

*FUTILE FANTASY CREATIONS PRESENT...*

*THE SIEGE OF CAPSWAY ISLAND.*

*“A world of swords, magic and wraiths, in which mankind suffered the consequences of its own arrogance.”*

***Bartley Forest, Kingdom of Aquaria...***

With his magic drained and little energy left to spare, sixteen year old Anders could only gape, his heart struck by mortal fear. Being charged at by two wolf-like wraiths, snarling and drooling at the thought of ripping his flesh from his body, he thought his number was up. He whole-heartedly believed that this normally quiet stretch of woodland would bear witness to his dying breath. Sapped of hope, he could only stand in trembling terror and pray he didn't soil himself. It was too late to run and he had nothing left to fight with. The wolves were upon him. Mercifully, the gods were smiling on him that day. As he closed his eyes and screamed what he thought would be his dying word, salvation came his way. In quick succession, two powerful blasts of telekinetic energy whooshed across the forest, one after the other, and blasted his two adversaries to smithereens. When he opened his eyes a few seconds later, having failed not to soil himself, his jaw dropped and he looked to his right in bewilderment. Standing there looking pleased with herself was one of his class-mates. Holding a pose that made her look more like a model than a warrior, she nodded to his groin area then laughed.

SOAPY: Nervous, Anders?

(As she scuttled away giggling, Anders drew a sigh of relief then forced a smile. As far as he was concerned, she was allowed a dig at him, she was allowed several. She could kick him in the groin if she wanted to. He owed her his life. If she hadn't been there, all his hopes and dreams would have disappeared into the ether; and in this callous world, his body would have been interred beneath the soil then swiftly forgotten about. Instead, his aspirations went on and he remained in possession of a life he cherished. He would forever be in Soapy's debt.

Taking a moment, Anders composed himself then raced after Soapy. For the rest of this battle against the wraiths, he wanted to be as close to her as possible. It wasn't that he wanted to thank her and hopefully repay the debt, this battle had nearly brought about his end and he feared he was out of his depth. Right now, he felt that battling at her side was definitely the safest place to be.

Grace and deadly accuracy were an almost impossible combination to achieve in the heat of battle, and yet his fifteen year old, fellow apprentice, Soapy, had them blended into a fine art. She never seemed to get tired and her magic seemed to come in an inexhaustible supply which was hitherto unheard of. What is more, she never seemed to miss! With a blast of her telekinetic energy it seemed there was no enemy she couldn't blow to smithereens. In this moment, a moment when Anders simply wanted to go home and hug his loved ones, there was nothing more reassuring than fighting beside her. Whereas he was awkward and all too often a victim of fatigue, Soapy never wavered. She was at home in battle, never failing to take down her enemy and never failing to look good doing it. There was a poise and an elegance to her killing style that went way beyond her years.

Unsurprisingly, it hadn't taken the leaders of the army long to notice her talent. This girl had incredible potential. Unfortunately, with such a rare talent, came an ego. Soapy knew she

was special. She didn't pretend to be modest; on the contrary, she was always the first to let her peers know how efficient she was. She also wasn't slow in making sure they knew how good she looked either. This may have made her popular with her fellow superficial students but for those trying to turn her into a soldier, it was maddening.

Having made it through all her preliminary tests with consummate ease, six months after her fifteenth birthday, Soapy was sent into *this* battle, her level nine exam, brimming with confidence. Anders, on the other hand, had come into the exam merely hoping to come out of it unscathed. As soon as the battle had started, some eleven minutes beforehand, their difference in ability had immediately come to the fore. Right from the off, Anders started to battle for his life, whereas Soapy had gone to town on the wraith enemies, destroying everything in sight with athleticism that cried out to be marked for artistic merit. Now, having come so close to meeting his maker, Anders had given up any hope he had of passing. His plan now was simply to stick with Soapy and pray the battle would be called to a halt as soon as possible.

Focusing very much on keeping her close, he followed her down a slight, leaf strewn slope, cautiously looking all about himself for danger. Just then, Soapy thrust out a straight arm and sent a powerful jet of energy deep into the woods, seemingly for no apparent reason. Seconds later, however, a wolf like howl echoed across the forest. Anders was astonished.)  
ANDERS: How the hell did you make that shot? I wouldn't have even seen it!!!

(Holding her pose and staring dead ahead, Soapy replied coldly.)

SOAPY: Why are you following me?

(She then grinned and relented her stance. Turning towards him and smiling, she couldn't help but laugh to herself.)

SOAPY: Didn't scare you, did it? Only we can't have you crapping yourself as well!

(Anders hung his head. He was thoroughly embarrassed right now and even if he hadn't been, he could hardly throw an angry retort her way; she'd just saved him from certain death. And so, he opted to say nothing.)

SOAPY: Aw, come on. Cheer up, I'm joking!

(Anders just sighed. This really was a low moment in his life. Not only was this exam a catastrophic failure but he was certain this popular, pretty girl saw him as nothing but a self-urinating fool and would undoubtedly tell the entire academy. His only solace at this time was that he was at least alive.)

SOAPY: Suit yourself! Now are you gonna kill anything or just stalk *me* all day?

(Anders shrugged.)

ANDERS: I'm gonna stalk you! I'm not cut out for this crap! When it comes to fighting I'm the ultimate donkey!

SOAPY: Fine, whatever. Just make sure you watch my butt closely then, apart from my gorgeous face and awesome boobs, it's my best feature.

(With that, she giggled and raced off between some trees. Anders just shook his head and started to follow when a loud siren starting to echo through the trees. At once, Soapy and Anders looked about themselves in bewilderment when a voice yelled out from the treetops above them.)

CAPTAIN: I've seen enough!!!

(Within moments, swarms of soldiers raced through the woods taking out any remaining wraiths, and an army captain started to abseil down from a nearby tree. Having been watching his cadets, Anders and Soapy, from on high, he'd witnessed everything and was ready to offer his assessment of their battle.

As soldiers continued to chase through the trees around them, Anders and Soapy slowly approached the captain and stopped to watch as he abseiled the last few feet.)

CAPTAIN: Bare with me, these ropes can be annoying.

(He then attempted to jump to the ground and growled as the rope snagged leaving him dangling a foot from the forest floor.)

CAPTAIN: There!!! I bloody knew it! I'm all tangled again!

(Anders hung his head and looked away as Soapy chuckled to herself, highly amused by the sight of her captain struggling and battling with the ropes.)

CAPTAIN: Bloody things... every bloody time... why do they always... oh, for pity's sake... stupid...

(A good thirty seconds of swearing and cursing later, he yanked hard at the rope above his head and it finally gave way causing him to crash to earth, flat on his face. Anders winced on his behalf, but Soapy fell about laughing.)

CAPTAIN: It's not funny!!!

(He then jumped up and snarled at them, defying them to laugh any further. Unfazed by his scowl, Soapy's face had turned red and tears of laughter were streaming down her cheeks.)

CAPTAIN: I said it wasn't funny!!!

(Soapy wiped her eyes.)

SOAPY: You should have seen it from where I was standing!

(As she tried to compose herself, the captain ruffled his neck and looked to Anders.)

CAPTAIN: Anders?

(Anders looked to him nervously and grimaced.)

CAPTAIN: Would you *like* me to assess you? I mean, I *can* if you like! Or would you rather just go back to the academy under your own steam and tell them you've decided to repeat level nine again? I will allow you that one dignity.

(Anders sighed.)

ANDERS: Thank you, captain.

CAPTAIN: You're welcome! Now piss off, you're a bloody embarrassment!

(As Anders skulked away, Soapy watched him go then looked to the captain.)

SOAPY: That was a bit harsh!

CAPTAIN: Excuse me?

SOAPY: I mean, he's not the best mage in the world, sure...

(The captain threw his hands to his hips and leant over her menacingly.)

CAPTAIN: Did I ask your opinion???

(Soapy rolled her eyes, far from intimidated by his gesture.)

SOAPY: Fine, whatever.

(The captain growled.)

CAPTAIN: It's "Fine, whatever, sir"!!!

(He shook his head.)

CAPTAIN: I mean it's "No, sir. Sorry, sir".

(Soapy simply shrugged as the captain stood tall and folded his arms.)

CAPTAIN: Now, as for *your* assessment...

(Soapy then started to laugh again.)

SOAPY: Sorry, I can't stop picturing it. You were like, splat, face first!

(On the verge of breaking, the captain growled then read Soapy the riot act.)

CAPTAIN: Listen here, you annoying little twerp!!! Yes, you can fight, and yes you passed the exam but I tell you what, you're in for something of a shock when you join a unit!!!

They're not going to tolerate your insubordination, or that bloody arrogance of yours!!!

(He nodded to affirm his thinking.)

CAPTAIN: It's not right for a fifteen year old to be so openly bloody proud of her boobs!!! Or her butt!!! Yes I heard you!!!

SOAPY: I've got a great rack and my arse is smoking, how can I *not* be proud?

(The captain was furious.)

CAPTAIN: Maybe you *do* have a nice rack, but do we all have to hear about it every five minutes? You smug little shit!!!

(Soapy gave him a disturbed glance.)

SOAPY: You think I have a nice rack? Are you some kind of kiddie fiddler, captain? I'm fifteen!

(Barely maintaining any sense of calm, the captain clenched his fist.)

CAPTAIN: Listen here, girly, I really hope you pass the final assessment or written test tomorrow, you conceited little sow, just so I can be shot of you!!! And you know what? *I* get to pick where you'll be posted to!

(He snarled menacingly then allowed a small grin to surface.)

CAPTAIN: You won't think you're so bloody amazing when you get *there*, I can assure you!!!

(Much to the captain's surprise, for the first time since he'd been training her, Soapy looked a little unsure of herself.)

SOAPY: There's a written test? But... I'm not good at them!

(The captain scoffed.)

CAPTAIN: You'll be fine! You only have to take a *written* test if you fail the spoken assessment. You just need to know why *we* and all the other races on this planet are fighting this war! Can't have you embarrassing our race by not even knowing why we're doing what we're doing.

(He smirked.)

CAPTAIN: It's the posting you should be worried about!

(Soapy gave him a nervous glance.)

SOAPY: I should?

CAPTAIN: Yes! You think you're so wonderful and cute and lovely but your unit mates will soon cut you down to size, I can assure you.

(Soapy trembled.)

SOAPY: You're going to send me off to a unit full of girly-girl hating lesbians, aren't you?

(The captain grinned.)

CAPTAIN: I'm saying nothing.

(He then paced away.)

CAPTAIN: Room 61. 9am sharp tomorrow. I'd brush up on my history tonight, if I was you.

(Watching him pace away, Soapy mused to herself for a moment then shrugged.)

SOAPY: He's just trying to scare me.

(She beamed.)

SOAPY: Another exam passed with ease! I'm so awesome.

(She then paced away after the captain, looking forward to getting back to base and enjoying a warm meal.)

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The following morning, Soapy strolled down a quiet corridor in her military academy looking somewhat nervous. Fearing for her reputation as being great and good at everything, her heart was full of trepidation. She hadn't been expecting a written exam so hadn't paid much attention in class. Terrified her lack of concentration was now about to bite her on the backside, she whimpered then paced up to a side door. Taking a deep breath, she looked down to check her uniform was perfect then closed her eyes. Moments later, she opened her

eyes, straightened her neck scarf and swept at her skirt to make sure it was hanging perfectly then stood tall.)

SOAPY: Okay, here goes. You can do this. Don't make a fool of yourself.

(With that, she pushed open the door and minced inside with a confident smile on her face.)

SOAPY: Morning, peeps.

(Much to her delight, her two best friends were there and a boy she didn't know, but there was no sign of a teacher. Upon sighting her, her friend Pepsi, who hailed from a small nation called Romanda in the south, spoke up in her exotic, yet nasal accent.)

PEPSI: Hi, Flip-Flops!

MAXINE: Hey, you.

(The boy started to chuckle to himself.)

DAN: Flip-Flops?

(Soapy sneered at him.)

SOAPY: It's my nickname!

DAN: That's a stupid nickname!

PEPSI: No it's not!

MAXINE: If you want to hear a stupid nickname, we'll saddle *you* with one!

(Dan held up his hands sarcastically.)

DAN: Okay, okay, you win! It's a great name and doesn't sound at all funny in a Romanden accent.

(He scoffed and looked out of the window, leaving Soapy rolling her eyes.)

SOAPY: Dick!

(She then sat in front of her two friends and turned to face them.)

SOAPY: So, I kind of studied for this test last night. Not sure I understood it all though.

Something about a boat and fifty slaves though right?

(Pepsi and Maxine looked stumped.)

PEPSI: You studied the war on slavery?

(Soapy looked lost.)

SOAPY: Shouldn't I have?

MAXINE: No. This is all about the wraith wars; you know, the one we're *currently* fighting!

(Soapy looked horrified.)

SOAPY: We're not fighting the war on slavery anymore then?

PEPSI: That ended three hundred years ago!

(Soapy hung her head.)

SOAPY: I'm screwed!

PEPSI: No, you're not. The war on the wraiths is all common knowledge, Flip.

(Dan chuckled and swiftly received three dagger looks. Giving him disdainful shakes of the head, the girls then resumed their conversation.)

MAXINE: It's about when the gods came to the planet two hundred years ago! You know; the story of our world.

PEPSI: Everyone knows about that!

(Soapy bit her lip and looked to them in horror.)

SOAPY: Not everyone!

MAXINE: But you must!

(Pepsi raised an eyebrow.)

PEPSI: Come off it, Flip-Flops...

(She then snarled at Dan before resuming talking.)

PEPSI: How can you not know?

(Soapy flapped in frustration.)

SOAPY: I've just never heard it, okay? I never pay attention in class, you know that!

(She shrugged modestly.)

SOAPY: I get by on charming the teachers, I always have. My gift is being cute, not being teachable.

(She hung her head.)

SOAPY: I'm gonna fail and everyone's gonna think I'm full of crap.

(She shuddered.)

SOAPY: When you've been as arrogant as I have... I really can't afford to fail!!!

(Pepsi looked enthusiastic and pulled some notes from her bag.)

PEPSI: Quick, read this.

SOAPY: What?

PEPSI: It's a summation of the story! You know, maybe you can read it and then blag your way through the test!

(Soapy was enthused.)

SOAPY: That usually works. Keep an eye out for the teacher and delay him while I read.

(Maxine quickly got to her feet and headed for the door.)

MAXINE: I'm on it!!!

(As Pepsi watched on, Soapy grabbed the notes and stared hard at them.)

SOAPY: Pepsi?

PEPSI: Yeah?

SOAPY: This is all in Romanden!

(Pepsi looked troubled and scratched her chin.)

PEPSI: Yeah... I forgot about that!

(As Soapy dropped her head in defeat, Pepsi nodded determinedly.)

PEPSI: Give them to me, I'll read them to you.

(Soapy quickly looked up then thrust the notes to Pepsi. As Pepsi took them and sat forwards, Soapy looked to her urgently.)

SOAPY: Go!

PEPSI: Okay!

(She cleared her throat then began.)

PEPSI: It says... the gods had spoken! For centuries human beings had wondered how the gods would view them and now they had their answer. The gods had come forth unto mankind with their verdict and how they wished they hadn't. The gods had not been impressed.

SOAPY: Why not?

PEPSI: I'm coming to that!

(She rolled her eyes then continued.)

PEPSI: The arrogance of the human races had cost them dear. Since the dawning of time, every church, holy commune and religious sect had made the same claims. They claimed that the gods had created mankind in their own image. They claimed that the human races were brought forth by the gods to make the world their own and govern it in the god's names. They believed mankind to be special and that only human beings would reach the afterlife. They claimed all other creatures were created only to feed, serve or entertain man. They were wrong. The gods had created all living things equally and were utterly infuriated by mankind's conceited belief that they were somehow above all other life forms.

(Soapy stared at the ceiling and swiftly made notes to herself.)

SOAPY: Okay, humans thought they were a cut above. Disrespected animals; thought they didn't go to heaven and were there to serve *them*. Gods angry!

(She then looked to Pepsi.)

SOAPY: Go on!

PEPSI: Right.

(Pepsi took a breath then continued.)

PEPSI: Eager to teach the human races a lesson they would never forget, the gods revealed themselves, their united voice, echoing across skies throughout the world. First, the voice condemned man's arrogance then it told them of their punishment. Seeing as humans believed only they went to heaven, this would become the case. The souls of all other forms of life, upon their deaths, would be sent back to the world in the form of a mutant wraith. A beloved family pet may one day die in the arms of a tearful owner, only to re-spawn a few days later, somewhere else in the world as one of many types of beast. It was the ultimate ironic punishment. Man believed animals had no heaven and now they didn't. Instead of leaving the planet, animals would now return forever as wraiths, ever increasing in number. And any wraith slain, would re-spawn only days later. They could be killed, but would always return. And so, the life cycle of all living things continued but rather than leaving the world upon their death they'd stay forever as wraiths, their number ever increasing and slowly consuming the planet.

(Soapy looked enlightened.)

SOAPY: That explains a lot!

PEPSI: Listen, Soapy!

SOAPY: I am!

PEPSI: Good!

(She looked about the page then continued.)

PEPSI: As a result of the god's holy wrath, it didn't take long for the world to become overrun with creatures, some placid and harmless but others wild and hungry for blood. With every wraith craving food, man had become part of the food chain and the world had become a dangerous place. As time passed, every creature that was born and died, added to the already desperate state of affairs and mankind knew something needed to be done to control the situation. With so many dangerous creatures roaming the land, often spawning in the most unexpected places, the human race simply couldn't ignore what was happening. They either had to resist or be wiped from the face of the planet. And so, in order to deal with the situation, every nation united together to form a giant army.

SOAPY: Ah! This army!

PEPSI: Yes! Now listen... fighting the wraiths was very much a never ending task for the human troops. Every wraith slain would simply return a few days later, somewhere else in the world. If they didn't hunt them, however, their ever increasing number would soon overwhelm the planet. Decreasing their number therefore, even temporarily, was essential. Ultimately, however, they knew it would only be a matter of time before the wraith numbers would become such that mankind would eventually be overwhelmed. Until that time came, however, mankind would fight determinedly to prolong its existence. It didn't matter that it seemed like a battle mankind was destined to eventually lose, the fight had to go on.

SOAPY: I'm with you so far!

PEPSI: And you knew none of this?

(Soapy shrugged.)

PEPSI: Wow!

(She then rolled her eyes and went on.)

PEPSI: Military units were formed and battled bravely night and day against the wraiths. Some had a fair degree of success, others were not so lucky. Towns were destroyed and the future looked extremely bleak. Fifty years after the gods had issued their punishment, however, they returned with a message for the human races. Their punishment was at an end. Animals would once again return to the kingdom of heaven. The existing wraiths however, would stay forever as a reminder to the human races never to be so arrogant ever again. The wraith numbers would no longer grow, but nor would they decrease.

SOAPY: That sucks! Still, could have been worse.

(Annoyed at the interruption, Pepsi furrowed her brow then read on.)

PEPSI: As a result of this second coming, mankind drew a large sigh of relief. Their survival would be assured so long as they kept up the fight. With this in mind, the united nations and their army decreed that every human at the age of fourteen, male or female would be required to join the military and serve for a minimum of ten years after passing training. This new law would assure the survival of their species. And so, mankind had accepted that this was the way of the world. A person would be born, educated, serve in the army and only then be free to enjoy their life.

(She smiled.)

PEPSI: And that's that!

(Soapy nodded.)

SOAPY: Wow! So we're all in this mess 'cause our ancestors were arrogant morons?

PEPSI: In a nutshell, yes!

(Just then, the teacher forced his way through the door, looking angrily behind him.)

TEACHER: Stop that, Maxine! Why are you acting so weird today?

(He shook his head.)

TEACHER: Now put them away, I'm not interested!

(At once Soapy and Pepsi looked to one another in dismay.)

TEACHER: I'm sure you have a lovely pen collection but I've got a test to oversee!

(As Soapy and Pepsi chuckled together, Maxine paced back in and sat down. No stranger to hearing girls giggling, the teacher ignored the cackling then paced to the front of the class.)

TEACHER: Right! This is it, ladies.

(He winced.)

TEACHER: Oh, sorry Dan; didn't see you there.

(As the girls laughed, Dan pouted then stared out the window.)

TEACHER: Settle down! Now, as I was saying, this is it. Convince me you know your stuff and you'll graduate. Then it'll be off to war for real. Excited?

(Hearing nothing but perfect silence, the teacher smiled.)

TEACHER: Wise!

(He looked to his notes then raised an impressed eyebrow.)

TEACHER: All grade 1 mages it says here. Grade 1 with merit in your case, Soapy.

(Soapy beamed.)

SOAPY: Well, you know!

TEACHER: In that case I won't patronise you by asking about the basic history with the gods an' all, that'd be insulting!

(Soapy pouted.)

SOAPY: But I've learned it now!

(She burned red and hid her face.)

TEACHER: I'm sure you have, Soapy. Who hasn't?

(Soapy just looked away and scratched behind her ear as the teacher carried on.)

TEACHER: So, who can tell me why we separate the forces into men only and women only units?

PEPSI: Rape!

(The teacher laughed.)

TEACHER: I do hate it when women yell that at me!

(He then swiftly scratched his head and looked away, daunted by the hateful stares he was receiving.)

TEACHER: Yes, right, poor taste. Anyway, you're quite right. That was a reason. In the early years, men and women served in the same army units, but sex was an issue. The main



problems being rape, unexpected pregnancies and also a lot of deaths from overly relaxed male soldiers. Sex has a pacifying effect on men, you see. Anyway, it wasn't long before the rules were changed. The genders were separated and those rules remain unchanged even today.

(He nodded.)

