Getting used to it is gonna take a while.

(Nivea gave her a quizzical glance.)

NIVEA: So... what does it actually entail? I mean, being a general?

SIKA: How would she know that?

NIVEA: Well, I'm assuming that's what Lady Hasham took her to one side to discuss with her.

SIKA: Ah... you see... that's a rookie mistake. Never assume.

KASIRA: Actually, Nivea's right.

SIKA: Shit.

CAYLEY: You missed the nail and banged your thumb there, didn't you, love?

(Sika ruffled her neck indignantly.)

SIKA: Never mind what *I'm* doing...

KASIRA: Good idea.

(She looked to Nivea.)

KASIRA: According to Lady Hasham, I'll just carry on as I am, but of course, my word will carry a hell of a lot more weight. *Wherever* I go. The only extra workload will be attending general's meetings.

CAYLEY: Where they discuss policy and that sort of thing?

KASIRA: Yeah. She said she pushed for me to get boosted to general, so there'll finally be a female influence in the meetings. Apparently, there are one hundred and sixteen generals, and I'll be the only woman.

NIVEA: Wow. So you're the *first* female general. That's an amazing feat.

KASIRA: Yeah... but I won't lie, it's actually a really daunting prospect.

SIKA: I'll bet it is.

CAYLEY: Still, if anyone can deal with the pressure it's you, Kasira.

AMBRE: Definitely. Kasira's really good at stuff.

KASIRA: Aw, thanks, love.

(Just then, the door eased open and Soapy strolled in, smiling merrily.)

SOAPY: Hiya!

(Everyone looked at her then gasped in horror and covered their genitals.)

NIVEA: Panic everyone! There's a Candiru getting in the bath!!!

SIKA: We're doomed!!!

KASIRA: Run before it devours our girly bits from the inside!!!

(Ambre screamed then waded to the edge of the bath in a blind panic, before diving onto the marble floor.)

AMBRE: Quick!!! Get out!!!

(She then turned and sat there looking bewildered. Why Kasira, Cayley, Sika and Nivea were in fits of laughter, she had no idea.)

AMBRE: What's so funny?

(Soapy just shook her head.)

SOAPY: Seriously? Did you get me to take the bins out tonight, so just you could all get in the bath before me then make that joke when I came to join you? I mean... really?

(Sika chuckled.)

SIKA: We did, yes.

CAYLEY: It was all Nivea's idea.

NIVEA: I'm proud to say.

KASIRA: Yeah... unfortunately, we forgot to tell Ambre.

(She looked to Ambre and smiled.)

KASIRA: Come back in, love.

AMBRE: No way! Not if something's going to devour my fufu.

KASIRA: It won't. That was a joke.

AMBRE: It was? Who'd joke about something like that?

CAYLEY: Like I said, it was Nivea's idea.

AMBRE: Oh. Now it makes sense.

(She then slid back into the bath.)

SOAPY: Childish.

(She too then slipped herself into the bath.)

SIKA: No!!! A Candiru!!!

SOAPY: Do you want a slap?

KASIRA: No, she doesn't!

(She then caught sight of Ambre fleeing again in the corner of her eye.)

KASIRA: Come back, Ambre. Sika was only messing around.

AMBRE: Aw.

(She about turned then stomped back and threw herself down.)

AMBRE: Stop scaring me, you lot.

SIKA: Sorry, Ambre.

AMBRE: I'll forgive you.

SIKA: It was all Nokia's fault.

NIVEA: Seriously? Did that groping I gave you and Soapy earlier teach you nothing?

CAYLEY: Have your gropings *ever* taught them anything?

KASIRA: I'm starting to wonder if they *can* be taught.

SOAPY: Excellent. That's fantastic, that is. I walk in the bath and offer you all a chirpy greeting and what do I get for my troubles? I've only been here for ten seconds and already you've insulted my family name and insinuated that I'm an unteachable idiot.

(She furrowed her brow.)

SOAPY: Farewell, good mood. It was fun while it lasted.

NIVEA: Don't pout. Life's great right now; embrace it.

SOAPY: I was *trying* to!

NIVEA: Then try harder. Like I said, life is great right now.

SIKA: It really is. And in so many ways.

(She looked to Kasira.)

SIKA: Think. You outrank Major Miles now. Do you realise how much fun you could have with that?

CAYLEY: Oh, wow. Imagine the hoops you could make him jump through.