TEACHER: Excellent. So, you know the basics. You know why we're in this mess and you obviously understand the way things are. Wraiths roam the earth and military units slaughter them in their droves, only for them to keep coming back. A never ending cycle.

(He then rubbed his hands together and looked at Soapy.)

TEACHER: Okay, moving on; tell me about one of the other human races, Soapy.

(Soapy just gaped at him then mumbled quietly.)

SOAPY: Races?

TEACHER: Yeah.

(Soapy shrugged in desperation.)

SOAPY: They're really fast?

(The teacher nodded.)

TEACHER: Ah, you must be referring to the Swift Human!

(Soapy nodded forcefully.)

SOAPY: That's exactly what I'm doing!

(As Soapy wiped some sweat from her brow, the teacher started to pace up and down.)

TEACHER: Swift-Humans, a race from way out to the east. They have a human form and an alternative one. The men can transform into what, Maxine?

MAXINE: A cheetah!

TEACHER: And the women, Pepsi?

PEPSI: A gazelle!

TEACHER: Excellent. Now, the men of their species when in human form are easily identified because... Dan?

(Dan grinned knowingly at Soapy.)

DAN: Ask Soapy, she seems to know a lot about it!

(The teacher furrowed his brow.)

TEACHER: I was asking you!!!

(As Dan grimaced, clearly unsettled by the scolding, the teacher sneered.)

TEACHER: Fine. The male of the species is inordinately hairy and on average they're seven feet tall!

(He then looked to Soapy.)

TEACHER: And how are the women clearly distinguishable in the swift-human race, Soapy?

(Soapy stared through him and answered in a slow, lost voice.)

SOAPY: Because... they're gazelles!

TEACHER: In their human form!

(Soapy looked lost for a moment then took a wild stab in the dark.)

SOAPY: Antlers?

(The teacher nodded.)

TEACHER: They're actually horns, but I'll give you that one. A lot of people make that mistake.

(Unable to believe her luck, Soapy took a deep breath and continued to watch the teacher pace back and forth. So far her luck was holding out and she could only hope this continued to be the case. Dan, however, had seen right through her and wasn't about to let her get away with it. Watching the teacher, he only had one thing in mind, finding the right moment to drop Soapy in it.)

TEACHER: So that's the swift-humans. What other races do we have, Maxine?

MAXINE: Airborne!

TEACHER: Yes. Another please, Pepsi?

PEPSI: Subterranean!

TEACHER: Good! Soapy?

(Soapy looked to him and trembled.)

SOAPY: Um...

TEACHER: Come on, you ought to know this!

(Dan grinned as Soapy continued to struggle to find a reasonable guess.)

TEACHER: Soapy? This is...

(Looking flustered she shrugged and blurted out the only thing she could think of.)

SOAPY: Land people?

(As she winced in embarrassment, the teacher started to pace again.)

TEACHER: The word is *land-bound*, Soapy.

(Soapy looked delighted with herself and nodded.)

SOAPY: That's the word! It completely escaped me.

(Dan just looked at her in disbelief and growled as the teacher carried on, accepting her answer as a valid one.)

DAN: Unbelievable!

TEACHER: And that leaves which race, Dan?

(Not even listening, Dan continued to snarl at Soapy.)

DAN: Jammy witch!

(The teacher stopped in his tracks and glared at him.)

TEACHER: Witches?

(Dan looked at him and grimaced.)

DAN: Sorry, what?

TEACHER: Witches, Dan? Really?

(He shook his head.)

TEACHER: The answer was our *own* race. Us! Aqua-humans! Bloody witches, indeed!

DAN: Wait, I didn't mean...

TEACHER: Oh, be quiet!

(He shook his head and Dan's shoulders sunk.)

TEACHER: Now where was I?

PEPSI: Aqua-Humans.

TEACHER: That's right. Well, as you know, we Aqua-Humans are unique in that we can transform into a near-fish like state and breathe underwater. The other races can't do this so don't expect them to join you for a leisurely Sunday afternoon swim, okay?

(He nodded then started to pace again.)

TEACHER: Now, the Airborne Humans, very nice people actually... they have the gifts of flight and healing. Without them this war would be a hell of a lot harder. As long as you're not dead they can pretty much heal any ailment. They're distinguishable by the fact they have feathers sticking backwards from the sides of their heads, and of course, when they take off, their wings made them stand out somewhat.

(As Pepsi, Maxine and Soapy laughed, the teacher smiled and continued.)

TEACHER: Subterranean Humans, well they're not so easy to differentiate from land-bound humans by looks alone. Difference being, Subterranean Humans can't stand daylight, they never fight in the daytime, only at night. Their magic is channelled through swords. Land-bound humans, well, they don't have any magic. What they do have however, is incredible dexterity and balance. They fight close up and they fight fast. They can do this because, unlike aqua, airborne and subterranean humans, they were *born* to the land. No gravity or fish out of water issues for them.

(He smiled.)

TEACHER: Now, any questions?

(Soapy smiled to herself then raised her hand.)

TEACHER: Yes, Soapy?

(Soapy deliberately turned to face Dan as she proceeded to pose her question.)

SOAPY: It is true that the witch race are distinguishable by their green skin, pointy hats, broomsticks and the fact that they don't exist?

(As Maxine and Pepsi laughed heartily behind her, Dan growled and the teacher furrowed his brow.)

TEACHER: That's quite enough of that!

(He rolled his eyes then turned away to hide his smirk.)

TEACHER: The most important thing I can pass on to you about *meeting* people from other races is not to be shocked. Expect them to be different. It can startle you at first when you see someone transform into a wild animal, or when you first see an airborne cast open their wings. You just have to remember, it's just as much of a shock to them when we jump in deep water and our legs transform into their fish state. They can be as freaked out by us as we are by them. Okay?

(He then stopped pacing, stood tall and smiled.)

TEACHER: Well, my job today was to ensure that you all knew your stuff and to fill in any blanks. And if I may say so, it's not been a bad start.

(He looked to Soapy, Pepsi and Maxine.)

TEACHER: Well done, ladies. You've shown me what I wanted to see. I think you're ready!

(Dan looked gobsmacked.)

DAN: What? Even Soapy?

TEACHER: Though Soapy, remember the *word* land-bound. You have to remember the names of the races; it's not enough to just know what they are!

(Soapy beamed.)

SOAPY: Okay!

(Dan was beside himself.)

DAN: She didn't have a bloody *clue* what they are!!!

(The teacher furrowed his brow at Dan.)

TEACHER: That's enough from you. Two questions I asked you, you tried to pass one onto Soapy then gave me a bloody stupid answer for the next one! Before I let you go, I'm setting you a written test!

(He then headed for the door.)

TEACHER: Ladies, you're free to leave. Congratulations on reaching level 9. Dan, you stay right where you are!

(As the teacher opened the door and paced out of the room, Pepsi, Maxine and Soapy all leapt from their seats to share a joyous hug and an overexcited bounce to celebrate their graduation. Dan, on the other hand, sat there dumbfounded by his failure.)

PEPSI: We did it! We're gonna be soldiers!

MAXINE: So amazing, I love you guys!

SOAPY: I love you guys too. I'm really gonna miss you when I get posted!

PEPSI: I wonder where we'll end up!

(Before anyone could answer, Dan growled in their direction.)

DAN: How the hell did you get away with that???

(Soapy looked to him and raised an eyebrow.)

SOAPY: We're talking!

DAN: Yeah, you've been talking a lot. Out of your arse mostly. How the hell did *you* pass and I didn't??? I've studied this topic for months but you didn't know a bloody thing!

(Soapy smiled to her friends then looked back at Dan.)

SOAPY: Don, is it?

DAN: You know very bloody well it isn't!

SOAPY: Well, whatever your name is, you failed, accept it. Don't take it out on me!

DAN: You...

SOAPY: Look, okay... I didn't know the answers, true. I didn't have to. I just had to convince the teacher I did! It's not about what you know; it's about what you can convince the teacher you know.

DAN: You make me sick!

SOAPY: Quite *how* you studied for months then managed to convince the teacher you had no idea, I'll never know. And quite frankly, I don't care. That's your mistake, not mine.

(She looked to Pepsi and Maxine and nodded.)

SOAPY: Let's go, girls.

(As they all started to head for the door, Dan gave them one last hateful glance.)

DAN: I hate you!

(Soapy smirked then turned to face him in the doorway.)

SOAPY: Look, in the end, you and I are very much alike. We *both* tricked the teacher into miscalculating our knowledge levels. The difference being, I'm not a self-defeating moron! See you.

DAN: Bitch! Who the hell do you think you are?

SOAPY: Me? I'm a qualified level 9 soldier. You never know, pass the written test and you might become one too.

(With that, she minced out of the door with her two giggling friends, leaving Dan shaking his fist angrily beneath the desk.

Exiting the room then pulling the door closed behind her, Soapy took a deep breath and placed her hands on her friend's shoulders.)

SOAPY: Let's go stuff our faces and annoy some boys.

MAXINE: Sounds good to me. Seconded.

PEPSI: Motion carried.

(They then headed off down the corridor.)

SOAPY: We should make the most of our last days here.

PEPSI: Yeah, a couple of days from now we'll be shipped off to god knows where and might never see each other again.

MAXINE: Well that's depressing.

SOAPY: No, not really. This is what we worked so hard towards.

(She smiled.)

SOAPY: We did it guys, we're soldiers!!!

(They all shared a wry smile then stopped walking to enjoy another overly excited bouncing and screaming for joy moment.)

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FOUR DAYS LATER.

*Misère sea, near Capsway Island...*

Just off the coast of the sun-kissed Capsway Island, close to the land-bound human homelands, a small wooden army boat cut softly through the glistening sea. On the ship's open deck, a bikini clad Soapy stood nervously biting her fingernails, her eyes transfixed on the land in the distance. Just behind her, stood her smirking captain. Overjoyed to now be

shot of her, he was saying his farewells with a callous determination to scare Soapy witless. She'd annoyed him endlessly for months but at last it was his turn to be the cocky fifteen year old girl.

CAPTAIN: I remember my first day with a unit. Awful it was. Terrifying. The things they made me do. It's a military tradition to torment the fresh meat, you know? No doubt they'll have you running about the town naked by sundown.

(He exhaled.)

CAPTAIN: Oh, the pranks we used to pull.

(He smiled.)

CAPTAIN: It was all in the right spirit though. Just a bit of fun and hardly anyone died.

(Soapy gulped.)

SOAPY: Died?

CAPTAIN: What, sorry?

(She turned to face him looking terrified.)

SOAPY: You said... died!

CAPTAIN: Oh, don't worry about that. It probably won't happen to you.

SOAPY: I don't want to die!

(The captain shrugged.)

CAPTAIN: None of them *wanted* to die!

(Soapy turned away again and faced the shore.)

SOAPY: When they played pranks on you...

(The captain grinned, enjoying her torment immensely.)

CAPTAIN: Yes?

SOAPY: Was it *just* because you were the new guy... or were they picking on the weak one?

(The captain furrowed his brow.)

CAPTAIN: Excuse me?

SOAPY: Only, I hear bullies do that. I wouldn't know; I've always been popular.

CAPTAIN: Well...

SOAPY: No offence, but it's obvious *you* used to get bullied, so I figured you'd know.

CAPTAIN: Hey, I'll have you know...

(Much to his annoyance, Soapy turned round, grinning from ear to ear.)

SOAPY: You're so easy.

CAPTAIN: What?

SOAPY: I mean come on, Captain, how gullible do you think I am?

(As the captain seethed, Soapy turned to face the sea again.)

SOAPY: I know I'll get made to do all the stuff they can't be bothered to do at first, I'm expecting that. And they'll get away with it if I let them, but I can handle it.

(She smiled.)

SOAPY: Thanks for that, I needed a laugh. Settled my nerves nicely. I'm actually kinda looking forward to getting there now.

(The captain snarled.)

CAPTAIN: I really don't like you, Soapy.

(Soapy turned and smiled at him.)

SOAPY: I think I'm ready to swim out now.

(With that, she threw her arms around his waist and hugged him tight.)

SOAPY: You take care. Thanks for all you taught me, Captain.

(The captain looked stunned for a second then hugged her back and smiled.)

CAPTAIN: You're welcome.

(He nodded to himself.)

CAPTAIN: Maybe I was wrong about you. You're a good kid.

(Soapy then pulled back from the hug.)

SOAPY: See? So easy! You're as gullible as the day I met you.

CAPTAIN: Why you little...

SOAPY: I'll be off then!

(As she picked up a pack, coated with a whale skin to keep the contents dry, the captain flapped angrily.)

CAPTAIN: That was a downright nasty stunt, you little shit!

(He growled.)

CAPTAIN: I'm glad I picked this place for you now. You're gonna hate it! Nobody's going to fall for your cute antics and fluttering eyelashes where you're going; oh no. Quite the opposite! This is where General Wilson takes all his leave and he hand picked most of your unit personally for a reason!!! They're not going to tolerate your ways even for a moment; that I can promise you!

(Soapy scoffed.)

SOAPY: Yeah, yeah, they're all angry lesbians. I didn't believe you before and I don't believe you now!

CAPTAIN: I don't care what you believe! Mark my words, after five minutes with your new unit, you're going to realise you're not as precious as you think you are, you infuriating little harpy.

(Having slipped the pack on her back, Soapy looked round at the furious captain and grinned.)

SOAPY: You done?

CAPTAIN: No, I'm not done!

SOAPY: Then you'll have to mail me the rest of the rant, won't you?

(With that, she leapt into the deep water to begin her swim ashore. Watching as her legs transformed into a mermaid-state, the captain growled and shook his fist at her.)

CAPTAIN: Infuriating child!

(He watched her for a few moments more then exhaled and smiled to himself.)

CAPTAIN: Who'd have thought it, eh?

(A deckhand who happened to be passing at that moment, looked all about himself then glanced at the captain.)

DECKHAND: Sorry? Who'd have thought what, sir?

(The captain glanced at him briefly then looked back at Soapy swimming away.)

CAPTAIN: You know when someone you've been bitterly at odds with for months goes off into the big wide world for the first time and you suddenly realise you're actually going to miss them?

DECKHAND: Yeah!

CAPTAIN: It isn't that!

(He beamed.)

CAPTAIN: I'm just marvelling at the fact I got through teaching the little shit without strangling her!

(He looked thoughtful.)

CAPTAIN: Shows how far I've come really.

---

Cutting her way through the ocean, gaining ever closer to the island that was set to become her home for the foreseeable future, Soapy's mind started to run riot. What would the rest of her unit be like? Could they really be the freaks her teacher had described? Trying to imagine a woman with horns, her mind sent her a myriad of amusing images making her giggle and send bubbles shooting from the gills behind her ears. Most people in Soapy's position would have worried that her new unit wouldn't like her. They'd have feared not

fitting in. This thought, however, never crossed Soapy's mind. As far as she was concerned, she was the coolest person on earth and they were bound to like her. She couldn't fail to be cooler than horn-headed freaks and weird bird people, she thought, and she'd undoubtedly be queen of the barracks before the day was even out.

Convinced she was going to have great fun meeting new people and getting to show off how awesome she was, Soapy didn't have even a hint of nerves as she started to approach the island. In fact, she couldn't wait to arrive and start stamping her greatness on everything. Smiling to herself, as she swum forth, she raised her head and glanced across the high wall where the sea met the land before her. To the left of the wall was a set of stairs leading down to a small concrete jetty, just above the water line. Normally a launch for rowing boats and other tiny craft, this lowered landing would be the perfect place for her to alight the ocean. Excited about her imminent arrival, Soapy put her head down and swum towards it, singing inside. In her mind, she'd convinced herself that this normally unspectacular jetty would always be remembered as the place where the lucky folks of Capsway Island got their first glance of her emerging like a goddess from the water. History was now in the making, she thought. And so, grinning like a hungry chimp in a banana plantation, she kicked hard and floated the last few feet before throwing an outstretched arm onto the jetty.

Expecting gasps of awe from the quayside as she pulled herself onto the jetty, Soapy was most taken by the absolute silence that greeted her. Laying on her front, waiting for her scales to recede and her human legs to return, she scanned the portside with her eyes then furrowed her brow. With the exception of two girls deep in conversation at the top of the stairs up to the port, there wasn't a soul in sight. Convinced that there must have been some kind of horrible mistake, she shook her head then glanced back at her legs. Seeing all her toes back to their human form, she nodded then climbed to her feet. At once, she released a bitter sigh.

SOAPY: I'm young, gorgeous and brilliant... *and* I'm wearing a bikini! How the hell could that go unnoticed?

(Maintaining a scowl, she slipped her pack off of her back then bent to peel away the whale-skin coating. As soon as it was off, she slipped the skin into the sea then swung her pack onto her back again.)

SOAPY: Stupid town. You get a brilliant new soldier and you can't even be bothered to put bunting out!

(With that, she stomped towards the end of the jetty and started to pace up the stairs. Cursing under her breath as she reached the last few steps, Soapy was given quite a start when one of the two girls she'd noticed earlier, spoke to her over the wall in an excitable voice.)

AMBRE: You're the fishy!

(As Soapy clutched her chest and caught her breath, Ambre looked to her companion and grimaced nervously.)

AMBRE: Wait... that's what I was told *not* to call her, isn't it?

(Her companion coldly rolled her eyes then looked to Soapy.)

SIKA: Welcome to Capsway Island!

AMBRE: Yeah, that too!

(Relieved that there was at least some sort of welcoming committee, even if was only these two young ladies, Soapy smiled.)

SOAPY: Thanks! I'm Soapy!

SIKA: I'm Sika...

(She then gestured to Ambre.)

SIKA: This idiot is Ambre!

SOAPY: Nice to meet you both!

(Soapy then stood there looking perplexed as Ambre lead Sika away from her and started to question her in a hurt voice.)

AMBRE: Why do you always say things like that? You're mean.

(Sika replied in a disdainful tone.)

SIKA: Ambre? Why have you lead me over here?

AMBRE: I don't want the new girl to know we're arguing!

SIKA: She's not blind, you idiot!

AMBRE: Stop calling me that!!!

(Watching them, Soapy raised a thoughtful eyebrow. Ambre was clearly a swift human. Just as her teacher had described, she had horns that very much looked like antlers pointing back from the sides of head. Her companion, Sika, had feathers pointing backwards from the sides of her head, the distinctive mark of an airborne human. At once, the observations made her feel more than a little uncertain. These were not the freaks she'd imagined. They were both very pretty, especially Ambre, and being the best looking in her class was something she'd always used to her advantage. Taking an instant, irrational disliking to Ambre, based on her looks alone, her nostrils twitched and she furrowed her brow. Moments later, however, when Sika and Ambre returned to her wearing fake smiles, pretending they hadn't been arguing, Soapy swiftly adopted her own insincere smile.)

SIKA: Sorry about that. Minor disagreement.

AMBRE: Yeah, she called me an idiot!

(Sika winced.)

SIKA: Ambre!

AMBRE: Yeah?

SIKA: Let it go! Anyway, yeah, so... let's take you to the base shall we, Soapy?

(Soapy nodded.)

SOAPY: Sure! Lead the way!

(With that, Sika and Ambre headed away leaving Soapy to follow on and absorb the sights around her. The port was a bland concrete affair with several weathered buildings overlooking it. Above the port and off to the right, she could see a hillside with several homes built into it. To the left of the hill, she could make out a forest, towards which, Ambre and Sika were leading her. Her first impression of the island being that, away from the port, this might well be quite a pretty place. As she pondered that thought, a man paced from one of the buildings and stopped to stare at them. Feeling it'd be good for her reputation as a super cool soldier to wave, Soapy raised her hand aloft and smiled. Receiving a one fingered salute in return, she furrowed her brow and grimaced. It most definitely hadn't been the fanfare arrival she'd been expecting.

Sighing to herself, Soapy paced onwards behind Ambre and Sika, snarling hatefully at Ambre's perfect backside mincing forth.)

SIKA: I was just stating a fact, that's all.

AMBRE: No you weren't!

SIKA: Look, I'm not gonna argue with you anymore.

(Sika then glanced over her shoulder at Soapy.)

SIKA: Made level nine at fifteen, huh? Me too! Last year!

(Soapy looked to her and smiled.)

SOAPY: Cool!

(At once, Soapy's confidence took another hit. Along with her friends Pepsi and Maxine, Soapy thought she'd made a miraculous achievement in reaching level nine so young.



Clearly, however, it wasn't as rare as she thought. Trying not to sound disheartened, she held her smile and engaged Sika in discussion about it.)

SOAPY: Passed everything first time then, I guess?

SIKA: Yeah! You?

SOAPY: Yeah!

(Faking modesty, she then said exactly what she was thinking.)

SOAPY: I guess it's not that rare then.

SIKA: Not really.

(Ambre then cut in excitedly.)

AMBRE: Oh, look, a flower!

(Sika just rolled her eyes and pointed into the woods.)

SIKA: Oh, look, a tree!

(She then resumed talking to Soapy while Ambre scowled at her.)

SIKA: I thought my friend and I were the only ones ever to do it, but I've heard about loads of people since then.

(Soapy nodded and lied.)

SOAPY: Yeah me too. That's why I didn't get excited about it. No big deal really, anyone can do it if they try hard enough.

(Sika grimaced.)

SIKA: Well you say that... how old were you again, Ambre? When you made level nine?

(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: Shut up!

(Sika raised a troubled eyebrow then mouthed the word "nineteen" to Soapy. At once, a huge smile emerged onto Soapy's face.)

SOAPY: Nineteen?

(Ambre snarled at Sika.)

AMBRE: I hate you, Sika!

(As Ambre stormed ahead then promptly fell over, defeated by her high cork heels, Sika laughed then rushed to help her up.)

SIKA: You okay?

(Ambre got to her feet then blushed and hid her face from Soapy.)

AMBRE: Yeah. Thanks.

(As Ambre slowly walked ahead, Sika waited for Soapy to catch up then grimaced at her.)

SIKA: Yeah, poor thing passed her level nine exam at the age of nineteen. Rumour has it, she had help too.

SOAPY: Wow.

(This was music to Soapy's ears. This girl who she'd decided she didn't like, whom she assumed would be her rival, was in fact hopeless. Eager to hide her hatred, however, she just smiled.)

SOAPY: Still, she seems nice!

SIKA: Yeah, she is. Come on, let's catch her up.

(With that, they passed from the town, onto the dirt track of the forest floor and swiftly arrived at Ambre's side.)

SIKA: Base is just down here.

SOAPY: Cool.

SIKA: So, how long do you think it'll be before you make level 10?

(Soapy shrugged.)

SOAPY: A year tops!

(Sika looked impressed.)

SIKA: Really? I thought *two* years was ambitious!

SOAPY: Nah, I'm pretty damn good at what I do.

SIKA: You'd have to be. A level 10 at sixteen; like, *my* age... that's kind of unheard of.  
(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: Do we have to talk about this?

SIKA: Excuse me?

AMBRE: It's embarrassing!

SIKA: Why is it? You've nothing to be embarrassed about, Ambre. A lot of...  
(She looked to Soapy and grimaced uncomfortably.)

SIKA: Twenty three year olds...

(She then looked back at Ambre.)

SIKA: Haven't made level 10, you're not the only one.

(As Soapy followed on, holding in her urge to mock and laugh, Ambre sighed.)

AMBRE: You're just saying that!

SIKA: Yeah, I am.

AMBRE: See, I'm hopeless.

SIKA: You're not hopeless! You're pretty, you... are pretty. You've got lots going for you.  
(She shrugged.)

SIKA: It's not your fault you're a dip-shit!  
(Ambre pouted angrily.)

AMBRE: You're being mean again!

SIKA: I'm not!

AMBRE: You called me a dip-shit!

SIKA: I did? Sorry. I meant dipstick!  
(Ambre seemed to calm a little.)

AMBRE: That's alright then!

SIKA: That's my girl!  
(Ambre looked miffed.)

AMBRE: Hey!!!  
(Sika chuckled.)

SIKA: You know I'm only teasing, babes.

(She put a friendly arm around Ambre then looked to Soapy.)

SIKA: So, yeah, you nervous, Soapy? First day an' all?  
(Soapy shrugged.)

SOAPY: Kinda! I was nervous earlier, then I felt fine, but now I'm here...

SIKA: Daunting isn't it? First days suck.  
(Ambre smiled.)

AMBRE: Don't be nervous. Everyone's really nice, you'll love it here.  
(Soapy nodded.)

SOAPY: Good to know!

(As Ambre smiled and faced ahead, Soapy bit her lip. The last thing she wanted was reassurance from Ambre.)

SIKA: You probably won't like Kasira, the boss, at first. She can come over, well... bossy.  
But once you get to know her...

AMBRE: She's lovely!

SIKA: Right... and the second in command, Cayley...

AMBRE: She's adorable.

SIKA: She's an airborne like me. And yes, she *is* lovely.

AMBRE: Nivea's nice too!

SOAPY: Nivea?

SIKA: She's a subterranean. You won't meet her until night time.

SOAPY: Oh, okay!

(She looked thoughtful.)

SOAPY: So what race is the boss?

SIKA: Land-bound.

SOAPY: Cool. If she's mad at me, I'll just jump in the sea and swim away.

(Sika laughed.)

SIKA: I tried to fly away when I first got into trouble!

(She blushed.)

SIKA: I flew back when I was hungry; boy was I in deep shit?

(Ambre beamed.)

AMBRE: Yeah, but you've been a good girl since then!

(Sika winced.)

SIKA: Don't call me that!

AMBRE: I was being nice!

(She rolled her eyes.)

AMBRE: Fine! Everything is do is wrong!

(As Ambre folded her arms and paced forth pouting, Soapy looked at the trees around her and nodded.)

SOAPY: At least it's a pretty place.

SIKA: Not when it's overrun with wraiths!

SOAPY: No, I don't suppose it is.

(As they paced on, Soapy sighed inwardly. Being pretty, cute, quick-witted and chatty were all traits she used to own at the academy. These were the things that made her standout. After only a few minutes in the company of these two new unit comrades, however, she knew this wouldn't be the case anymore. Ambre was prettier than she could ever dream of being with a cuteness and an innocence she couldn't even dream of competing with. And already she could tell, Sika had taken the quick-witted chatterbox role and made it her own. Now she had no niche that made her standout. In that moment, the captain's words hit her like a thunderbolt. She would no longer be the ace in the pack. There was no reason for her unit to think she was special unless she could come out with a new trait, unique to her. Sighing as she paced forth thinking about it, she could only hope the three soldiers she hadn't met yet weren't as pretty as the other two. Being just another girl would drive her to the edge of insanity.)

Following another brief minute or two of walking, Sika gestured ahead and smiled. Before them was a concrete wall with metal spikes poking from its top. In the centre was a cast iron gate. Outside was a sign which read '123<sup>rd</sup> Regiment – Wraith Containment Unit'.)

SIKA: We're here!

(She grinned at Soapy.)

SIKA: Nervous *now*?

(Soapy stared at her through wide eyes.)

SOAPY: Yes!

(Ambre smiled.)

AMBRE: Don't be nervous, Soapy.

(Sika rolled her eyes.)

SIKA: Yeah, that'll help!

AMBRE: It might!

SIKA: And did it?

SOAPY: No!

AMBRE: Oh! Well, sorry! I'm trying!

(Sika smiled at her.)

SIKA: Nobody can ever say you're not that, babe.

(Taking Sika's insult as a compliment, Ambre beamed and pushed open the gate.)

AMBRE: Here we go.

(Soapy gulped then followed Sika and Ambre through the gates into a concrete forecourt, trembling nervously. Trying to compose herself, she then took a deep breath and allowed them to lead her into the building.)

Not knowing what to expect, Soapy followed her two unit mates through a thin entrance passageway and into a large mess room with sofas around the edges and a large table in the centre. Despite having arrived at the barracks, the reality of joining a war still hadn't hit her yet and the only thing on her mind was how the leader would perceive her. She yearned to be seen as special, unique, a cut above the rest and her confidence had taken quite a pounding on that score already. Sadly for her, it then took another one. As she stood there lost in thought, a stunning, twenty five year old, black-haired beauty paced into the room and headed straight for her, introducing herself with an outstretched hand.)

KASIRA: You must be Soapy. Nice to meet you. I'm Captain Kasira Ashwood; you can call me boss, ma'am or Kasira, depending on the situation. I'm sure you'll know when.

(Soapy held out her hand and stared into Kasira's eyes.)

SOAPY: It's a pleasure, ma'am!

KASIRA: Maybe I was wrong. It's Kasira in here!

(She smiled.)

KASIRA: Unless you've made me angry.

(Seeing her stock on the beauty-front plummet, Soapy forced a smile and tried to reply with a witty comment, only for a stunning, twenty four year old, blonde to appear from a side room and crush her hopes completely.)

CAYLEY: Ah, she's here. Welcome to the unit, Soapy. I'm Sergeant Cayley Avanti!

(Soapy's shoulders sunk.)

SOAPY: You're all so beautiful!

SIKA: What a gay thing to say!

(She grimaced.)

SIKA: Hope she's not another Nivea.

(As everyone smirked, Soapy looked uneasy.)

SOAPY: What?

KASIRA: You'll see... Corporal Nivea can be... a little free with her hands!

(Soapy gulped.)

SOAPY: What do you mean?

KASIRA: I mean exactly what you're thinking!

SOAPY: A groping lesbian?

CAYLEY: She's not a lesbian... she just gets bored!

SIKA: And when she's bored, her hands tend to wander!

(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: She gropes our boobs!

(As Soapy stood gaping, Kasira, Sika and Cayley started to laugh.)

KASIRA: We scared her half to death, look.

(Sensing they were having a laugh at her expense at her, Soapy raised an eyebrow.)

SOAPY: I knew you'd play tricks on me and yet I walked straight into that.

(Everyone laughed for a moment then Kasira smiled.)

KASIRA: We weren't joking, sweetheart.

SOAPY: What?

KASIRA: Now, Cayley will show you to your room and you can change out of that bikini; bikinis are for down time and we've got work to do! Starting with your induction. Off you go.

(With that, Kasira shovelled Soapy towards Cayley.)

KASIRA: Don't be long.

SOAPY: But... induction?

(Kasira just smiled as Cayley took Soapy's hand and led her out of the room.)

KASIRA: Seems like a nice enough kid.

AMBRE: Yeah, I like her!

SIKA: You like everyone!

AMBRE: Be nice!

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*Fifteen minutes later...*

Seated around the large table in the mess room, Kasira, Cayley, Sika and Ambre were all leant forward scrutinising a clearly uncomfortable Soapy. Eager to know as much about the new girl as possible, Kasira fired off one question after another, every answer being lapped up by her interested unit comrades. Sat at the table with her hands on her lap, Soapy replied to every sharp question with a blunt answer, praying for the interrogation to end, but alas, Kasira kept on coming.

KASIRA: Current boyfriend?

SOAPY: No!

KASIRA: Period due?

SOAPY: Two weeks!

KASIRA: Pregnant?

SOAPY: What?

KASIRA: You heard!

SOAPY: No, I'm not! I pretty much answered that when you asked if I'm a virgin!

KASIRA: Don't be embarrassed, I have to ask these questions. It's all part of your induction.

SOAPY: Okay!

KASIRA: Sexual preference?

(As everyone leant forward, Soapy furrowed her brow.)

SOAPY: I'm straight!

(As all around her gave a sigh of relief, Soapy sneered.)

SOAPY: Oh, like it was ever in doubt!

KASIRA: You can never be too sure, Soapy.

(She smiled.)

KASIRA: Anyway, that's enough about you.

SOAPY: Thank god.

KASIRA: There's a fair bit you need to know and I don't fancy repeating myself so pay attention. First thing, your duties. I won't lie to you, I'm going to work you like a dog for the first week. The sooner you get everything down, the sooner you'll feel at home here and the happier we'll all be, okay?

(Soapy half-nodded.)

SOAPY: Okay...

KASIRA: I'm going to take you on your first patrol soon. We do two a day. A daytime patrol and a night one. This may not be the biggest island in the world but we do get somewhere in the region of fifty wraiths per patrol to deal with. They're not difficult to

dispatch if you pay attention to what you're doing but they can kill you if you don't. So you'll need your wits about you. Understand?

(Soapy nodded arrogantly.)

SOAPY: Don't worry, I'll be awesome.

(In that moment, Soapy felt all warm inside. Realising what a lot of less vain people might have realised earlier, her niche could be the fact she was excellent at her job. This could be the thing that set her apart. Enthused and looking forward to the first patrol, she smiled as Kasira continued her lecture.)

KASIRA: As I said, I'll be taking you later and then you'll be going again tonight. You won't always do two a day; I just want you to experience both patrols, night and day, okay?

SOAPY: Got it! Shall we go now?

KASIRA: Calm down, I haven't told you even half of what you need to know yet.

(Soapy blushed and looked sheepishly at Kasira as she resumed.)

KASIRA: Every day, as soon as night falls, we do the flag ceremony. The army are very fastidious about having a clean allied flag flying over the town. So we have to go there and lower it then raise a clean one. In full uniform, no less. All you'll have to do is come along, stand to attention then salute when I say "company salute". Okay?

SOAPY: Gotcha!

KASIRA: As for the uniform...

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: It's hideous!

SOAPY: It is?

KASIRA: You can't imagine!

(Soapy bit her lip.)

SOAPY: I've seen some uniforms before, they looked kinda cool.

KASIRA: Well, this is the 123<sup>rd</sup> regiment. Forget cool.

(She sighed.)

KASIRA: You may have noticed something about this regiment, Soapy. Without being arrogant, none of us are exactly ugly.

(Soapy sighed.)

SOAPY: I had noticed.

KASIRA: Well there's a reason for that. This island is where General Wilson takes his leave.

SOAPY: Yeah, I heard about that.

KASIRA: The man's a pervert beyond imagination.

(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: He took my virginity!

SIKA: And mine!

KASIRA: See?

(Soapy trembled.)

SOAPY: How did he...

KASIRA: By force!

SOAPY: Rape, you mean?

KASIRA: Not exactly, but yes!

SOAPY: Eh?

AMBRE: He told me I *had* to do it with him or he'd put me in prison.

SIKA: I told him I'd *rather* go to prison so he raped me!

KASIRA: He'll want to sample you next!

(Soapy gave them all troubled glances.)

SOAPY: This is a wind-up right?

KASIRA: I wish it was. This is why this regiment is like it is. He picks all the best looking girls with the biggest boobs, or gets his friends to recommend them.

(Soapy snarled.)

SOAPY: My captain... what a bastard!

KASIRA: That's why we're all good looking and why our uniform looks more like a kinky schoolgirl outfit!

SOAPY: No, you're winding me up. This is a joke surely!

(Kasira sighed then placed a high-heeled shoe on the table.)

KASIRA: See? Five inch heel, one inch platform. Now pair it with some cute short socks, a pleated mini-skirt, blouse and tie and that's our uniform.

(Soapy stared at the shoe in terror.)

SOAPY: I can't walk in that!

KASIRA: Then you'll have to learn. Before the flag ceremony tonight.

AMBRE: You'll be fine. I learnt to walk in them in ten minutes and I'm really, really stupid!

SIKA: And then some!

KASIRA: Sika!

SIKA: Sorry! She knows I love her to bits really.

(Ambre beamed.)

AMBRE: Aw.

KASIRA: Anyway...

(Soapy sat forward pouting.)

SOAPY: I don't want to lose my virginity to some old pervert. Can't we pretend I'm out when he comes? He doesn't even know about me yet!

(Having been silent until now, Cayley sat forward.)

CAYLEY: It's not that simple, Soapy. He undoubtedly knows we've got a new member. And if we tried to hide you...

(She smiled at Kasira.)

CAYLEY: It'll be Kasira's backside on the line.

KASIRA: Literally! Any insubordination and I get it in the neck. Again, literally.

(Cayley patted Kasira kindly on the back.)

CAYLEY: She's taken a lot of hits for us; we can't expect her to take them all.

KASIRA: And by taken hits, she means literally again. I told him to stay away from Ambre when she first joined us and his guards beat me up. Then he... did stuff to me.

SOAPY: I'm scared.

KASIRA: That's wise, Soapy. Listen, this isn't the woman's army they make it out to be. Be the best, just like your mother was, they say. That's crap! The high-ups beat us, molest us, pretty much do what they like to us and nobody cares. We're not protected by the men in the army, we're just pretty things for them to put their cocks into given half a chance, whether we like it or not. That's why we have to be so careful. Not a lot we can do about General Wilson but men in general we can keep at arms length as long as we're alert.

SOAPY: Okay...

KASIRA: That includes the townspeople, by the way.

CAYLEY: Yeah, they really don't like us.

SOAPY: Why not?

KASIRA: Because they resent the fact their town is protected by a female unit. They think we're an insult to their community.

SOAPY: But... I was better than all the boys in my class!

KASIRA: Doesn't matter. As far as they're concerned women are weak. Given half a chance they'd drive us out of town in a heartbeat. That's why we never leave the compound

alone and at the flag ceremony, we never acknowledge them. They come out in their droves just to mock us, so we put our heads down and get on with it.

CAYLEY: Yeah, it'll be hard but you have to ignore the name calling.

KASIRA: Yes! And don't react when they throw things!

SOAPY: Really? But we're the army!

KASIRA: Yeah, and as they'll so readily remind you, so were they once. Don't forget, everyone over the age of fifteen either has been or *is* a soldier! They all think they can do a better job and they're not slow in letting you know that.

CAYLEY: To the older people, the army is just the last stage of school. That's how we're seen, schoolgirls put in a job we're unfit to do.

KASIRA: Yeah. That's precisely how we're seen.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: So we do our jobs, keep our heads down and avoid men like the plague. Do that and you'll be fine. Until General Wilson comes.

(Soapy whimpered.)

SOAPY: I'm gonna hate this army life, aren't I.

KASIRA: No!

CAYLEY: You'll enjoy it given time.

SIKA: Yeah, it's fun once you get used to it.

CAYLEY: It's not like you're on your own, Soapy. We're all like sisters here, we've got you covered.

AMBRE: I never want to leave. I've never had friends before.

(Sika smiled and patted Ambre on the back.)

SIKA: See? We're a family.

(Soapy forced a smile.)

SOAPY: Okay... sounds like hell to me, but okay.

KASIRA: That's the spirit.

(She rubbed her hands together.)

KASIRA: Now go and peel the potatoes. Cayley will show you where they're kept.

SOAPY: Potatoes?

KASIRA: Yeah. Potatoes! Then when you're done we can do that patrol!

(She smiled.)

KASIRA: Told you I was gonna work you like a dog!

(Soapy pouted then hung her head.)

SOAPY: Fine!

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Within the hour, Soapy found herself pacing up a grassy hill alongside Kasira and Ambre with an excited spring in her step. Eager to impress on this, her first patrol, she couldn't wait to undertake a killing spree. A whole lot calmer about proceedings, Kasira and Ambre strolled causally forth, almost as if they were enjoying the warm sun on their backs and didn't have a care in the world.

SOAPY: You wait until them wraiths get a load of me. They won't know what hit them!

(She looked to Kasira urgently.)

SOAPY: Where do they spawn? Over the top of this hill? We should hurry.

(Kasira grinned.)

KASIRA: They spawn all over. And no, we shouldn't hurry.

SOAPY: But...

KASIRA: Patience, Soapy. There's no need to rush about, trust me.

(She reached inside her bag and pulled out a small bone carving.)



KASIRA: Here, take this!

(Soapy reached for the carving and pulled an uncertain face.)

SOAPY: What's this?

KASIRA: It's a wraith whistle! Don't blow it until I say.

SOAPY: A wraith whistle?

(She took the carving from Kasira's palm and scrutinised it with her eyes.)

SOAPY: What does it do?

KASIRA: It attracts wraiths! So, don't blow it until I say so, I mean it.

(Soapy gave her a sideways glance.)

SOAPY: They never mentioned anything about these in training!

KASIRA: Of course they didn't. For one, a trainee soldier attracting every wraith in earshot onto themselves would be suicidal.

(She smiled.)

KASIRA: They're a swift human invention.

SOAPY: Swift humans are suicidal are they?

(Ambre chuckled.)

AMBRE: Far from it. Well I'm not anyway.

KASIRA: You use these when you have someone who can handle big groups of wraiths.

(She gestured towards Ambre.)

KASIRA: Such as Ambre here. Nivea too, actually.

(Soapy looked Ambre up and down then raised a doubting eyebrow.)

SOAPY: She can handle large groups of wraiths?

AMBRE: *I* can't but my familiar can.

SOAPY: Familiar?

KASIRA: They really don't teach you much about other races down there in fish world, do they?

(Soapy pouted.)

SOAPY: I'm not a fish!

AMBRE: Yeah, Kasira, you told me not to call her a fish, remember?

(Kasira rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: Okay, fine. Listen, Ambre can summon a stone beast. That's her familiar.

SOAPY: Okay...

KASIRA: And when you blow the wraith whistle, the wraiths will all come running from all over the island to attack you.

(Soapy looked more than a little uncomfortable.)

SOAPY: Me?

KASIRA: Yeah, but don't worry. Ambre's stone beast can emulate the sound of the whistle. Once they get close enough they'll attack that instead.

AMBRE: And while I keep my stone beast healed, you two can kill all the wraiths.

KASIRA: What she said!

(Soapy nodded.)

SOAPY: Sounds good to me. But, if that stone thingy can emulate the whistle, what's the point of me blowing it in the first place.

KASIRA: The stone beast isn't loud enough. The wraiths can't hear it unless they're 200 yards away.

SOAPY: Fair enough.

(She mused to herself.)

SOAPY: When you say it's a stone beast? I mean... what is it?

AMBRE: Just a stone beast. Like a rock man. I call him Fluffy!

SOAPY: No, I mean, what kind of...

(She then paused and gave Ambre a belittling glance.)

SOAPY: You named a stone beast “Fluffy”?

AMBRE: It’s a cute name!

(Soapy rolled her eyes.)

SOAPY: Right. So, what type of creature is it?

(Kasira shrugged.)

KASIRA: Ancient swift human text refers to it as a Saxum.

AMBRE: Nobody calls them that though. They just call them our familiars.

(Soapy smirked.)

SOAPY: Or Fluffy, apparently.

(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: What’s wrong with Fluffy?

SOAPY: It’s made of stone! How can it be fluffy?

AMBRE: You don’t have to *be* something to be *called* something.

(She folded her arms indignantly and looked away.)

AMBRE: You of all people should know that “Soapy”.

(Kasira chuckled.)

KASIRA: She’s got you there. It’s not like you’re all covered in soap.

(Soapy pouted then furrowed her brow. Having been outsmarted by this airhead whom she already despised, her hatred swelled. Trying not to let her disdain for Ambre show, she took a deep breath then ruffled her neck.)

SOAPY: My parents couldn’t spell Sophie!

(As Kasira chuckled, Soapy sighed.)

SOAPY: I know it’s a stupid name. That’s why I’m kinda glad everyone called me by my nickname at the academy.

AMBRE: I used to get called nicknames.

SOAPY: I bet you did!

AMBRE: Dipshit, halfwit, idiot face... mostly it was “thick girl”. I don’t like nicknames.