SOAPY: For nothing.

NIVEA: The possibilities are endless.

(Kasira smirked.)

KASIRA: Do you think I hadn't thought of that?

SIKA: Dunno. Had you?

KASIRA: Yes!

(She gave her a sideways glance then looked to Cayley.)

KASIRA: So had Lady Hasham. Clearly she's had run ins with the bugger too.

NIVEA: What do you mean?

KASIRA: She said that, as a general, now and again I'd have to designate lower ranked officers to perform certain uncomfortable duties in places they'd rather not go. She then followed it up by saying 'Major Miles for example'.

CAYLEY: Seriously?

KASIRA: Yup. She was basically giving me permission to assign him crap duties.

SIKA: Oh. And what did you say?

(Kasira beamed with delight.)

KASIRA: I said I'd see what I could do.

SOAPY: Oh, wow.

(She chuckled.)

SOAPY: Welcome back, happy mood.

NIVEA: That's the spirit.

SOAPY: Thanks, Nokia.

NIVEA: Seriously?

SOAPY: Yup.

(She then looked to Kasira.)

SOAPY: Sorry, Kasira, I almost forgot. Eksi and Lycia are coming. There just getting their uniforms off.

KASIRA: Oh, cool. They haven't been in here with us for ages.

NIVEA: Several months, in fact!

AMBRE: Right? Sometimes it feels like they're not even part of our unit anymore. Makes me a bit sad, actually.

SIKA: Yeah, but what are you gonna do? The army gave them different jobs to do.

NIVEA: Away from the base, unfortunately.

CAYLEY: But at least we still get to see them from time to time. If they'd been sent to a different unit, we'd *never* see them. So look on the bright side.

KASIRA: Yeah. I mean, if you miss them, you can always go and visit them in the booth, can't you?

AMBRE: That's true.
(She then exhaled.)
AMBRE: I'm not sad anymore.
SIKA: Sweet.
(Just then, Eksi and Lycia paced into the bathroom.)
EKSI: Evening!
LYCIA: Hiya!
KASIRA: Oh, hey, girls!!!
AMBRE: Yay!
NIVEA: Cool! It's Eksi and the other one!
LYCIA: Really?
NIVEA: What?
(Lycia slid herself into the bath behind Eksi then furrowed her brow.)
LYCIA: You're so not funny.
NIVEA: Liar. I'm hilarity itself, wrapped in a sexy, blonde shell.
SIKA: Then disguised as a pale white idiot with giant hands like a gorilla.
(Nivea glowered at her.)
NIVEA: Do you enjoy sleeping with one eye open or something?
SIKA: Stay out of my room, weirdo!
NIVEA: Nope.
KASIRA: Seriously. You two are like bloody five year olds.
(Just then, Eksi knelt down next to Kasira and smiled lovingly.)
EKSI: Wow.
KASIRA: Wow?
EKSI: My sister. General Kasira Ashwood.
(She then threw her arms around her and started to sob.)
EKSI: I'm so proud of you.
(Kasira's bottom lip immediately started to tremble.)
KASIRA: Finally. She loves me again!
EKSI: I do!
(She then flinched.)
EKSI: Wait. What? Again? What do you mean again?
KASIRA: I'm just saying? Whatever it is I did wrong, you've finally forgiven me.
EKSI: You didn't do *anything* wrong.
KASIRA: I know. That's why I was confused.
EKSI: Eh?
(She then rolled her eyes.)
EKSI: Is this about me calling you ma'am?
(Kasira ruffled her neck indignantly.)
KASIRA: Maybe.
EKSI: I was just being professional, like you taught me.
(She nodded.)
EKSI: You taught me and I listened. Because I love and respect you, okay?
(Kasira couldn't help but smile.)
KASIRA: It's more than okay. It's perfect.
CAYLEY: Aw.
NIVEA: So sweet.
(She sighed.)
NIVEA: I wish the other one was as sweet as you.
(Lycia looked to her then started to laugh.)

LYCIA: I take it back. You are funny.

(She shook her head.)

LYCIA: But you're really mean with it.

NIVEA: Take it as a compliment, love. I only tease people I like.

SOAPY: And Sika!

NIVEA: Yeah, her too.

SIKA: Oh, ha bloody ha!

NIVEA: Seriously, Lycia, you're alright. Nah, better than that; you're awesome. Like everyone else in this unit.