KASIRA: What was *your* nickname then, Soapy?

SOAPY: Flip-Flops!

(Ambre and Kasira gave her a sideways glance.)

KASIRA: Flip-Flops?

AMBRE: Like the shoe?

SOAPY: No, like the banjo! Of course the shoe.

KASIRA: How did you get *that* nickname?

(Soapy chuckled and scratched behind her ear.)

SOAPY: On my first morning in basic training, I kind of overslept. One of the girls rattled my bunk and said we had to be on the parade ground in like thirty seconds. Anyway, I sat up a few seconds later, once her words had filtered through to my brain, and they’d all gone.

(She struggled not to laugh as she elaborated.)

SOAPY: Anyway, I didn’t know any better so I grabbed a cup of water from my bedside, slipped my flip-flops on and strolled out onto the parade ground.

(Kasira also started to laugh.)

KASIRA: You’re joking.

SOAPY: Nope! There they all were in their neatly pressed uniforms, standing to attention, and I’m on the end of the line in my nighty and flip-flops, hair all over the place with a cup in my hand. The sergeant was livid. He called me Flip-Flops for ever more and it kinda stuck.

(She smiled.)

SOAPY: That was okay by me. Soapy is a silly name. And, I was so humiliated, I kind of went on to excel at what I do.

(She glanced very deliberately at Ambre.)

SOAPY: Didn't want to get labelled as a useless idiot bimbo, you see.

(Ambre sighed.)

AMBRE: Yeah, that's no fun at all!

(Kasira patted Ambre's back.)

KASIRA: You're far from useless, Ambre.

AMBRE: Thanks, Kasira.

SOAPY: So yeah, that's why I was called Flip-Flops. What about you, Kasira? Did you ever have a nickname?

(Kasira grimaced.)

KASIRA: Nothing I care to repeat in front of a fifteen year old.

AMBRE: Kasira the penis cosy!

(Kasira winced and put her hand to her face.)

KASIRA: Ambre!

(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: Sorry.

SOAPY: Why call you "Kasira the..."

KASIRA: Boys can be very cruel!!!

(She flexed her neck muscles and nodded.)

KASIRA: And they exaggerate! And tell lies!

AMBRE: Boys are mean!

KASIRA: Yes! They are!

(She nodded then looked ahead at the top of the hill, now only a matter of feet away.)

KASIRA: Almost there now. Time to get down to business. When I say the word, blow on that whistle with all you've got Soapy.

SOAPY: Righto.

KASIRA: No. We're officially going about our duty now. It's "yes ma'am".

SOAPY: Okay!

KASIRA: What did you just say, soldier???

SOAPY: Yes, ma'am!!!

KASIRA: Better!

(She nodded her head then looked to the top of the hill, just before them.)

KASIRA: As soon as we can see over the side, we'll get started.

AMBRE: Shall I start summoning Fluffy *now*, or wait until...

KASIRA: Now, please, Ambre.

(A few moments later they all arrived at the top of the hill. From their vantage point they could see the whole of Capsway Island. It was quite an eye opener for Soapy. On one side lay the port, a small town and their base, while on the other there was nothing but woods, meadows and farmland with the odd building dotted around.)

SOAPY: Amazing view from up here!

KASIRA: Not bad, is it? Nothing really happens on the other side of the island. The islanders rarely ever go there. You might see the odd farmer once in a blue moon but they keep themselves and their livestock indoors most of the time, where their dogs can protect them from wraiths.

SOAPY: So it's like dead over that side?

KASIRA: Pretty much, yeah.

(Just then, a ten feet tall cluster of rocks, moulded into the rough shape of a muscular human being, appeared at their side. Given quite a start, Soapy screamed and jumped back, poised to fire her magic.)

KASIRA: Hey!!! Stand down, soldier! This is Fluffy!

(Ambre peered from behind it.)

AMBRE: Didn't mean to scare you!

(Soapy furrowed her brow.)

SOAPY: I wasn't scared.

(She grimaced and looked away. Eager to start the mission and spare her blushes, she then looked to Kasira.)

SOAPY: Look, can I blow this whistle now?

KASIRA: Excuse me?

SOAPY: I said "can I blow this whistle now?"

(Kasira puffed out.)

KASIRA: Again!

(Soapy rolled her eyes.)

SOAPY: Can I blow this whistle now *please*!

(Kasira folded her arms and raised an angry eyebrow at her.)

KASIRA: Are you *trying* to piss me off, soldier?

(Soapy looked stunned for a moment then a look of enlightenment crossed her brow.)

SOAPY: Sorry! My bad. Can I blow the whistle now, ma'am!

KASIRA: That's better!

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: But the answer's no! Let me reiterate what we're doing first.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: Once the wraiths come, let Ambre gather them, then when I give the command, you and I can do our thing, okay?

SOAPY: Okay!

(She grimaced uncomfortably.)

SOAPY: I mean, yes ma'am.

KASIRA: There you go, you're getting it!

SOAPY: Right, now can I? Ma'am?

KASIRA: Go for it. As loud as you can.

(Looking delighted to finally have her first mission underway, Soapy placed the whistle to her lips and blew with all the might her lungs could muster. At once, a dull, almost bloodcurdling drone echoed across the island. Seconds later, she pulled the whistle from her lips and looked to Kasira.)

SOAPY: Again? Ma'am?

(Kasira stood ringing her ears out with her fingers and raised an impressed eyebrow.)

KASIRA: No! Definitely not! You got quite the set of lungs on you, soldier!

(Soapy beamed.)

SOAPY: I'm loud and I'm proud.

KASIRA: Yes, yes you are.

(With that, Kasira turned and looked to Ambre.)

KASIRA: Okay, Ambre? Start him whistling.

(Ambre looked to her and nodded nervously before closing her eyes to concentrate.)

AMBRE: Here goes!

(As a whistling sound started to emanate from the stone beast, Kasira reached out and clutched Ambre's arm.)

KASIRA: Relax, okay darling? Keep your focus now.

(With that, she led her backwards by the arm, away from her stone beast.)

KASIRA: Soapy, stick with us. Concentrate, Ambre!

(Soapy joined them in pacing backwards, giving Kasira a hard done by pout. Having just been referred to as "soldier" several times, it seemed horribly fair that she'd called Ambre

“darling”. One thing she’d never liked was being on the wrong end of double standards or favouritism and she felt very much the victim of both. Maintaining her bitter eye on Kasira, Soapy allowed herself to be led back a good twenty feet from the stone beast, somehow managing to keep her grievance to herself. A rare thing for Soapy. Her silence, however, wasn’t to last much longer. Having stopped pacing backwards, Kasira watched Ambre concentrating and gave her a warm smile.)

KASIRA: That’s perfect. Keep it up, sweetheart.

(Soapy frowned.)

SOAPY: Sweetheart?

(Kasira glared at her.)

KASIRA: Problem, soldier?

SOAPY: Soldier?

KASIRA: Well?

(Soapy shook her head bitterly.)

SOAPY: No, ma’am.

KASIRA: Quit whining then!

(She looked to Ambre then back at Soapy.)

KASIRA: She’s concentrating hard on keeping the beast whistling. Then she’s going to have to focus hard on healing it. It’ll be much easier for her do that without you wittering on!

Understood?

(Soapy sighed.)

SOAPY: Fine. Ma’am.

(Wearing an angry frown, Soapy looked at the ground and shuffled her feet uneasily when suddenly, the sound of dozens of wraiths rose up into the air. A little startled, she looked up to see wraiths of all shapes and sizes charging up the hillside towards the stone beast. Some were shaped like wolves, some were shaped like primates and others were in the form of giant insects. Having never seen so many types of wraith, Soapy’s jaw dropped.)

SOAPY: Holy crap!

KASIRA: Yeah! Must be sixty or seventy today. Just be ready to start killing when I give the word.

(Kasira then looked to Ambre urgently.)

KASIRA: Get ready to switch from whistling to healing it, Ambre.

(Ambre opened one eye and trembled.)

AMBRE: Tell me when!

KASIRA: I will, just relax okay. You’re doing brilliantly, darling.

(As Soapy’s nostril’s flared, Kasira watched the wraiths charging towards the stone beast then leant gently towards Ambre.)

KASIRA: Nice and easy, start healing now, there’s a good girl. We’ve got your back.

(Seconds later, a blue aura surrounded the beast. Having never seen anything like it, Soapy looked to Kasira.)

SOAPY: That’s the healing, is it?

KASIRA: That’s right. Nice work, Ambre. Now brace yourself, the wraiths are here.

(Ambre said nothing and hunched her shoulders, continuing to focus hard as wraiths charged past them in all directions, intent on savaging the stone beast.)

KASIRA: See, Soapy? Wraith whistle! Now they’re all gathered in one place, attacking something else. Now...

(She beamed.)

KASIRA: Now we can get to work.

(She took one step forward and then paused.)

KASIRA: Just don't hit me with you magic, 'cause if you do, even General Wilson won't find you attractive once I've finished with you.

SOAPY: Relax, I never miss my target.

KASIRA: Let's hope so. Now come on!

(With that, Kasira sprinted forth with razor sharp duel blades at the ready. Delighted that her time had come, Soapy also jumped forward and aimed her arms into the swarm of wraiths that were attacking the stone beast. Before firing, however, she took a sideways glance at Ambre and mumbled under her breath.)

SOAPY: Bloody leader's pet.

(She then sent a blast of telekinetic energy into a wraith, blowing it to smithereens. As its remains evaporated into dust, ready to float up and come back another day, she grinned to herself then stepped up her attack.)

SOAPY: I'll make short work of these.

(Making full use of her talents, she released one powerful blast after another into the swarm of wraiths. With Kasira, chopping and culling wraiths in front of the stone beast, she set her mind to clearing every wraith to Kasira's left. Fully focussed and with deathly accuracy she did just that in a matter of seconds.)

KASIRA: Nice work, Soldier!!! Now go round the other side!

(Soapy beamed.)

SOAPY: Already on it, captain! Leader! Boss. Ma'am!

(Thoroughly enjoying herself, she raced around the hoard and started to attack the wraiths from behind the stone beast.)

SOAPY: This is so awesome.

(It had once been remarked that for a girly girl, Soapy had an unusually heightened sense of joy when it came to blowing things to pieces. That had never been truer than at this moment. Blasting the wraiths and watching them violently disintegrate was giving her more pleasure than she could possibly ever explain. A great deal more professional in her killing, Kasira continued to chop and slash at the wraiths, ever mindful of getting the job done as soon as possible before Ambre's magic expired. With a focus in her eyes that didn't even waver for a moment, she was destroying the wraiths at great speed while keeping a constant vigil on the blue healing magic surrounding the stone beast.)

KASIRA: Okay, keep this up, girls, we're doing great!

(As soon as she spoke, however, the blue healing magic fluctuated and the stone beast seemed to stagger slightly. Deeply concerned, Kasira swiftly turned her head towards Ambre.)

KASIRA: You okay, Ambre?

(Thrown from her concentration by the interruption, Ambre opened her eyes and looked up in bewilderment.)

AMBRE: What?

(Much to Ambre's horror, having lost her focus entirely, her summoning failed and the stone beast vanished into the ether with a good twenty or more wraiths still on the rampage.)

AMBRE: No!!!

(At once, Kasira's eyes bulged and she went on a mad slashing spree to keep the wraiths from piling into her. Being nearest to them, their attention was solely focussed on her.)

KASIRA: Shit! Ambre, get Fluffy back, quick!!!

(Panicking profusely, Ambre fumbled and dithered, trying her damndest but struggling to refocus under such pressure.)

AMBRE: I'm trying!!!

KASIRA: Soapy, regroup!!! Get this side!!!

(Soapy yelled back at her from where she was blasting the wraiths joyfully.)

SOAPY: Hang on a second!

KASIRA: Now, Soapy!!!

SOAPY: Just a couple more!!!

(Kasira slashed and chopped at the wraiths furiously, slowly retreating to avoid the gnashing teeth and crunching pincers they were throwing her way. Thanks to her immense dexterity, she was capable of slashing at such a speed that her hands were something of blur. At this moment, it was only this highly developed skill that was keeping her alive.)

KASIRA: I said, now!!!

(Looking peeved, Soapy swiftly raced around to Kasira's side then proceeded to help her thin the herd.)

SOAPY: No need to shout!

KASIRA: I'm being swamped here!!!

(Sure enough, Kasira had several cuts on her arms and legs from far too many close calls and was beginning to tire. Thankfully, however, due to their combined speed and skills, it was only a matter of moments before the wraith numbers dwindled to practically nil, before Soapy took out the last one with a deft blast of her magic. As soon it exploded, she blew on her fingers and beamed.)

SOAPY: How awesome am I?

(As she stood there admiring herself, Kasira paced over to where Ambre was desperately whispering to herself and panicking. With terrified tears in her eyes, she was still trying to recall her summon. Placing her hands on her shoulders aggressively, Kasira proceeded to shake her.)

KASIRA: Stop! It's over.

(Ambre looked disorientated and opened her tearful eyes. Having taken a second to compose herself, she pouted like a small child.)

AMBRE: I could have killed you!

(Kasira furrowed her brow and stared hard into Ambre's eyes.)

KASIRA: No! That was *my* fault. You were concentrating and I put you off. Sorry, babes.

(She then turned and glared at the smug looking Soapy.)

KASIRA: As for you, you arrogant little shit, do you think you're above taking orders???

(Soapy looked dumbfounded.)

SOAPY: What are you having a go at *me* for???

(She pointed at Ambre and furrowed her brow.)

SOAPY: *She* fucked up, have a go at *her*!

KASIRA: *She* made a mistake! *You* disobeyed my order!!!

(Soapy gave her a disbelieving glare then hung her head angrily.)

SOAPY: Like that is it?

KASIRA: Yes!

(She looked to Ambre and gave her a warm smile.)

KASIRA: It's okay! Stop shaking. It wasn't your fault. I should know better than shouting to you while you're channelling magic.

SOAPY: Unbelievable!

(Still trembling, Ambre looked to Kasira through a nervous pout.)

AMBRE: My heal came out weak and Fluffy shuddered. So I tried to up my power when I heard you shout.

(She hung her head.)

AMBRE: It threw me.

KASIRA: Sorry, darling. Entirely my fault.

(She smiled.)

KASIRA: Still, no harm done in the end. Let's get back to base.

(She then headed down the hill glaring at Soapy.)

KASIRA: Get marching you insubordinate little shit, I'll deal with you later.

(As Ambre followed Kasira, Soapy shook her head then started to trudge down the hill looking furious. Glaring hatefully at Ambre, she allowed a growl to rumble through her lips. Feeling horribly unjustly treated, she mumbled bitterly to herself under her breath.)

SOAPY: Yeah, right. I see how it is. Pick on the new girl.

(She then glared at Kasira as she continued to mumble.)

SOAPY: Never mind the fact your blue-eyed wonder girl fucked it up, just blame *me* why don't you? Bitch!

(Up to her knees in self-pity, she then proceeded to trudge all the way back to the base glaring at Ambre as if she'd killed both her parents then set fire to her face. A happy bunny, she was not.)

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In the base's kitchen that evening, Soapy wore a face like thunder. Feeling extremely hard done by still, her anger had been fuelled further by Kasira's orders for her to make dinner. Faced with the task of making a stew for six people and a giant cake, she couldn't remove the pout from her lips. Having never cooked before this felt like an unbearable task, one made all the more difficult by her own bad mood. Focussing far too much on being angry, she couldn't concentrate on the cooking and it felt like a gargantuan chore. Despite the fact that Cayley was at her side, guiding her through it, her determined belief that Kasira had set her an impossible challenge would not subside. As far as she was concerned, this was a cruel punishment, one that was bound to end in disaster, and Kasira had only asked her to do it to make her look bad.

Fuming as she chopped randomly at some carrots, she snarled at the indignity of it all then mumbled to herself.

SOAPY: I bet that idiot Ambre never has to cook.

(She growled.)

SOAPY: So unfair.

(Stepping up to her side, Cayley smiled warmly.)

CAYLEY: How are the carrots coming...

(She bit her lip and grimaced.)

CAYLEY: Oh dear.

(Soapy sighed.)

SOAPY: What have I done wrong now?

(Cayley looked to her warmly.)

CAYLEY: You've never cut carrots before have you?

(Soapy hung her head.)

SOAPY: No!

CAYLEY: That's a shame. It's great fun when you get used to it.

(Doubting her words greatly, Soapy raised an eyebrow.)

SOAPY: Fun?

CAYLEY: Yeah, look.

(She carefully ushered Soapy aside and took the knife from her.)

CAYLEY: It's about rhythm. Just remember to cut away from yourself though...

(She then grabbed a carrot, placed it down and rested the knife against the top of it, near her hand.)

CAYLEY: Now watch.



(Soapy's mouth fell open as Cayley proceeded to cut all the way down the carrot at tremendous speed.)

SOAPY: Holy crap!

CAYLEY: See? Fun!

(Soapy gaped.)

SOAPY: If I tried that I'd probably chop my fingers off.

CAYLEY: No, not if you look what you're doing and, like I said, make sure you chop away from yourself.

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: You try. Don't go too fast at first though. Speed comes with practice.

SOAPY: Then you must have had a lot of practice!

CAYLEY: Yeah, I love cooking. I don't have to do it every day; I do it because I want to.

(She then giggled.)

CAYLEY: Plus, it's the only way I can be sure I'll get something nice to eat.

(Soapy smiled at last. Chopping carrots Cayley's way looked like fun and for a moment, she forgot to be in a temper.)

SOAPY: Okay, so... I'll give it a go.

(She retook her place at the cutting table and bit her lip.)

SOAPY: Slow at first, right? So I don't cut myself.

(Cayley shrugged.)

CAYLEY: As long as you don't cut your hand completely off, I can heal you if you do, you'll be fine.

(Soapy looked thoughtful.)

SOAPY: Heal me?

(She looked enlightened.)

SOAPY: Oh right, airborne people can heal.

CAYLEY: Most of us can, yeah.

(Feeling a whole lot more confident, Soapy grabbed a carrot and placed the knife on it.)

SOAPY: If you airborne people can heal... I mean, having *two* healers, I'd have thought there'd be one of you on *every* patrol. So, how come neither you nor Sika went on the patrol today?

CAYLEY: Get chopping and I'll tell you.

SOAPY: Oh, okay...

(As Soapy swung the knife at the carrot, Cayley watched her cautiously.)

CAYLEY: For one, Sika isn't a healer. And I can't go on every...

SOAPY: Ow!!!

(With bloody oozing from a deep knife wound in her hand, Soapy leapt about cursing to the high heavens. Swift to intervene, Cayley grabbed Soapy's hand and tried to calm her down.)

CAYLEY: Keep still a second!!!

(Soapy froze then shuddered with pain as Cayley placed a hand on the cut.)

CAYLEY: There you go. All better.

(As Cayley let go of her hand, Soapy stared down at it in bewilderment.)

SOAPY: Not even a scar! Thank you.

CAYLEY: You're welcome.

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: Now throw those bloodied carrots pieces in the bin and try again. Don't rush it, this time.

SOAPY: Okay.

(As Soapy swept the blood covered carrots into the bin, Cayley placed her hands to her hips and continued from where she left off.)

CAYLEY: So anyway, I can't go on *every* mission. You actually took my place today.

SOAPY: I did?

CAYLEY: Yeah, I got to put my feet up so you could get your first taste of battle. Thanks for that, by the way.

(Soapy chuckled.)

SOAPY: You're welcome.

CAYLEY: So yeah, when I'm *not* on patrol to heal, we use someone who can take on all the wraiths without getting hit. Nivea or Ambre.

SOAPY: You mean Fluffy. Ambre's a...

(She bit her lip.)

SOAPY: Nothing. Carry on.

(She placed a carrot down on the chopping table then listened as Cayley went on.)

CAYLEY: Yeah, Fluffy then. Otherwise Kasira attacks them all while I keep her constantly healed. I have a skill to dull pain too, you see. So while she's getting bitten and scratched she doesn't feel much and the wounds are instantly healed.

SOAPY: Sounds scary.

(As Soapy proceeded to chop, Cayley sighed warmly.)

CAYLEY: Yeah, it's not pleasant really. Still, we've got three methods of battling wraiths, you see? Nivea can do this spinning thing with her sword, awesome to see. The wraiths can't even get close.

(She shrugged.)

CAYLEY: It's a combination of balance, sword skill and some weird subterranean magic techniques. And there's the method with Kasira tanking while I heal her, plus the one you saw earlier with Fluffy.

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: For someone prone to panic and loss of concentration, Ambre does really well controlling that stone beast of hers.

(Upon hearing Ambre's name, Soapy snarled and started to chop twice as fast.)

CAYLEY: We're all very proud of her.

(She then winced as Soapy jumped up and down in agony again.)

CAYLEY: Not your day is it, Soapy?

(Soapy sneered.)

SOAPY: I was doing fine until you mentioned that...

(She whimpered then held her hand to Cayley.)

SOAPY: Never mind.

(Cayley healed her again then looked down at the carrots.)

CAYLEY: No blood on the food this time? Nice!

SOAPY: I'm not very good at this, am I?

CAYLEY: First time round, nobody is. You'll get there.

(Soapy nodded to accept her words then resumed chopping.)

SOAPY: Anyway, that's enough about...

(She paused chopping.)

SOAPY: Ambre.

(She then resumed.)

SOAPY: How come Sika can't heal?

(Cayley smiled.)

CAYLEY: She's not one hundred percent airborne. Her mother's land-bound, like Kasira. She got her father's wings and airborne magic, but not his healing powers.

SOAPY: Really?

CAYLEY: Yeah. And because of her mother being land-bound, she's got awesome dexterity which makes her pretty quick with her magic skills. Much quicker than me.

(She laughed to herself.)

CAYLEY: She wasn't slow in letting me know about it either.

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: We both attack using magic energy to create a crushing gravity spell on the wraiths. Kinda looks like a tornado around them. It either rips them apart or crushes them.

(She chuckled.)

CAYLEY: We don't mind which, as long as they die.

(She then gave the pouting Soapy a pitying glance.)

CAYLEY: It really *isn't* your day is it, babes?

(Reaching to heal Soapy's bleeding hand once again, Cayley sighed.)

CAYLEY: Don't worry, you'll get there.

(Soapy just blushed. She liked Cayley. Cayley didn't call her soldier or order her around, in fact, she'd just called her babes. She liked that. Cayley had a motherly way about her and right now, that was exactly what Soapy needed to calm her down.)

SOAPY: You're really cool, Cayley!

(Cayley beamed.)

CAYLEY: Aw, thank you. I try to be.

(She nodded then gestured across the kitchen.)

CAYLEY: Tell you what, I'll finish these vegetables, you can stir the cake mix.

SOAPY: How do I do that?

(Cayley looked to her emptily for a moment then replied in a soft voice.)

CAYLEY: You pick up the bowl full of cake mix that I made and you stir it.

(Soapy looked enlightened.)

SOAPY: Oh... I can do that. Probably.

CAYLEY: Just make sure you don't spill any over the side. Like I told my first boyfriend, preparing food is like sex, do a *good* job, not a quick job!

(She then grimaced.)

CAYLEY: You're fifteen; I shouldn't be telling you that!

(She looked thoughtful and shrugged.)

CAYLEY: But then, *I* was fifteen at the time...

SOAPY: Fifteen?

CAYLEY: Never mind that, get stirring.

(She blushed and looked away, leaving Soapy giggling.)

CAYLEY: Stop that, missy.

SOAPY: Sorry.

(They then shared a smile and continued about their jobs.)

---

A few hours later, just after sunset, Soapy found herself tucking into the stew she'd helped make around the large table with Cayley, Kasira, Ambre and Sika. A sixth plate of stew lay going cold in the seat to Soapy's right. Having had nothing else to eat all day, the delicious stew was just what Soapy needed to chase her troubles away.

SOAPY: This is the best stew ever.

KASIRA: It's pretty damn good, nice work guys.

AMBRE: It's lovely.

(Cayley winked at Soapy.)

CAYLEY: Just make sure you check the carrots for bloodstains.

(Sika furrowed her brow.)

SIKA: You made the new girl cut the carrots again?

CAYLEY: It's a rite of passage!

SIKA: It was a bloody massacre when I did it!

SOAPY: Me too! Three times I cut myself and I only chopped two of them!

KASIRA: That sounds about average!

(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: How come *I* didn't get to try that?

(Kasira tapped her hand lovingly.)

KASIRA: You did try it, sweetie, there was so much blood you passed out.

(Ambre looked confused.)

AMBRE: I don't remember that!

(Sika grinned sarcastically.)

SIKA: And yet you're usually so good at remembering things, Ambre!

(Ambre furrowed her brow.)

AMBRE: Don't be mean!

(Sika poked her tongue out.)

AMBRE: Stop it!

SIKA: Halfwit!

AMBRE: Half-bred, poop head!

SIKA: Inbred dipshit!

AMBRE: At least I can do my own race's basic skills. Stupid.

SIKA: *You're* calling *me* stupid?

AMBRE: Yeah! What sort of airborne can't heal? You'll probably forget how to fly next.

(Ambre jolted from a kick beneath the table.)

AMBRE: Ow! Hey!

(As Sika jolted from being kicked back, Kasira thumped the table and raised her voice.)

KASIRA: That's enough! You're like a pair of bloody kids!

(Ambre hung her head.)

AMBRE: Sorry, Kasira!

SIKA: Sorry!

KASIRA: Now shut up and eat your food!

(As they resumed eating in silence, Soapy lowered her head over her bowl. With Sika and Ambre blushing and pouting, the embarrassed atmosphere in the room was uncomfortable to say the least. Deciding only to focus on her plate, she took another mouthful of stew when two hands wrapped around her breasts and started to squeeze them.)

NIVEA: Surprise!!! You must be the new girl.

(As everyone burst out laughing, the horrified Soapy leapt to her feet and instinctively took a swing at Nivea. Chuckling, the pretty, twenty one year old blonde caught her arm in mid air.)

NIVEA: Whoa, you're a feisty one. I can see I'm gonna have some fun with you.

(As the laughter died down, Nivea offered an outstretched hand to Soapy.)

NIVEA: I was just playing with you, girl, the name's Nivea. Nice to meet you.

(Soapy nervously reached for her hand to shake it.)

SOAPY: I'm Soapy.

(Nivea raised an eyebrow.)

NIVEA: Just got out of the bath have you?

SOAPY: It's my name!

NIVEA: I know, I know, I'm kidding.

(She smiled around the table.)

NIVEA: Evening, ladies.

(Everyone greeted her warmly except the pouting Ambre. Sitting with her arms across her chest, she scowled at Nivea distrustfully.)

NIVEA: Relax, Ambre. I've done my groping for today, you're off the hook.

(Ambre gave her another distrusting glance then resumed eating nervously. Chuckling to herself, Nivea then sat down, Soapy slowly following suit.)

NIVEA: So, Soapy, how you settling in?

(Soapy could only grimace and shrug.)

SOAPY: I'm...

(She looked to Kasira nervously then down at her plate.)

NIVEA: Ah, like that is it?

(Kasira nodded.)

KASIRA: It's like Sika all over again.

SIKA: What? She's that awesome?

(Kasira gave Sika a belittling glance then smiled at Soapy.)

KASIRA: Give her a few days, she'll be fine.

NIVEA: Nothing like Sika then, she was a monster for months!

SIKA: Hey, I'm sitting right here!

NIVEA: Doesn't matter *where* you're sitting, girl, you were a nightmare when you first joined.

(Sika scoffed.)

SIKA: I was awesome.

KASIRA: You were a disaster. Thankfully, you've changed.

(Sika shrugged playfully.)

SIKA: I didn't change, you lot did. To fit in with my greatness.

NIVEA: Like hell, we did. You sucked! You wouldn't pay attention to a bloody thing you were told.

(Ambre gave her a dagger look.)

AMBRE: Yeah, and because of that you nearly shot me with your magic by accident!

SIKA: You can't prove that was an accident!

AMBRE: Eh?

NIVEA: Seriously, you were dreadful.

SIKA: I wasn't *that* bad!

KASIRA: You were completely out of control. Twice I had to write to the mayor and apologise for your behaviour!

(Sika blushed.)

SIKA: Oh right... that.

(Soapy looked lost.)

SOAPY: What did she do?

KASIRA: Same thing you did today. Didn't listen to me! She ended up being chased by a wraith and in all her panic she fired three random magic blasts, one of them destroying the mayor's barn!

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: He'd just rebuilt it when she decided it'd be funny to convince Ambre here she could use her magic to throw her into the sea.

(Sika chuckled.)

AMBRE: It wasn't funny. I can't swim!

SIKA: I wasn't actually going to do it! I couldn't for a start, I was lying!

AMBRE: *I* didn't know that!

SOAPY: So what happened?

KASIRA: She panicked, transformed into a gazelle and charged straight through the side of his barn!

AMBRE: Chipped one of my antlers!

NIVEA: They're horns, dear.

AMBRE: I call them antlers!

NIVEA: They're still horns!

(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: You're just lucky my antlers can heal themselves!

(Sika smiled at her.)

SIKA: I am sorry about doing that, you know that right?

(Ambre returned her smile.)

AMBRE: Yeah! It's cool.

KASIRA: I just wish the mayor was as forgiving as you, Ambre. We were disliked in town even *before* that happened and he's not about to let it go any time soon. Even though the army compensated him, he's still there every night at the flag ceremony, leading the hostility. (She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: I hate those sexist bastards out there.

CAYLEY: They certainly don't make our lives easy, do they?

NIVEA: No they don't. And the stupid thing is, like a unit of men could be any more efficient.

KASIRA: Exactly. If they hated us for being incompetent, then I'd understand. But to hate us just because we're women, that sucks. We do a great job.

SOAPY: Men are dumb.

KASIRA: Well, you're not wrong.

SIKA: So are women though! They've *all* been in the army, they know what we can do and yet *they* hate us too.

SOAPY: That's ridiculous!

(Nivea nodded.)

NIVEA: It is! And it's all because they think the male soldiers are sent to the important places and women are sent to useless outposts that don't matter. They see us as an insult to their town.

KASIRA: Idiots!

AMBRE: Complete morons!

SIKA: They make *you* look intelligent, Ambre!

(Ambre scowled at her.)

AMBRE: Stop saying mean things!

(Kasira growled.)

KASIRA: Don't start, you two!!!

(As Sika and Ambre faced their plates and tried to avoid eye contact with Kasira, Nivea laughed and looked to Soapy.)

NIVEA: Get used to this, Soapy. This is how it is all the time.

SOAPY: What do you mean?

NIVEA: Those two. Sika and Ambre arguing. Everyday without fail they're going at it. Sika calling Ambre an idiot and a halfwit, and Ambre teasing Sika because she can't do the magic her race is famous for.

(She grinned.)

NIVEA: And yet how many times have you looked in their room and seen them sleeping cuddled up in the same bed, Kasira?

KASIRA: Oh, god, loads of times!

SIKA: Hey, that makes us sound like a pair of lesbians!

AMBRE: Yeah, I'm not a pair of lesbians and nor is she!

KASIRA: Nobody said you were.

NIVEA: Fact is, for all your arguing, you're like sisters. Exercising together, playing together, brushing each other's hair...

CAYLEY: For all their arguments, they love each other to bits.

NIVEA: They do.

(At once, Sika and Ambre burned red then hid their faces in their plates. Amused by their actions, Nivea chuckled then looked to Soapy.)

NIVEA: We need a 'thing' for you now?

SOAPY: What thing?

NIVEA: A quirk!

(She grinned.)

NIVEA: Me, I'm the pervert of the group. As you already found out. And will again later if you don't sleep with one eye open!

(Soapy was horrified.)

SOAPY: What?

NIVEA: I'm joking, relax. I only molest the waking.

(She chuckled.)

NIVEA: So, that's me. Cayley here... she's our mum!

(Cayley looked somewhat dismayed.)

CAYLEY: I'm twenty four!

NIVEA: Yeah, but you're like a mum.

(Cayley flexed her neck muscles.)

CAYLEY: Way to make a girl feel bland and unattractive, Nivea. Thanks.

NIVEA: Hey, mum's can be sexy!

CAYLEY: Even so...

NIVEA: Just saying you're really nice and we all come to you when we need advice.

Doesn't mean you're not smoking hot. I wouldn't grope you if you weren't.

(Cayley looked unimpressed.)

CAYLEY: Fair enough!

(Nivea then looked to Kasira.)

NIVEA: And as for Kasira...

KASIRA: Careful now, Corporal.

NIVEA: Kasira's like our dad!

KASIRA: I'm going to stop your right there!

NIVEA: Just saying, you're the strong, disciplinary figure.

KASIRA: I'm nothing like a dad though!

NIVEA: You kind of are.

(Kasira grinned.)

KASIRA: I'm beginning to wonder about your dad, Nivea. I'm wearing deep purple eye shadow, black mascara and plum lipstick, and I remind you of your dad?

NIVEA: You know what I mean.

KASIRA: Do I? Do your dad and I have the same dress size or something?

(Nivea chuckled.)

NIVEA: Maybe... if you lost a few pounds...

(Turning to look away from Kasira's icy glare, Nivea laughed.)

NIVEA: I'll move on.

KASIRA: Please do! A dad indeed!

CAYLEY: Yeah, nice one Nivea, and I thought being called a mum was insulting. Wow.

NIVEA: I'm just saying it for Soapy's benefit. We're a family. You two are the parents, I'm a perverted auntie and Sika and Ambre are the squabbling teenage daughters. Now we need a role for Soapy!

(Kasira nodded.)

KASIRA: I'm thinking, third squabbling teenager daughter.

(She furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: Not that I'm going along with this ridiculous analogy!

(Soapy nervously scratched behind her ear.)

SOAPY: Can't I just be a long lost cousin from out of town?

NIVEA: Nope! Too distant!

KASIRA: Of course she can, leave the poor sod alone.

(Nivea looked thoughtful.)

NIVEA: I think she's gonna be another daughter, but not a squabbling sibling, she's the rebellious evil genius, little sister.

CAYLEY: What the hell are you on about?

(Nivea shrugged.)

NIVEA: I'm saying...

KASIRA: Well don't. This scenario is ridiculous!

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: Though I like what you said about us being a family. I rather like to think of us all as sisters.

NIVEA: Bit dull that though!

KASIRA: No, it's not. It's an army thing!

CAYLEY: Yeah, guys like to call themselves bands of brothers, and brothers in arms, in that same respect, we *are* sisters!

KASIRA: Yeah, we live together, grow together and fight together, relying on each other to cover our backs!

NIVEA: Like a family! Mother, father, perverted auntie...

KASIRA: No! Like sisters!

(Nivea looked doubtful.)

NIVEA: Not really, no. I hate my sister!

(Kasira started to laugh.)

KASIRA: You're mental, Nivea. It's certainly never dull with you around.

(Cayley also laughed.)

CAYLEY: Gotta give you that. You do keep us entertained.

(Nivea bit her lip.)

NIVEA: You make me sound like a circus act!

KASIRA: You are one sometimes.

(Nivea laughed.)

NIVEA: Fine, you win. Sisters it is.

(She then placed an arm around Soapy and made her tremble.)

NIVEA: So we're sisters then! Which makes what I'm planning to do to you later, kinda gross!

(Soapy whimpered.)

SOAPY: What are you...

NIVEA: I'm kidding!

(She then squeezed one of Soapy's breasts before turning to face her plate.)

NIVEA: Nice boobies by the way, Soapy. Thanks for bringing them along, I'm gonna enjoy them.



(As Nivea ate a mouthful of her stew, trying not to laugh, Soapy stared at her in horror. Watching them Kasira and Cayley shared a wry smile then also focussed on their food again. Still blushing, Ambre and Sika didn't say a word.)

---

One hour after darkness had descended, Soapy found herself in the mess room staring down at herself in horror. At her side, dressed in an identical outfit, Sika stood nodding sympathetically.

SIKA: Told you it was hideous!

(Unable to stop staring down at the school uniform style outfit that constituted her army uniform, Soapy's lips couldn't help but pout.)

SOAPY: It's gross!

SIKA: It is! But I kinda like the shoes.

(Having just spent half an hour learning to walk in her immensely high heels, Soapy sighed.)

SOAPY: They look nice but... the socks. And I've been pacing up and down in them for ages, my feet are gonna get really sore aren't they?

SIKA: Nah, don't be silly. You'd have to be in them for hours before that happens.

SOAPY: Maybe.

(Sika smiled.)

SIKA: So you mastered walking in them then?

SOAPY: Yeah, I think so!

SIKA: Let's see!

(With that, Sika pushed her sideways. Staggering but managing to stop herself falling, Soapy glared at Sika furiously.)

SOAPY: What did you do that for?

SIKA: Just checking!

SOAPY: I already told you I was fine.

SIKA: You said you *thought* you were; big difference.

(She ruffled her neck.)

SIKA: Besides, it doesn't hurt to double check.

(Soapy rolled her eyes.)

SOAPY: When does this flag ceremony start anyway?

SIKA: As soon as everyone's in their uniform normally.

SOAPY: Okay. Cool.

(Just then, Kasira paced into the room wearing a matching outfit to the girls, except with a beret on her head.)

KASIRA: Ready so soon? Well done, ladies.

(Soapy looked uncertain.)

SOAPY: A beret? I didn't get one of those.

KASIRA: Of course not, only the leader gets one.

SOAPY: Oh.

(She puffed out.)

SOAPY: That's a relief. Thought I'd messed up again!

KASIRA: Plenty of time yet, Soapy. You okay with walking in those shoes now?

SOAPY: Yeah, I've got it down.

(Kasira stepped towards her.)

KASIRA: You sure?

SOAPY: Yeah I'm...

(Much to her annoyance, Kasira then pushed her.)

SOAPY: Hey!!!

(Swaying as she staggered back three steps before steadying herself, Soapy furrowed her brow bitterly.)

SOAPY: Sika already did that!

KASIRA: Well it doesn't hurt to double check.

SIKA: That's what *I* told her!

SOAPY: Yeah, right. You were both hoping I'd fall over, I could see it in your eyes.

KASIRA: I was not!

SIKA: I was!

KASIRA: Anyway, listen up, Soapy. This mission is simple for you, okay? Just march out to the flag pole on Sika's right side and stop when she stops. When the flag comes down, salute on my orders. And keep saluting as the new flag is raised, okay? That's all. Then I'll give the order to march back and you do so, at Sika's side again. Easy stuff.

SOAPY: Right. Okay. Got it.

KASIRA: Just remember one thing. No matter what the townsfolk say or do, ignore it!

Don't look at them and certainly don't answer back.

SOAPY: Gotcha!

KASIRA: And if any of the stuff they throw should hit you, just don't react.

SOAPY: They throw things?

KASIRA: Anything to provoke a reaction! Don't give them one.

SOAPY: Sure... okay. I won't.

KASIRA: You *will* find their attitude offensive, but just let it go over your head. Let it go. Don't go getting any ideas about revenge, like someone else around here did.

(She looked directly at a shame-faced Sika.)

SIKA: Oh, boy.

(Kasira looked thoughtful.)

KASIRA: Well, you don't *have* wings so there's no danger of *you* flying over one of their houses in the night and dropping the contents of our long drop down the chimney, so I can rule that out.

(Sika bit her lip nervously.)

SIKA: I knew you were gonna mention that.

KASIRA: We're just lucky they didn't find out it was you.

SIKA: *You* weren't supposed to find out it was me either.

(Kasira gave her a condescending glance.)

KASIRA: Then why do it while the night patrol team were out on the hill overlooking the town?

(Sika shrugged.)

SIKA: I figured you'd be too busy concentrating on the wraiths.

KASIRA: Well we weren't. We were just about to start when we saw a girl flying out of the base with a giant poo sack in her hand.

SIKA: And yet you instantly assumed it was me!

KASIRA: Well, Cayley's the only other one who can fly and she was with us!

(She rolled her eyes then looked to Soapy.)

KASIRA: Anyway, what I'm saying is, whatever you do, ignore the townsfolk. Keep it zipped and don't react. Give them any excuse to turn on us and they'll grab it with both hands! They'd do anything to drive us 'bitches' out of their town, so no matter what the provocation is, let it go.

SOAPY: Understood.

KASIRA: Good. Sika understood it too but I forgot to tell her not to seek retribution *after* the event.

(Sika chuckled.)

SIKA: I know I shouldn't have done it, but it didn't half feel good.

KASIRA: I don't doubt that for a second. Just don't...

SIKA: I know, it was silly and I couldn't have dropped us all in the shit, if you pardon the pun. Just saying, at the time, it made me feel better.

KASIRA: Anyway, Soapy, that's how it is, okay? The townsfolk hate us and you just have to learn to ignore their provocation.

SOAPY: Okay.

KASIRA: We don't mix with them and when we go out, we only ever go in pairs and we never make eye contact with them. We just do our jobs and pretend they don't exist.

Remember that and you'll do fine!

SOAPY: Don't worry, I won't start anything.

KASIRA: Good girl. Now...

(Just then, Cayley and Nivea emerged from the corridor to the sleeping quarters.)

CAYLEY: Well yeah, it's knackered. It's a really long way up.

NIVEA: I'll bet the views are breath-taking from up there though, right?

CAYLEY: Oh, god yeah.

(Upon spotting Soapy, Nivea beamed.)

NIVEA: Hey, she's pretty hot when she's all-dressed up, look.

(Soapy stared at her with wide eyes.)

SOAPY: Um... thanks?

NIVEA: So, how do you like the uniform?

(Soapy pouted.)

SOAPY: I look like a tart!

NIVEA: We *all* look like tarts, Soapy!

KASIRA: All part of General Wilson's filthy little fantasy, I'm afraid.

SIKA: He's so twisted.

SOAPY: So let me get this straight, the townspeople hate us and our own general thinks we're nothing but kinky sex kittens, here to indulge his perverted ways?

CAYLEY: That's about the shape of it!

SOAPY: Does nobody respect us?

KASIRA: Sure they do. We respect each other.

SOAPY: And that's it?

KASIRA: That's it! Welcome to life as a woman in the army, Soapy.

NIVEA: Yup, you're lower than pond scum now, girl. If you want respect, lose the tits and grow a penis.

SIKA: It's all about doing your job and trying not to get assaulted from now on.

CAYLEY: Physically or sexually.

KASIRA: You're just a dork in a crappy uniform waiting to get abused.

(Soapy hung her head.)

SOAPY: And I was so looking forward to becoming a proper soldier.

NIVEA: Well, the academies kind of omit the details like public hatred, perverted generals and such.

SOAPY: So I see.

SIKA: Still, the good thing is, you're not alone. We've all got to wear this stupid uniform, so we all get to look ridiculous together.

(Just then, Ambre minced gingerly into the room and gave everyone an exaggerated wave.)

AMBRE: Hiya!

SIKA: Of course, *she's* excluded from the looking ridiculous thing.