(Kasira nodded.)

KASIRA: Fact. Seriously. Eksi, Lycia, because of your assignment at the academy, we don't get to spend as much time with you as we'd like. But, I need you to know that whenever you *get* a little free time, you'll always be welcome to spend it here. You're part of the team and we miss you.

LYCIA: Thanks, Kasira. We miss you too.

EKSI: We do. We're always talking about that. Doesn't seem fair that we got sent elsewhere.

LYCIA: It really doesn't. I miss Ambre helping me with my Saxum. That was fun.

(She smiled at Ambre.)

LYCIA: I learned so much from you. You're an amazing teacher, Ambre.

AMBRE: Aw. That makes me happy. We should get together again soon.

LYCIA: Definitely.

KASIRA: Good idea. There's no such thing as too much experience.

CAYLEY: Oh, I dunno. I think it's safe to say we've had too much experience when it comes to wraith infestations.

KASIRA: Oh, god yes. It seems I stand corrected.

(She shrugged.)

KASIRA: Never again. Four is enough for one life time.

NIVEA: Four is four times too many.

SIKA: Definitely.

EKSI: I can't believe you got embroiled in another one. You guys are cursed.

NIVEA: I know, right? And there's no prizes for guessing the source of the curse.

(She sneered at Soapy.)

SOAPY: Me?

NIVEA: Yeah! Before you joined the unit, less than a year ago, we'd faced zero wraith infestations. Zero. Then *you* came waltzing into the base. Suddenly, four and counting!

SOAPY: Like that's my fault!

SIKA: It is. You're definitely cursed! We should have her exorcised.

NIVEA: Agreed! *I'll* do it!

SOAPY: Piss off! *Your* idea of an exorcism is probably to tie me to a bed then grope my boobs!

NIVEA: Blimey. She's psychic.

SOAPY: You don't have to be psychic to figure out what *you've* got in mind, you bloody weirdo.

NIVEA: Your words cut me deep, Soapy. Mortally wounded I am.

(Ambre leant towards Kasira and whispered nervously.)

AMBRE: Soapy's not *really* cursed, is she?

KASIRA: No, love; she's not.

(She smirked.)

KASIRA: She's a nutter, but she's not cursed.

SOAPY: Excuse me?

KASIRA: You're all nutters. Each and every one of you. But you're awesome with it. Not to mentioned talented. Soapy, you're a fighting machine. You make battle so much easier. Sika, your skills are definitely improving and your attitude has improved immensely in recent months. Well done, love. And you Nivea, you're a powerhouse with that blade, a real asset to the team. Best of all though, the three of you are *so* bonkers, you have me in stitches sometimes. As childish as the bickering might be sometimes, you guys make me laugh, and I love you for that.

SIKA: Aw.

SOAPY: Thank you, Kasira.

NIVEA: Very kind.

KASIRA: The only one who isn't a lunatic is Cayley. I thank my lucky stars that I have someone sane at my side. Without you *I'd* have gone insane by now.

CAYLEY: I'm glad I could help.

KASIRA: As for you, Ambre. What can I say? Like the Major-General said, you, my love, are an absolute superstar. The pride of the regiment.

(Everyone looked to her and raised a cry of "hear, hear".)

AMBRE: Aw. Thank you. I like it when you say nice things.

KASIRA: I wasn't saying nice things, I was just stating facts. We went to hell and back, but somehow we overcame a fourth wraith infestation in the worst weather conditions imaginable. Deadly ones. But we got through it. Why? Because we're a solid team. Why are we such a solid team? Because there are no weak links. Why are there no weak links? Because every single of us cares about our unit-mates and their welfare. That's why. We work well together because we work *for* each other. That's our secret.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: We're lucky to have that bond. And I want to thank each and every one of you for helping us to achieve it.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: Now...

(She then threw open her arms.)

KASIRA: Group hug!!!

SIKA: Yay! Bundle!!!

KASIRA: No! Just a group hug!

SIKA: Shit. Spoilsport.

(Kasira couldn't help but laugh.)

KASIRA: See? You're a fucking nutter.

(They all then came together for a hug. As they did so, they all felt extremely warm inside. Kasira's words had moved them. They were deep, they were affectionate, but best of all they were true. They were a team, and it genuinely felt like no rogue general or colossal hoard of wraiths would ever be able to divide them.)

THE END

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