(Sure enough, much to Soapy's annoyance, Ambre somehow managed to look cute in *her* uniform. Quite how she could look good wearing something that made everyone else look

silly, she had no idea. To her irrational teenage mind, it all seemed horribly unfair. It felt like yet another slap in the face. The way she saw it was, this bumbling airhead was having a sly dig at her. Somewhere in her psyche she felt like Ambre was deliberately looking nice just to make her feel small. Having already convinced herself that this woman could screw up liberally and get away with it, while she'd get chastised for every tiny mistake, her disdain for Ambre deepened. She'd already pegged her as her nemesis and with this latest atrocity, daring to look cute in a stupid outfit, Ambre had gone too far in Soapy's eyes. She was surely having a laugh at her expense now. And so, flaring her nostrils, she stared hatefully at Ambre as Kasira gave them all a team talk.)

KASIRA: Right, seeing as we're all here, listen up.

(At once, everyone with the exception of Soapy turned to face Kasira.)

KASIRA: Now... Soapy! Yes, Ambre has a nice arse, but I need to you to look at me when I'm talking!

(As everyone giggled, Soapy blushed and looked to Kasira.)

KASIRA: Much better!

AMBRE: Were you staring at my bum, Soapy?

KASIRA: Ambre! Pipe down.

AMBRE: Sorry!

SOAPY: No, I wasn't!

KASIRA: Enough!

(Kasira rolled her eyes then placed her hands on her hips.)

KASIRA: Same old routine today, okay? Nothing's going to change just because we have a new girl here. She's going to march to Sika's right, the rest of you, just do the same thing you've always done.

(She nodded firmly.)

KASIRA: Got the new flag, Cayley?

(Cayley picked a folded flag up from the table and smiled.)

CAYLEY: Yes, ma'am.

KASIRA: Let's go then.

(As Kasira turned to go, Nivea quickly looked to Soapy.)

NIVEA: Before we go, I've just gotta check something!

(She then pushed Soapy backwards.)

SOAPY: Hey!!!

(Swaying and staggering, Soapy managed to stay upright and glared at her.)

SOAPY: Will you all stop bloody doing that?

NIVEA: I was just making sure you can walk in those shoes!

SOAPY: I'm fine!

(Nivea beamed.)

NIVEA: Yeah, I know that now!

(With that, she sauntered away towards the door, grinning from ear to ear. Watching her go, Soapy sneered for a moment until she caught sight of Ambre's skirt swaying from side to side with every swing of her hips. Clenching a fist, she growled then headed out of the door looking bitter and angry at the world.)

As soon as they were out in the moonlit courtyard, Kasira stepped up to the gate and Cayley stood behind her holding the flag in her arms before her. Completing the formation, Nivea and Ambre stepped up behind Cayley then Sika and Soapy stepped up behind them.

(Checking everyone was in place, Kasira glanced over her shoulder.)

KASIRA: Okay, nice. You ready, ladies?

CAYLEY: Yes, ma'am.

SIKA: Yes, ma'am!

SOAPY: Yes, ma'am!

NIVEA: Yes, ma'am!

AMBRE: Yes, mum!

(Soapy gave Sika a sideways glance and whispered.)

SOAPY: Did she just call her 'mum'?

SIKA: Probably! Sounds like something she'd do!

KASIRA: Okay, let's go!

(With that, Kasira swung open the gates to the compound and stepped to one side allowing them all to march out. Once Sika and Soapy were out, she then locked the compound gates and paced to the front.)

KASIRA: Company... march!!!

(And in formation, they all headed off, marching down the dirt track towards town. Soapy felt a little odd marching in such high shoes but much to her relief, she had no trouble with her balance. And so, without her gait to worry about, she was free to concentrate on staring hatefully at Ambre as they headed into town. Even the way she walked was infuriating to Soapy. As far as she was concerned, nobody had a walk that sexy by nature and the annoying bimbo must have been doing it for attention. Quite happy to give Ambre that attention in the form of scowling, she paced ahead through the darkened woods towards the lantern lit dockside where the flagpole was situated, with barely even a blink. The aesthetic majesty of the moonlit woodland was completely lost on her. Such was her hatred; she could quite easily have glowered at the unfortunate Ambre all night had she not been distracted by the chorus of booing that rose up from the dockside as soon as they neared it. A little perturbed by it, she removed her eyes from Ambre and glanced ahead of herself. Between the trees she could make out a ceremonial flagpole on the dockside and a group of angry looking townsfolk gathered around it. Feeling unnerved somewhat, she couldn't help but puff out and mumble under her breath.)

SOAPY: Damn.

(Having heard her mumble, Sika whispered back.)

SIKA: Don't look at the crowd, look over them. At the sea.

(Adhering to her advice, Soapy tipped back her head and focussed on the moonlight reflecting on the sea behind the mob. It did indeed have a calming influence on her. Feeling slightly more relaxed, she took a deep breath and continued to focus on the water as they arrived at the flagpole to a chorus of jeering and insults.)

MALE TOWNIE 1: Sluts, look at them!

MALE TOWNIE 2: Fuck off out of our town, whores!

FEMALE TOWNIE: We don't want you, slags. We want real soldiers!

(As a loud, agreeing cheer went up from the townsfolk, Kasira stepped to one side and Cayley stepped to the other to stand face to face with her at the base of the flagpole. Waiting patiently, they stared dead ahead, ignoring the crowd while Nivea paced forward and commenced lowering the flag.)

KASIRA: Company, salute!!!

(At once, Kasira, Cayley, Sika and Soapy all saluted, much to the amusement of the crowd.)

MALE TOWNIE 03: Don't break a nail lowering that thing, love.

(Treating the comments with the utter ignorance they deserved, Nivea continued to lower the flag down to where Ambre was waiting to grab it. Looking up in readiness to hold it off of the ground while Nivea untied it from the pole, her arms could barely keep still. Eager to grab it and perform her job well, she seemed more than a little apprehensive. The flag normally sailed swiftly down the pole but on this night for some reason, it seemed to be taking it's time. Wearing a troubled frown, Nivea stared up at the flag, tugging hard and

grimacing. With every pull, the flag lowered only slightly, almost as if the ropes were caught on something. Noticing her struggles, Kasira looked to Cayley receiving a raised eyebrow in return. Not about to abandon protocol however, she stood perfectly still and continued to watch, her hand held firmly to her head in a saluting position.)

FEMALE TOWNIE: Pathetic. My mother could have lowered that by now and she's 82!

MALE TOWNIE 04: You lot are a bloody joke!

MALE TOWNIE 01: How are you lot gonna kill any bloody wraiths when you aint even strong enough to lower a bloody flag?

FEMALE TOWNIE: Yeah, you suck!

(As the townsfolk commenced booing them, Nivea pulled a frustrated face and started to tug even harder at the rope. Seeing it continue to come down extremely slowly, she then sneered and pulled with all her might. At once the ropes loosened and the flag came hurtling down. Not expecting it come down at such a rapid pace, however, Ambre wasn't quick enough to react and the large, billowing flag flapped down, landing squarely over her head, much to the amusement of the townsfolk.)

MALE TOWNIE 03: What a fucking idiot!!!

FEMALE TOWNIE: She's a ghost!

MALE TOWNIE 03: She's a moron, more like!

FEMALE TOWNIE: That too!

(Panicking and unable to see, Ambre spun around whimpering in extreme distress.)

AMBRE: Kasira, Kasira!!!

(Rushing to her aid, Kasira reached out for the flag and tried to yank it from her head.

Caught on Ambre's horns however, it didn't budge.)

SIKA: Oh shit, she's gonna flip!

(Watching on with bewilderment as Ambre flapped and cried beneath the flag, Soapy's jaw fell open. She'd never seen such a debacle in all her life.)

SOAPY: What on earth...

SIKA: Never mind that, Soapy, get ready to move!

SOAPY: What?

(As Kasira struggled to free her of the flag, her hand touched Ambre's head causing her to scream out in terror. Blinded and panicked, she'd mistaken Kasira's hand for a projectile thrown by the mocking crowd, and her instinct to survive kicked in. Desperate to escape, she transformed into a gazelle and took off like a rocket towards the base, ripping the flag to shreds with her horns as she bolted. Just as Sika had warned her to, Soapy dived out of the way then watched in astonishment as Ambre disappeared from sight, galloping at full speed down the dirt track.)

SOAPY: What a donkey!

(Sika reached out her hand to help her up.)

SIKA: Gazelle, actually.

(As Soapy climbed to her feet, Kasira and Cayley rushed the new flag up the pole, eager to get back and see if Ambre was alright.)

KASIRA: Salute, ladies!!!

(At once, Soapy and Sika resumed saluting as the crowd around them laughed hysterically.)

MALE TOWNIE 01: I knew they were useless, but that's taking the piss!

FEMALE TOWNIE: Did you see her? What a retard!

MALE TOWNIE 03: Where did you find her? Is there a merchant specialising in idiots on the mainland or something?

MALE TOWNIE 04: Just shows how little the army think of this town, doesn't it? We don't only get a bunch of pathetic women, we get retarded ones.

(Ignoring the mocking, as soon as the flag was erected, Kasira looked towards the base.)

KASIRA: Forget the formation, just march.

(As they started to march away, however, the crowd grew angrier.)

FEMALE TOWNIE: What? Are you just gonna screw up the ceremony then bugger off?

MALE TOWNIE 02: You should be ashamed.

(Well aware that they didn't care about the ceremony anyway and just wanted an excuse to bait them, Kasira spoke from the side of her mouth.)

KASIRA: Just keep going, girls.

(As they headed onwards, however, a rain of sticks cascaded down on them from the angry mob.)

MALE TOWNIE 01: Don't wander off when we're talking to you!!! Hey!!!

(Ignoring them, Kasira lead them swiftly away when a stone thudded into the back of Soapy's head. Looking absolutely livid, she instinctively spun around and clenched her fists.)

SOAPY: Which one of you wankers threw that???

(Looking furious, Kasira grabbed Soapy's arm and bellowed at her.)

KASIRA: What the fuck did I tell you???

(She then glanced to one side and gulped as the townsfolk started to pace towards them.)

KASIRA: Now, calm down everyone!

MALE TOWNIE 01: Don't fucking tell me what to do!

FEMALE TOWNIE: That bitch called us wankers!

MALE TOWNIE 02: Yeah, that was bloody rude.

MALE TOWNIE 04: And rudeness needs to be punished.

(Looking extremely daunted, Kasira, Nivea, Sika, Cayley and Soapy all slowly backed away as the townsfolk advanced.)

KASIRA: She didn't mean it. She was upset.

MALE TOWNIE 03: Yeah well, so are *we* now!

MALE TOWNIE 01: And it's our turn to lash out.

MALE TOWNIE 02: You're just lucky we don't hit women!

MALE TOWNIE 01: Who doesn't? I fucking do! Especially bitches like them!

(Male townie 02 gave him a disturbed glance.)

MALE TOWNIE 02: But that's just wrong, Dave.

(Growling, Male Townie 01 grabbed his fellow townsman by the collar.)

MALE TOWNIE 01: You a poof or something?

MALE TOWNIE 02: No, I was just raised not to hit women.

MALE TOWNIE 01: Then you were raised by a poof!

(Male Townie 02 was livid.)

MALE TOWNIE 02: My dad aint a poof!

(As the two men squared up, a massive argument broke out among the townsfolk.

Unfortunately, they were arguing five to one in favour of hitting women being acceptable.

Fortunately, they were so engrossed in the argument, they hadn't noticed the five female soldiers they were angry at sneaking away. In fact, by the time they noticed they were gone, the girls were almost back at their base, running as fast as they could in their high heels.

Kasira was, of course, beside herself with rage.)

KASIRA: Soapy, when we get back to base I'm going to rip your tongue out, stick it up your biff then seal it with the strongest glue I can find!!!

(Soapy whimpered.)

SOAPY: It was an accident.

KASIRA: An accident???

SOAPY: It just slipped out!

KASIRA: Your face is gonna slip out in a minute!

SOAPY: Eh?

KASIRA: Never mind that! I'm gonna bloody kill you.

(Soapy whimpered again.)

SOAPY: I didn't *mean* to do it!

(She pouted.)

SOAPY: Anyway, it's Ambre you should be mad at, not me! If she hadn't made a tit of herself...

KASIRA: She had nothing to do with it!!! They always throw things, I told you that!

(At once, a hateful look crossed Soapy's brow. Once again, Ambre wasn't at fault and she was. Furious at the double standards, she growled as she charged towards the base.)

SOAPY: Always bloody me, isn't it!

KASIRA: Yeah! Why is that? Your training record didn't say you were an incompetent buffoon! We were lied to.

SOAPY: *I'm* an incompetent buffoon? I'm not the halfwit who got a flag stuck over her head and ran off crying!!! If she hadn't done that...

KASIRA: If she hadn't done that, bollocks! *You're* the idiot who almost got us lynched. How dare you blame her???

SOAPY: I...

KASIRA: I don't wanna hear it!!!

SOAPY: But...

SIKA: She said, shut it!

NIVEA: Yeah, shut up.

(With even Cayley giving her dagger looks, Soapy snarled and pouted furiously all the way back to base.

Feeling unduly singled out and picked on, as soon as they were back at the base, she sneered her way towards the mess room, intent on heading for her bedroom. As soon as she reached the mess room, however, Kasira grabbed her collar and forced her into a chair.)

SOAPY: Get off me!!!

KASIRA: Don't talk back, you insubordinate little git!

(Kasira then stood over her and read the riot act.)

KASIRA: What the fuck did your academy teach you??? You've got no respect for authority whatsoever!!! When you're told to do something, just fucking do it.

(She threw her arms up in frustration.)

KASIRA: It wasn't even that difficult though, was it? You were told just to do nothing!

That was all you had to remember!!! You couldn't even get that right!!!

(Soapy just hung her head as the rant continued.)

KASIRA: Do you think orders are optional, Soapy? Or do you think I say these things just to keep my tongue busy while I'm looking for a window to lick? Is that it? You think I'm not worthy of being listened to, is that what it is? Like I'm just some clueless bitch who won leadership rank in the army tombola? Well? What is it? Why don't you do a bloody thing you're told???

(As Soapy looked up sheepishly, trying to think of something redeeming to say, she spotted Nivea and Sika on the sofa, either side of a human again Ambre. They were cuddling and petting her kindly, comforting her like she was a lost child. At once she lost her will to defend herself and stared furiously at the table. Once again, the screw up, Ambre, was being mollycoddled and pampered for her mistake and she was receiving the third degree. From this point on, everything Kasira yelled at her went straight over head, her mind too pre-occupied with thoughts of unfair treatment and her hatred of Ambre to absorb any of it.)

KASIRA: Last time I saw a soldier as pointless as you, I dunked it in my boiled egg! I'm not gonna tolerate any more of it. You're going on patrol with Nivea and Sika later and I



promise you, one more screw up and you're out. I'll send you back to the academy to take the level nine test again. How the hell you passed the discipline section, I'll never know.

(Sika looked up from hugging Ambre and grimaced.)

SIKA: They removed that section two years ago.

KASIRA: What? They removed it???

SIKA: Yeah. How do you think *I* passed?

(Kasira furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: I did wonder.

(She then sneered at Soapy.)

KASIRA: I tolerated your crap, Sika and thankfully you turned out okay. But, I aint gonna go through that shit again. I've got a unit to lead; I shouldn't have to waste time clearing up after bolshie disrespectful teenagers. You could have got all us beaten to death tonight, Soapy. Idiot.

(With that, she stormed out of the mess room towards the rooms out the back of the base. Everyone except Soapy watched her go then looked to Soapy uneasily.)

NIVEA: Wow, you really got told.

SIKA: Yeah, I haven't seen her that angry since I ran away!

NIVEA: Flew away!

SIKA: Same thing.

CAYLEY: Hardly.

(Ambre pouted nervously towards Soapy from the sofa.)

AMBRE: Yeah, but it's done now, right? She's been told off and we're all friends again, yeah?

NIVEA: Of course.

AMBRE: What did she do anyway?

NIVEA: Just leave it, yeah, Ambre.

(Ambre nodded then bit her nails.)

CAYLEY: You okay there, Ambre? That scared you witless, didn't it?

SIKA: She was already witless.

CAYLEY: Sika!

SIKA: What?

(Ambre sighed.)

AMBRE: I panicked. Sorry, guys.

NIVEA: Don't worry about it, no harm done.

CAYLEY: Yeah, all in the past, babes.

(Pressing her face firmly against the table, Soapy snarled. How Ambre kept getting away with it, she just couldn't fathom. One thing she did know, however, was that *she* wasn't getting away with anything. Feeling very much like the scapegoat for all Ambre's mistakes, she raised her head slightly and sighed in defeat.)

SOAPY: I hate it here!

AMBRE: Aw, don't say that. Give it time. Everyone's so lovely.

(Somehow avoiding the temptation to get up and punch her, Soapy closed her eyes and laid her face back down on the table.)

CAYLEY: Chin up, Soapy. I'm sure you'll have a better day tomorrow.

SIKA: Yeah, you said that to *me* after my first day and look what happened there.

CAYLEY: She's not you!

NIVEA: And for that we're grateful.

SIKA: Oh, shut up. You all love me, admit it.

NIVEA: Don't make me grope you, Sika!

(Sika reeled back and pouted in fear.)

SIKA: I'll be quiet!

---

A few hours later, Soapy found herself heading out into the woodlands with Sika and Nivea to do the night patrol. With a severe warning to pay attention from Kasira, still ringing in her ears, she slowly followed her chatty comrades, feeling utterly deflated.

NIVEA: There's something so romantic about these woods, you know.

SIKA: It's probably just the moonlight making it seem that way.

NIVEA: Doubtful, moonlight is the norm for me, remember? I've never seen anything in daylight except a dazzling yellow blob in front of my eyes.

(Sika chuckled.)

SIKA: It's kinda fun watching you walk into stuff.

NIVEA: Oh, is it?

SIKA: Yeah, but Cayley always spoils it by guiding you back into your room. Her kindness ruins all my fun.

(Nivea looked thoughtful.)

NIVEA: You know, Sika, it occurs to me, I really don't slap you enough.

SIKA: I agree. Do that instead of groping me in future.

NIVEA: No, it's fine, I can do both.

(Sika shuddered.)

SIKA: You're not even joking, are you?

NIVEA: Not one bit!

(She then turned and looked to where Soapy trudged along behind.)

NIVEA: You're quiet.

(Soapy sighed.)

SOAPY: Yeah!

NIVEA: Look, cheer up. Show how good a soldier you can be from now on, and it'll all be forgotten about before you know it.

SOAPY: Maybe.

NIVEA: And until then, stop sulking or it won't just be your boobs I grope!

(Looking alarmed, Soapy quickly rushed to Nivea's side.)

SOAPY: I'm okay!

(Sika laughed.)

SIKA: See, Nivea? Nobody likes your dirty touching.

NIVEA: It's *affectionate* touching. Nothing dirty about it, I'm just a tactile person.

SIKA: With a boob fetish!

NIVEA: You love it.

SIKA: Actually, I don't.

NIVEA: Liar!

SIKA: Tell her, Soapy. She's disgusting.

(Soapy looked to her and forced a smile. She wasn't in the mood for messing around but didn't want to look like a pouty sourpuss either. And so, pushing her sadness to the back of her mind, she gave half a laugh and wagged her finger at Sika.)

SOAPY: I'm saying nothing. If you want to antagonise her, go ahead, they're your tits, Sika.

(Nivea laughed.)

NIVEA: She catches on fast. The more lip you give me, the more I'm gonna do this!!!

(With that she pounced at Sika. With a scream, Sika ran off and Nivea charged after her.)

SIKA: Go away!!!

NIVEA: Never!!!

(Watching as they chased around in circles, laughing, Soapy smiled. She didn't like Ambre or Kasira but suddenly they didn't matter. Cayley was nice and these two were fun to be with. Realising this, being here didn't feel so bad all of a sudden, and she managed to pull herself out of the doldrums. Grinning from ear to ear, she called out.)

SOAPY: Run, Sika!

(Charging around, still chuckling, Sika yelled back.)

SIKA: Help me!!! She's got big man hands; I'll never get away from *them*!

NIVEA: You cheeky little git!!!

(Watching as Sika ducked and dived to avoid being snagged by the laughing Nivea, Soapy grinned from ear to ear then raced towards them.)

NIVEA: You can't run forever, you know!

SIKA: I just need to run until the sun comes up, you blind fudge muffin!

NIVEA: Fudge muffin?

(She chuckled.)

NIVEA: I've never been insulted so poorly in all my life!

(Sika laughed as they charged from the trees and headed up the hill, barely swaying out of Nivea's reach.)

SIKA: Too slow!

NIVEA: Is that so?

(Grinning from ear to ear, Nivea sprung forth majestically and caught Sika arm.)

SIKA: No!!!

NIVEA: Now you're in trouble, missy!

(Just then Soapy's amused voice rose up from behind.)

SOAPY: No! *You're* in trouble!

(Much to Nivea and Sika's amazement, Soapy then leapt at Nivea's legs, grabbing them tight and bundling her over. The perfect rugby tackle.)

NIVEA: What the???

(Sika beamed with delight.)

SIKA: Way to go, Soapy!

(With that, she dived on top of Nivea and started to pin her arms down.)

SIKA: Grab her other arm, Soapy.

SOAPY: I'm on it!!!

SIKA: Two against one, Nivea!

SOAPY: Yeah, let's see how *you* like being groped!

(With that, she kneeled across Nivea's arm, planted both hands on Nivea's breasts and squeezed.)

SOAPY: Honk!!!

(Nivea laughed as she struggled to get free.)

NIVEA: You two little shits are gonna be *so* sorry!

SIKA: Do it again, Soapy. She doesn't learn.

(Soapy grinned and squeezed twice more.)

SOAPY: Honk, honk.

NIVEA: Jokes on you two, I kinda like that!

SIKA: Ew!

(Soapy grinned.)

SOAPY: Time for plan B then.

(With that, she proceeded to tickle her midriff. Squirming and laughing, Nivea struggled like crazy, eventually pulling her arm free.)

NIVEA: Now you're in trouble!

(With that, she reached for Soapy's breasts, causing her to scream and jump backwards.)

SOAPY: No!!!

(Grinning, Nivea then swung her arm and slapped Sika's backside.)

SIKA: Ouch!!!

(Sika jumped up, rubbed her backside and pouted.)

SIKA: Wasn't expecting that!

(As Nivea climbed to her feet, chuckling, Sika and Soapy started to laugh. Shaking her head with amusement, Nivea caught her breath then puffed out.)

NIVEA: Come on, guys, fun as this is, we'd better get our work done.

SIKA: Killjoy.

(Nivea laughed.)

NIVEA: I'm gonna have to watch you two, aren't I?

SOAPY: Like a hawk!

SIKA: You know it! The underlings are fighting back, baby.

(She high-fived Soapy then grinned.)

NIVEA: Dream on. I'll crush your rebellion in no time.

(She then looked up the hill.)

NIVEA: Let's kill some wraiths first though.

(With that, she headed up the hill, followed by her two smiling subordinates.)

NIVEA: What do you know about subterranean attack skills, Soapy?

SOAPY: Not much. You do something with your sword... Cayley said it looks amazing.

NIVEA: I spin. Fast!

SIKA: Makes me dizzy just watching her.

NIVEA: Then don't watch me, attack the wraiths like you're supposed to.

(Sika sneered.)

SIKA: Witty.

NIVEA: Anyway, the point is, you have to stand back a good twenty feet or more.

SOAPY: Okay.

NIVEA: Make sure you do because...

SOAPY: I know, one more mistake and I'll get sent back to training.

NIVEA: No. You'll be dead. I spin with my sword out at arms length. Too close and you might get sucked onto my blade.

(Soapy looked astonished.)

SOAPY: Seriously?

NIVEA: Yes! So keep back, okay?

SOAPY: Definitely.

(Nivea smiled.)

NIVEA: Good girl. Once I've got my spin on the go and the wraiths are close, I'll give the order to attack. Go nuts by all means, but keep a safe distance from me at all times.

SOAPY: Okay.

SIKA: Just stay by me, Soapy. I know where to stand.

NIVEA: Good idea, take your lead from Sika.

SOAPY: Yes, ma'am.

(Happy to take orders from the fun and chirpy Nivea, Soapy followed her up the hill looking forward to killing more wraiths. Hoping she could impress her with her skills, she couldn't wait to begin the fight.

Following a brief walk to the top of the hill, Nivea, Soapy and Sika all came to a halt and glanced around the island. Nodding with satisfaction, Nivea puffed out.)

NIVEA: This place looks so beautiful from up here.

SIKA: Looks even better in daylight.

NIVEA: I'll have to take your word for that.

(She then rubbed her hands together.)

NIVEA: Anyway, let's get down to business.

(She looked to Soapy and nodded firmly.)

NIVEA: Take your lead from Sika and this should be a doddle, okay?

SOAPY: Yes, ma'am!

NIVEA: Get back then, you two. I'm gonna start.

(Eager to show Nivea what an awesome battler she was, Soapy looked to Sika then joined her in jogging away down the slope. Once they were a good twenty five feet away, Sika raised her thumb to Nivea.)

SIKA: We're clear!

NIVEA: Okay, here goes!

(With that, Nivea placed a wraith whistle to her lips and blew with all her might. Soapy reeled back and grimaced.)

SOAPY: What a horrible noise.

SIKA: Aint it just? Doesn't sound anywhere near as bad when you're the one blowing it though!

SOAPY: Yeah, I noticed.

(Standing atop the hill, looking about herself, Nivea licked her lips and mused out loud.)

NIVEA: Come on, shit-bags, where are you?

(Soapy and Sika also turned to glance down the hill, anticipating a wraith stampede at any moment. They were not to be disappointed. Moments later, the shrill cries of assorted wraiths rose up into the air as they charged for the hill top.)

NIVEA: Perfect!

(With that, she held her sword out before her and proceeded to spin around in circles. Almost immediately the sound of the wind trapped beneath her blade coughed up a whooping noise, such was the speed of her rotations. Soapy couldn't believe her eyes.)

SOAPY: She's gonna be so dizzy!

SIKA: Yeah, you'd think so, wouldn't you?

(She smiled.)

SIKA: She won't be though. She won't even be slightly disorientated. She can see and hear everything we're doing perfectly too, so get ready!

SOAPY: I *am* ready. Just amazed, that's all. Had no idea she'd be that fast. Doesn't seem possible.

SIKA: It *isn't* possible for *our* races, like flying isn't possible for your race and swimming underwater for hours isn't possible for mine. It's a race thing.

(Nivea called out to them calmly.)

NIVEA: As soon as the first ones hit my blade, girls!

SIKA: Uh-huh.

SOAPY: We've got it.

(A matter of seconds later, the hoards of wraiths raced past Sika and Soapy, hell bent on spilling blood. As soon as the first few disintegrated on Nivea's blade, Soapy grinned from ear to ear and commenced shooting them.)

SOAPY: Yay!!!

(Blowing wraiths apart, one after the other at immense speed, Soapy was having a whale of a time. Much slower in her casting of tornado like magic, Sika couldn't believe her eyes.)

SIKA: Shit, Soapy, you're well fast!

(Soapy grinned as she continued to punish the wraiths with deadly power, speed and accuracy.)

SOAPY: Don't tell the boys that!

(From behind the loud whooshing noise she was generating, they could both hear Nivea laugh.)

NIVEA: I was gonna say that!

(Maintaining a safe distance, just as she'd been told to, Soapy paced around Nivea, firing off her magic energy, first with her left hand and then with her right. Circling Nivea in the opposite direction, Sika also fired off her two handed magic. Looking focussed and dedicated, the wraiths were soon despatched in double quick time. Having made three quarters of a circle around Nivea when the last wraith died, Soapy puffed out in frustration.)

SOAPY: Damn it, I was enjoying that!

(Slowing her spin, Nivea puffed out.)

NIVEA: I noticed!

(Having only circled a little way around Nivea, Sika's jaw dropped.)

SIKA: That was awesome, Soapy.

(She paced up to her then blushed.)

SIKA: It was kind of pointless me being here really.

(Bringing her spin to a complete halt, Nivea sheathed her sword and looked to Soapy approvingly.)

NIVEA: Bollocks, I don't often say this, Soapy, but I'm impressed.

SIKA: When you told me you were awesome I just thought you were full of shit, like me!

NIVEA: Awesome doesn't quite cover it.

(She smiled.)

NIVEA: Patrols with you are gonna be much quicker from the look of things.

(Soapy shrugged modestly.)

SOAPY: I'm just glad I could help.

NIVEA: I tell you, Soapy; that was something special. I've met a few of your race before now and none of them were that good.

(She nodded.)

NIVEA: I know she may seem harsh and unfair right now, but once Kasira's moulded you into a soldier, you're going to be a real asset.

(Soapy beamed.)

SOAPY: Thanks.

NIVEA: She will make you a soldier too, you mark my words. That woman even turned Sika here into one.

SIKA: Hey!

NIVEA: Problem?

(Sika sighed in concession.)

SIKA: No, you're right, that was kind of a miracle, I guess. But then she even made Ambre a soldier!

NIVEA: Exactly. When Kasira's done with you, you're going to be somebody, Soapy.

(Soapy faked a warm smile then glanced away. As far as she was concerned Kasira was just a power mad, mean woman who liked to pick on her. Not about to raise that point of view to Kasira's friends, however, she just shrugged.)

SOAPY: That'd be nice!

NIVEA: Now...

(She paced between Sika and Soapy, smiling.)

NIVEA: Let's get off back to base.

(Sika beamed.)

SIKA: I hope there's some biscuits left, I'm hungry.

SOAPY: We have biscuits?

SIKA: I don't know but if there are any, *you* can't have any! Mine, mine, mine.

NIVEA: Greedy sod! Ignore her; she always tries to hog all the biscuits.  
SIKA: Me like biscuits!  
(Nivea grinned and pointed ahead.)  
NIVEA: Come on, girls.  
(As they headed away, Nivea looked thoughtful.)  
NIVEA: Hmm...  
(She then sprinted forth.)  
NIVEA: Last one back gets groped by me!!!  
(At once, Soapy and Sika screamed then charged after her.)  
SIKA: No!!!  
NIVEA: And no flying back!!!  
SOAPY: Wait, why are you running, Nivea???  
NIVEA: Because if I lose I'll have to grope myself and I'd much rather it was one of you two!  
SIKA: I don't wanna be groped again!!!  
SOAPY: Then you'd better hurry up, slowcoach.  
(And so, the three of them continued racing off down the hill, laughing and joking all the way.)

---

That evening, everyone found themselves gathered around the mess room table, with the exception of Cayley, who could be heard humming to herself in the kitchen. Seemingly in a world of her own, Ambre was staring agape at the ceiling while Sika sat pouting bitterly at Soapy.)

SIKA: So I'm supposed to believe that a tree root suddenly sprung up through the ground overnight, am I? Only there wasn't one there yesterday.

SOAPY: There must have been!

SIKA: Yeah, right! You tripped me!

SOAPY: I didn't! I swear.

NIVEA: Ignore her, Soapy; she's just a sore loser!

SIKA: That's crap!

NIVEA: You fell over, simple as that!

SIKA: I didn't!

SOAPY: Well I didn't trip you! Why would I? I was beating you!

SIKA: Only because you kicked my foot!

(She ruffled her neck muscles.)

SIKA: Like I'm that clumsy! I don't randomly fall over for no reason!

(Kasira gave her a sideways glance.)

KASIRA: You fell over three times on the way to your first flag ceremony!

SIKA: That was because of those stupid shoes!

NIVEA: And you fell over in the communal bath last week!

(Sika pouted.)

SIKA: Ambre tripped me!

KASIRA: She was nowhere near you!

SIKA: Well somebody did!

(Nivea looked thoughtful.)

NIVEA: You've fallen over quite a few times come to think of it.

(Sika puffed out in defeat.)

SIKA: Whatever!

NIVEA: You came last and you got groped, accept it.

SIKA: Fine, but next time...

(Just then, her face lit up and she stopped complaining, opting to lick her lips instead. Cayley had just entered from the kitchen carrying a tray, upon which sat seven slices of cake.)

CAYLEY: Cake time, people!

SIKA: Even better than biscuits!

(Ambre looked from the ceiling and beamed.)

AMBRE: Cake!

(She then looked to Nivea and smiled.)

AMBRE: There's twenty three.

NIVEA: Sorry, what?

AMBRE: Cracks in the ceiling!

(Nivea gave her a pitying glance.)

NIVEA: Aw, babes, I didn't mean literally count the cracks in the ceiling, I was being flippant!

AMBRE: But... you *told* me to count them.

NIVEA: You said something silly and I said "why don't you count the ceiling cracks or something."

AMBRE: Exactly.

NIVEA: I didn't mean it literally, I was telling you to shut up!

(Ambre looked stumped.)

AMBRE: Oh...

(She then grinned happily.)

AMBRE: No harm done, at least we know how many there are now.

(Soapy shook her head and chuckled to herself. Detesting Ambre as much as she did, watching her prove she was as thick as two short planks brought her much joy.)

SOAPY: Priceless.

(Unaware of Soapy's disdain for her, Ambre, like everyone else, stared merrily at Cayley as she set the tray down on the table.)

CAYLEY: You know, guys; it's a little disturbing when you stare at me lustfully like that.

NIVEA: It's your own fault for making such tasty cakes.

(She winked at her.)

NIVEA: And carrying them in at boob height! You know I like cleavage!

CAYLEY: Yeah, I *had* noticed that.

SIKA: Are you *sure* you're not a lesbian, Nivea?

(Nivea looked thoughtful.)

NIVEA: You know, I never really thought about it! What say I drag you into my room and find out?

(Sika reeled back in horror.)

SIKA: Don't even joke about that!

NIVEA: Well then, don't ask stupid questions!

AMBRE: Yeah, she's a subterranean, not a lesbian, stupid!

(Kasira sighed.)

KASIRA: You don't know what a lesbian is, do you, Ambre?

(Ambre looked to her sheepishly for a moment then hung her head.)

KASIRA: Thought not.

(As everyone smiled around the table in amusement at one another, Cayley started to pass the cake around.)

CAYLEY: One for you, Ambre.

AMBRE: Yay, go cake! Thank you!

(Cayley chuckled.)

CAYLEY: You're welcome.



(As Ambre stared lovingly at her slice of cake, Cayley continued to pass the slices around until everyone had one.)

AMBRE: Can we start now?

SIKA: Bless her.

AMBRE: What?

KASIRA: Just a moment, Ambre.

(Kasira wrapped a cloth around her hand then smiled at Soapy.)

KASIRA: Soapy?

(Soapy looked up from drooling at the cake she'd helped make and raised a nervous eyebrow.)

SOAPY: Yeah?

KASIRA: How does this make you feel?

(Much to Soapy's horror, Kasira then reached over and picked up her slice of cake and crushed it to pieces in her hand.)

SOAPY: What the...

(Grimacing wildly, Kasira then splatted the cake back down on Soapy's plate.)

KASIRA: Well? How does it make you feel?

(Soapy was livid.)

SOAPY: What the hell did you do *that* for???

KASIRA: I know, right. And you worked *so* hard making that!

SOAPY: You complete...

(Grimacing, she held back her anger, trying desperately not to call Kasira the many obscene things her heart wanted to.)

KASIRA: No come on, let it out.

(Soapy fought back the rage and looked away bitterly.)

SOAPY: You suck.

(Kasira sat up tall and spoke to her with forceful authority in her voice.)

KASIRA: Exactly! It really sucks to spend all that time and effort making something beautiful, just to have it destroyed in one unexpected moment of madness. So unnecessary.

(Soapy looked completely dumbfounded.)

SOAPY: What?

KASIRA: That was completely avoidable. Such a stupid waste!

(Soapy was furious.)

SOAPY: What did you do it for then???

KASIRA: Because I want you to know how your parents are going to feel when your coffin arrives home!

(Soapy looked lost for a moment and whimpered.)

SOAPY: What?

KASIRA: They raised you, loved you, carefully nurtured you and for what? For you to disobey orders and die screaming, thousands of miles from home? I don't think so!

(She puffed out in exasperation.)

KASIRA: Just like *you* agonised and stressed over raising that cake, your parents stressed over raising *you*. Now that cake is gone because one person chose to ignore common decency and destroyed it. You're gonna go the same way. Wraiths have no sense of common decency and given half a chance, they'll destroy you!

(She sighed.)

KASIRA: That's why we have rules, Soapy. That's why I give out orders. To stop them getting that half a chance. But you just ignore them, don't you? That's why that cake is a metaphor for your life... and your death.

(Refusing to see Kasira's argument, Soapy stared angrily at the floor, on the verge of exploding. As everyone looked on uncomfortably, Soapy snarled.)

SOAPY: Don't even pretend this was some big lesson.

(She then glared hatefully into Kasira's eyes.)

SOAPY: You only did it 'cause you're a bitch and you don't like me!

(Kasira snarled.)

KASIRA: Is that so, is it???

(With that, she jumped up from her seat and stomped over to Soapy. Looking extremely intimidated, Soapy jumped from her seat and paced backwards.)

SOAPY: Get lost!!! I hate you!!! Leave me alone!!!

(Much to Soapy's annoyance, Kasira grabbed her wrist and started to drag her towards a side door.)

SOAPY: Stop it!!!

KASIRA: I'll fucking show you, you little shit.

(Terrified that Kasira was going to beat her, Soapy struggled desperately as she dragged her into the corridor outside.)

SOAPY: I'll use my magic on you if I have to!!!

(Much to her bewilderment, Kasira pulled her wrist then her go. Tripping forwards, Soapy stumbled and her hands landed on a red velvet cloth, sat upon a shelf adorned by a plaque and a metal urn.)

KASIRA: Look!

(Soapy glared at her angrily.)

SOAPY: Look at what?

KASIRA: The plaque.

(Soapy snarled at her then read the inscription under her breath.)

SOAPY: 123<sup>rd</sup> regiment, wraith containment unit. In loving memory of Tahiti Rayne, may her soul find peace in heaven.

(Not knowing what to say, Soapy gave Kasira a nervous glance. Seeing Kasira stare at the plaque with a tear in her eye, she scratched her head uncomfortably.)

SOAPY: So... um...

(Kasira took a deep breath then spoke up softly.)

KASIRA: You might think you're at school and I'm just the mean headmistress, Soapy, but this is the reality. You're at war... and people die.

(Glancing at the metal urn, Soapy bit her lip.)

SOAPY: That urn...

KASIRA: That's all that's left of a life, Soapy.

(She gave Soapy a warm smile.)

KASIRA: She was an aqua like you. Cocky and full of life too, just like you. She'd been with us a month when it happened.

(Not knowing quite what to say, Soapy hung her head.)

SOAPY: I'm sorry.

KASIRA: She'd go bright red every time she laughed, that girl. Couldn't sit still either.

(She gave a weak smile.)

KASIRA: She had this weird habit of curling her hair round her fingers while she was eating, and when she ran her head bobbed from side to side. She was a quirky little thing. Nice girl though.

(She sighed.)

KASIRA: Now she's just a pile of ashes on the shelf. And all because she took it upon herself to ignore my orders one day.

(A tear rolled from Kasira's cheek and splashed onto the red velvet cloth.)

KASIRA: I told her not to blow the whistle and she just...

(She shook her head.)

KASIRA: She was usually so obedient but she just said to me, “it’ll be fine” and blew it anyway.

(She puffed out.)

KASIRA: Ambre damn nearly saved her, but she couldn’t summon Fluffy in time.

(As Soapy shuffled uneasily where she stood, Kasira reached out and took hold of her lower arm.)

KASIRA: Now do you get it? I’d rather you used this arm to make rude gestures at me than see it reduced to ashes and sat in an urn next to Tahiti.

(Soapy sighed and nodded apologetically.)

SOAPY: I...

KASIRA: I don’t care if you hate me, Soapy, I’m gonna keep you alive by whatever means possible. If I have to squash a hundred cakes to get that message across then I will. It breaks my heart when I think about Tahiti and I’m not going to lose you as well.

(She then puffed out and forced a smile.)

KASIRA: Now, there’s a spare slice of cake in there, Cayley brought seven slices in for a reason. Let’s go and get some down our necks.

(Soapy looked to her sheepishly then glanced at Tahiti’s plaque.)

SOAPY: How old was she?

KASIRA: Sixteen.

(Soapy winced.)

SOAPY: That sucks.

KASIRA: It totally sucks.

(She then placed an arm around Soapy’s shoulder and led her back into the mess room.)

KASIRA: Sit down, babes.

(Soapy nervously took her seat, lost in thought, as Kasira picked up a cup from the table and stood over her.)

KASIRA: Ladies and Nivea, I’d...

(Everyone laughed.)

NIVEA: That’s cold, Kasira!

KASIRA: I’m sure you can take it.

NIVEA: No, I mean that coffee your holding.

(Kasira looked into the cup.)

KASIRA: Damn.

(She placed the cup down and picked up the juice pitcher from the centre of the table.

Having poured herself a cup, she then stood tall again.)

KASIRA: Charge your glasses, ladies!

AMBRE: And Nivea!

(As Cayley set about pouring everyone some fruit juice, Nivea scowled at Ambre.)

NIVEA: You’re so gonna regret that, missy!

(Ambre cupped her breasts and pouted.)

AMBRE: Leave me alone.

(Once everyone had a glass of juice, Kasira resumed making a speech. Everyone watched her warmly except a deeply troubled Soapy who stared down sorrowfully at her new slice of cake.)

KASIRA: Ladies, I’d like to take a moment to welcome Soapy here to our unit.

(Soapy looked up and forced half a smile.)

KASIRA: I’m sure you’ll all join me in wishing her the best of luck and hoping she enjoys a long and happy future with us.

(Everyone cheered and raised their glasses.)

SIKA: Speech!

AMBRE: Yeah!

CAYLEY: Aw, don't pressure the poor girl.

(Trembling, Soapy looked up and glanced around the table.)

SOAPY: Thanks, everyone. Um...

(She then hung her head.)

SIKA: Worst speech ever!

KASIRA: Leave her alone.

(Lost in her thoughts, Soapy picked at her cake as the conversation around the table continued.)

NIVEA: That was actually much better than your speech, Sika.

SIKA: No it wasn't.

(She blushed.)

SIKA: Though I may have waffled a bit.

NIVEA: You spent ten minutes telling us how awesome you are.

(Sika furrowed her brow.)

SIKA: I remember. You all walked out before I'd finished.

CAYLEY: Yeah, but in our defence, it was long *after* we'd finished listening.

SIKA: Whatever. You mock, but *you* try explaining my awesomeness in ten minutes. It's not long enough.

(Ambre smiled.)

AMBRE: Was *my* speech any good, I don't remember it.

CAYLEY: It was different!

KASIRA: You were so nervous.

(Ambre blushed.)

AMBRE: I was?

KASIRA: You were sitting there wide-eyed and trembling. Shaking like a leaf you were.

CAYLEY: So we let you off.

KASIRA: Yeah, we were afraid you'd faint again.

(Ambre made little circles on the table top with her finger and sighed.)

AMBRE: I didn't have any confidence back then.

(She smiled.)

AMBRE: I'm better now though.

NIVEA: Yeah, these days you never shut up.

AMBRE: Mean!

NIVEA: Just pulling your leg, darling.

(Cayley chuckled then sat back in her seat.)

CAYLEY: Oh well, fun as this is, Sika and I have work to do.

(Sika sighed.)

SIKA: Is it that time already?

CAYLEY: Almost.

SIKA: Almost? Let me know when it *is* time!

CAYLEY: It *is* time to help me clear this table and wash the plates! We can do that before we go.

(Sika pouted and pointed to the ashen-faced Soapy.)

SIKA: She's the new girl, make *her* do it.

CAYLEY: I asked you.

(Sika sighed and climbed to her feet.)

SIKA: Fine, whatever.

(Looking peeved, Sika cleared her half of the table then ambled into the kitchen, followed by Cayley. Watching them go, Kasira puffed out.)

KASIRA: I won't be sad to get to bed tonight, I'm shattered.

NIVEA: Long day, huh?

KASIRA: Stressful one.

(Nivea sighed.)

NIVEA: We need another subterranean here, it gets so boring when you lot are in bed.

KASIRA: I requested one, but they insisted we must have at least one of every race, so they sent us Soapy here.

(Soapy looked up then straight back down again, her mind very much elsewhere.)

NIVEA: We could always make her sit up all night with me! You know, just to be evil.

(They all looked to Soapy and grinned. Seeing no response, Nivea sighed.)

NIVEA: Kids are no fun when they don't bite.

---

Shortly before midnight, having finished doing the dishes, Cayley and Sika paced out of the barracks and into the small forecourt before it. Looking up at the sky, Cayley bit her lip nervously, whilst being pouted at by a grumpy looking Sika.)

SIKA: Like staring at it is gonna help.

(Cayley gave her a sympathetic glance.)

CAYLEY: Stop sulking, you look like a fish when you pout.

SIKA: I do not!

CAYLEY: It was your turn to help wash up, get over it.

(Sika frowned.)

SIKA: Fine, whatever.

CAYLEY: Now, you ready?

SIKA: Yeah.

CAYLEY: Let's get going then.

(At once, they both allowed their glorious wings to explode from the tops of their backs then rose up off of the ground.)

CAYLEY: Come on.

(With that, their wings flapped majestically and they started to soar high into the sky.

Keeping a sharp eye on the land below, they headed onwards and upwards at an acute angle, keeping a good distance between themselves, as to avoid a collision with their wings.

Glancing down at the base becoming a small spec beneath her, Sika glanced across to Cayley and called out to her.)

SIKA: This doesn't feel right, Cayley.

(Cayley looked across at her and grimaced.)

CAYLEY: I know. I shouldn't have been able to hear that, for one.

(Sika bit her lip. They normally went through a tried and tested routine on their flights together. Sika would call out and Cayley would give her a sideways glance, the words carried away on the wind. Sika would then fly over her head and repeat whatever she said. Tonight, however, there was absolutely no breeze whatsoever and she could hear Sika clearly.)

SIKA: This is weird.

CAYLEY: This is worrying, Sika. No wind could be disastrous for us.

SIKA: I know, right? I love gliding back down aimlessly, can't do that without wind.

(Cayley gave her a disturbed glance.)

CAYLEY: It's not that! Without wind, the re-spawning wraiths could all appear in the same place.

(Sika looked lost.)

SIKA: What does that mean?

(Cayley looked dumbfounded.)

CAYLEY: The army really are cutting back on education, aren't they?

SIKA: There's no need to insult me, Cayley.

CAYLEY: I think there is. Do you even know why we come up here every night?

(Sika gave her a troubled glance.)

SIKA: Because you like the exercise and we're not allowed out of the barracks on our own?

(Cayley almost stared straight through her.)

CAYLEY: You actually think that, don't you?

SIKA: Well why else would we fly really high every night then fly straight back again?

CAYLEY: We're checking for a haze!

(She gave her an empty stare.)

CAYLEY: You trying to tell me you didn't know that?

SIKA: Nobody told me! I just thought you wanted to keep fit and I had to keep you company!

(She shrugged.)

SIKA: What's a haze anyway?

CAYLEY: Seriously?

SIKA: Yeah!

CAYLEY: Wow.

(She rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: The dead wraiths re-spawn, right?

SIKA: Yeah.

CAYLEY: Well, at least you know that much.

SIKA: Cayley, don't be angry at me, I can't know what I wasn't taught.

CAYLEY: I'm not angry at you. I'm angry at the fact you weren't told this in training.

(She gave her a warm smile then continued.)

CAYLEY: When wraiths die, their residue reforms high up in the sky and the wind takes it elsewhere in the world.

SIKA: Okay...

CAYLEY: What we fight on Capsway Island is whatever was blowing over us when the time to spawn came.

SIKA: Oh, right. So without wind, we'll have to fight the same ones tomorrow that we killed today, because they didn't blow away?

CAYLEY: Yeah. Trouble is, the wind is much lighter over land as a rule. Which means it's probably still blowing out at sea.

SIKA: And that's bad because?

CAYLEY: Thousands of wraiths might get blown this way and stop where the wind dies out.

SIKA: Over Capsway Island?

(Sika looked daunted.)

SIKA: So everything will fall on us???

CAYLEY: Exactly.

(She puffed out nervously.)

CAYLEY: Basically, there could be wraith residue reforming from all over the world, and getting blown straight here! If that's the case we're gonna be in deep bum if its all still here come spawn time.

SIKA: Deep bum?

CAYLEY: I don't like to swear, you know that.

SIKA: Okay.

CAYLEY: Hopefully, the wind is dead at sea too though, then we'll be fine.

SIKA: And if it isn't?

CAYLEY: Then we'd better pray the wind starts to blow here too, and soon.

SIKA: Holy crap.

(Cayley puffed out.)

CAYLEY: When we get up there, keep an eye out for a haze.

SIKA: And what does it look like.

CAYLEY: Exactly what it is. A haze. The sky will look hazy because there's so much residue gathered in one place.

SIKA: Oh, okay.

CAYLEY: Fingers crossed, Sika.

SIKA: Already there, Cayley.

(They shared a nervous nod then put their heads down and soared upwards.)

Half an hour later, Kasira, Nivea, Soapy and Ambre remained at the mess room table. Soapy still hadn't said a word. Having just changed into her nighty, Kasira kept yawning, barely able to keep her eyes open.)

KASIRA: I haven't been this tired in a long while.

NIVEA: Go to bed then.

KASIRA: Not until Sika and Cayley come back.

NIVEA: They'll be fine!

KASIRA: Yeah, but I won't be able to sleep until I know that.

NIVEA: You worry too much. They do this every night and nothing's ever happened to them.

KASIRA: And I don't want to be curled up asleep if it ever does.

NIVEA: What you gonna do, rush to their aid like a knight in shining negligee? Your baps on display to the entire world?

(Kasira frowned at her.)

KASIRA: My baps, as you call them, are perfectly concealed thanks!

NIVEA: You reckon? I can see your nipples from here! Look...

(She reached her hand towards Kasira's chest and received a curt retort.)

KASIRA: Touch them and I'll break your arm!

(Nivea pouted and drew back her hand.)

NIVEA: Just saying. If you're all for rushing out any time soon, a skimpy nighty probably isn't the best thing to be wearing. It is, however, ideal for going to bed.

(Ambre yawned then leant her head on the table.)

AMBRE: I might go to bed in a minute too.

(She then sighed.)

AMBRE: But then Sika would only wake me up when she comes in.

(Just then, Cayley and Sika came pacing through the door looking greatly concerned.)

AMBRE: Yay, they're back!

(Kasira immediately climbed to her feet and paced up to Cayley.)

KASIRA: You guys took your time, you okay?

(Cayley sighed and shook her head.)

CAYLEY: There's a haze. No wind whatsoever.

(Upon hearing Cayley's words, Nivea upped and rushed to Kasira's side.)

NIVEA: A haze, did you say?

CAYLEY: Yeah, nothing too large for now and the wraiths aren't due to spawn until lunchtime tomorrow. But if the wind hasn't picked up by then...

KASIRA: Yeah, it could be huge by then.

(She sucked her teeth.)

KASIRA: So, we need to...

CAYLEY: Wow, Kasira, that nighty doesn't leave much to the imagination does it?

NIVEA: Thank you. Exactly my point.

KASIRA: Right! That's exactly what we *should* be discussing right now. My nighty.

(Just then, Ambre spoke up from the table behind her.)

AMBRE: Kasira, I can see your bum cheeks!

(Kasira sneered then paced out of the room.)

KASIRA: Just a second.

(She came back shortly afterwards wearing a bathrobe.)

KASIRA: Better? No boobs or thong in sight, just my face to talk too. Happy now?

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: This haze. We need a plan of action.

(She looked to Cayley.)

KASIRA: Check it again in the morning. About 9 o'clock. That'll give us a couple of hours before they're due to spawn to know what we're up against.

CAYLEY: Should we post a warning on the village noticeboard.

NIVEA: Might be an idea, but it depends on the size of the haze. The bigger hazes break late for some reason. If it's something big enough to worry about then we'll probably get no wraiths on the day time patrol.

(Cayley and Kasira gave her a sideways glance.)

KASIRA: Is that so?

CAYLEY: What are you basing that on?

NIVEA: I studied hazes at my academy. A lack of wind causes them to form, we all know that, right?

KASIRA: Yeah.

NIVEA: Well, the wind blows them all into the same place and they form a cluster rather than a gathering. They get wedged together and it makes it difficult for the wraiths to fall. I don't have a scientific explanation for it, but that's a fact.

(Kasira nodded.)

KASIRA: Interesting.

NIVEA: And the usual procedure, so I was told, is to post a notice to the public if the wraiths fail to materialise when expected to. That means you're either in for a big one later on *or* if you're lucky, the wind will come and blow them all away, leaving you no wraiths whatsoever.

CAYLEY: So, if they fall tomorrow during the day...

NIVEA: It'll be a big spawn, manageable though. A pain in the arse of course. But if they don't then the night time patrol will be a nightmare. That's if we're not so lucky they all blow away and fall elsewhere.

(Kasira nodded.)

KASIRA: So what sort of numbers are we talking about?

NIVEA: Day time... could even be five hundred.

SIKA: Holy shit!

NIVEA: If it's later though... over a thousand.

SIKA: Bloody hell!!!

NIVEA: Thanks, Sika, you've been very informative.

SIKA: I try my best.

KASIRA: Right, okay...

(Kasira mused to herself for a moment then nodded.)

KASIRA: So, here's the plan. Check again in the morning, you two. If there's no wind and nothing spawns in the day time, then we'll post a warning message.

CAYLEY: Sounds good.

KASIRA: Then we'll get some rest, *all* of us. If the night time wraiths are going to be a thousand strong we might well end up fighting them all night.

(She sighed.)



KASIRA: If all goes wrong tomorrow, we're in for a lazy day, followed by a night of hell.

(She gave another trouble sigh then shrugged.)

KASIRA: Still, nothing we can do about it right now. I'm off to bed. Night all!

(With that, she turned and minced away towards the bedrooms. Left behind, Sika looked to Cayley.)

SIKA: A thousand wraiths? Not sure I can deal with that.

(Cayley smiled.)

CAYLEY: We'll find a way.

(She then headed for the door.)

CAYLEY: I'm not gonna stress about it unless it happens though. Think, I'll have a bath.

(Sika watched her go then shrugged.)

SIKA: Sounds good to me.

(She paced past the table, looking to the sad-faced Soapy as she did so.)

SIKA: Hey, misery guts. You have to see our bath! It's a natural warm spring surrounded by all these funky round pillars and stuff. It's awesome.

(Soapy looked up having hardly heard a word.)

SOAPY: What?

SIKA: Just come with me a second.

(Looking somewhat lost, Soapy climbed to her feet and followed her, still deep in thought.

Watching them go, Nivea smiled to herself.)

NIVEA: Just you and me then Ambre.

(As Ambre's snore rose up from the table, Nivea then hung her head.)

NIVEA: Being nocturnal sucks!

(She shrugged.)

NIVEA: Think I'll have a bath too then.

---

When Soapy climbed into her bed that night, situated in a tiny room near the back of the barracks, her heart was heavy. Having been slightly invigorated by a soak in the large, hot spring bath, her spirits had lifted slightly but left on her own again, her mind started to wander. It seemed there was very little for her to feel positive about. She tried to focus her mind on the good things but every positive seemed to be a horribly outweighed by the negatives. Nivea and Sika were fun, Cayley was exceptionally nice and the bath was extremely luxurious. Those were the only positives. On the downside, she hated her boss, and she felt picked on, unappreciated and disrespected. She couldn't abide Ambre either. As far as she was concerned, Ambre was a slimy bimbo and a creep, born to make her look bad and get her into trouble. And worse of all, she could die here. It was a reality that had hit her hard.

Failing to sleep with a thousand thoughts running through her mind, Soapy rolled over and sighed sorrowfully. How she wished Kasira hadn't shown her Tahiti's ashes and plaque. In that moment her contentment at floating through life had been washed away. She'd finally realised that unlike at the academy, she couldn't just shrug off mistakes here. Mistakes could prove fatal. It had all been something of a shock to her system. She was no longer a care free child, she was a young adult now, and it was a responsibility she wasn't sure she was ready for. Life had seemed so easy up until that point. Life had just been about having fun and getting by with a smile on her face. Now, knowing about Tahiti's fate, it all seemed so much harder.

Pondering a myriad of painful thoughts, Soapy lay on her back then opened her eyes wide. Thinking about the situation with the cake, a stinging truth she hadn't wanted to accept, hit her hard. She had Kasira all wrong. Kasira *had* upset her deliberately but not just to be mean, as she'd chosen to believe. Kasira was trying to make her understand a harsh and necessary lesson. She was in a war and death was a distinct possibility. She'd chosen to ignore this lesson and wallow in self pity before but now she could see it perfectly clearly. Just as Nivea had said she would, Kasira was trying to turn her into a soldier, to teach her discipline and enable her to survive. She realised then that Kasira wouldn't take any nonsense from her. Recalling how she'd twice acted in complete disregard of Kasira's orders, the same thing Tahiti had done on the night she died, a tear rolled down her cheek. She'd never felt so foolish. At the time she'd been cocky and resented Kasira's disdain but now she realised she deserved it. Kasira had been a soldier for nine years and knew what she was talking about and yet on her first day, she'd scoffed at her as if she knew best. Tahiti's memorial was all the proof Soapy needed that Kasira was right. In that moment, her perspective changed dramatically.

Starting to feel positive about the future, she sat up and puffed out. Everyone except her liked Kasira and now she knew why. She'd taught them to be soldiers and kept them safe. It all seemed so obvious now. All she had to do was keep her mouth shut and do as she was told and she too could be happy here, like the rest of her unit mates. Clearly, Kasira didn't ask for much except for professionalism when on duty. It was something she could do with ease and she resolved to do so from that moment onwards. No more acting like a brat. Feeling mightily relieved she laid her head back down on her pillow and smiled to herself. This army life needn't be as difficult as she was set to make it for herself. When not on duty, Nivea was a crazy fruitcake. Sika was very much like her except a might cheekier. They were very much themselves and Kasira made no attempt to stop them from being so. The same could apply to her. All she had to do was be a good soldier and she could enjoy herself here. This realisation made her feel warm inside. These girls needn't be just unit-mates, they could be her friends.

Exhaling with satisfaction, Soapy rolled over and closed her eyes. A few seconds later, however, they opened again. Yes, she could be herself, and yes, she could learn to be a good soldier and make friends. The double standards which she felt she'd been a victim of however, were still bugging her. With a snarl, she then closed her eyes again. This was something she'd have to learn to live with. Ambre was clearly not as stupid as she made out and had Kasira wrapped around her little finger. She accepted that she'd been wrong to disobey orders twice, but it was annoying the living daylights out of her that Ambre had trembled and whimpered her way out of any punishment whatsoever. Swiftly coming to the conclusion that Kasira was a good person who'd simply been manipulated by Ambre's ingenious pretence, she puffed out then nestled into her pillow. Satisfied there was nothing she could do about the disgraceful Ambre, she opted to settle for simply not liking her and closed her eyes. And so, vowing she'd make peace with Kasira in the morning, she then dozed off for the night.

---

The following morning, having saluted Kasira and offered her an unreserved apology for her insubordinate behaviour, Soapy had been given a broom and ordered to sweep the courtyard. Accepting the chore without complaint she'd then headed outside to begin the job. A few seconds later, however, she'd paced back in and asked permission to wear less clothes. Fanning her face, Kasira granted her request then made her a cool refreshing cup of fruit juice.

Outside, the weather was scorching, easily the hottest day of the year, without even the merest hint of a breeze. Finally understanding why Kasira was wearing nothing but a bikini, Soapy accepted the drink, changed into a thin summer dress, then headed back outside.

Stepping into the bright sunlight, Soapy squinted then looked about the yard.

SOAPY: Hot. Damn.

(She then headed to the corner of the yard and proceeded to sweep. Quickly started to sweat, she puffed out and furrowed her brow. She was determined to do a first class job, even if it meant she melted in the ferocious heat.

A few minutes later, having taken great care to sweep all the dirt and leaves from the corner to the centre of the yard, she stood tall, wiped sweat from her brow then poked her tongue out.)

SOAPY: I'm on fire.

(She then went to resume sweeping when Ambre stepped outside in a skimpy top and a miniskirt. At once, Soapy's brow furrowed. For all her attempts to be more mature, she couldn't but feel Ambre's sexy outfit was deliberately aimed at making her look inadequately sexy in her inexpensive dress. Snarling, she turned her back on her and started to sweep swiftly, mumbling under her breath.)

SOAPY: Think you're so sexy, do you? You think *I* don't own a miniskirt or two, do you? I'll bloody show you...

(Her angry mumbles were then interrupted by Ambre speaking up in an insecure voice.)

AMBRE: Do you want some help?

(Soapy stood tall and glared at her.)

SOAPY: Been ordered to help me, have you?

(Ambre shrugged.)

AMBRE: No, but it's hot and I thought...

(Having heard enough already, Soapy just sneered at her coldly.)

SOAPY: I don't want your help.

(She screwed up her face at her and shook her head disdainfully.)

SOAPY: Just... get lost, Ambre!

(She then resumed sweeping, a snarl fixed on her face. A few seconds later, when she glanced back over her shoulder, Ambre was gone.)

SOAPY: And stay away, you piece of shit, bitch.

(And so, all alone under the burning sun, she continued to clear the four corners of the yard, sweeping all the debris into the centre to form one easy to manage pile.)

SOAPY: Almost done.

(She puffed out.)

SOAPY: I'll be glad to get inside, damn!

(Just then, Sika and Cayley flew down from above, landing right in the centre of her pile of dirt and leaves.)

SOAPY: Guys!!!

(Ignoring her, they both rushed into the building, kicking everything she'd swept across the courtyard again.)

SOAPY: Careful!!!

(As they disappeared from sight, her shoulders sunk and she dropped the broom. The fact two people had just fallen from the sky hadn't even seemed odd to her, she was far more concerned with the fact that all her hard work had been completely obliterated.)

SOAPY: Unbelievable.

(Looking crushed, she then bent over, picked up the broom and started again.

Inside the building in the meantime, Cayley and Sika were deep in conference with Kasira.)

CAYLEY: The haze is still there.

SIKA: And it's bigger, much bigger.

CAYLEY: And there's not even a slight breeze out there.

(Kasira bit her lip.)

KASIRA: Okay. Well, we'll stick to the plan for now. Same old routine, we'll do the day time patrol later. If there's no wraiths then... we'll warn the villagers and get some rest in case the haze breaks later on.

(She nodded firmly.)

KASIRA: As long as we keep an eye on it, I'm sure we can handle it.

CAYLEY: You don't think we'll need reinforcements?

KASIRA: Ambre and I posted a request for some this morning. They'll never get here in time, I know, but I've requested them anyway.

SIKA: What for? If you know they won't get here on time...

KASIRA: I have to by law. And besides, if the haze hasn't broken by the time they arrive, we'll bloody need them when it does. There'd be millions of them!

(Sika looked sheepish.)

SIKA: Good point!

CAYLEY: The chances of that happening are extraordinarily slim though.

KASIRA: Yeah, I fully expect the haze to break today. So we've just got to make sure we're ready.

(She nodded thoughtfully.)

KASIRA: With that in mind, we'd better rest up. Tell Soapy she can clean the yard another day. We'll rest up now, try the patrol later on and if there's no wraiths around, we'll rest some more.

SIKA: Resting, yeah? Sounds like something I might be good at!

KASIRA: Well, we always suspected there might be something!

(Sika furrowed her brow.)

SIKA: Harsh!

(She grinned.)

SIKA: If I didn't know you were just jealous of my awesomeness, I'd be offended.

---

As midday approached, Soapy found herself sat in the corner of the courtyard, slumped against the wall beneath a well positioned parasol. Out in the courtyard with her, Sika and Cayley both lazed on hammocks in the full glare of the scorching sun.

SOAPY: This is too hot, I really don't like it.

(Sika glanced to her from her hammock.)

SIKA: Wimp!

SOAPY: I'm not a wimp.

SIKA: Yeah you are, come and catch some rays.

(Cayley looked to Soapy urgently.)

CAYLEY: Don't! Stay where you are.

(She then looked to Sika.)

CAYLEY: Aqua humans get sunburn.

(Sika looked surprised.)

SIKA: Like land-bound people?

CAYLEY: Like every race except ours.

(Sika mused to herself out loud.)

SIKA: Wow. Sucks to be them. I love sunning myself.

SOAPY: You really didn't need the word "sunning" in that sentence, Sika.

(Cayley chuckled.)

CAYLEY: I was just thinking that.

SIKA: Yeah well, if you were...

(Soapy spoke in a mocking voice, finishing Sika's sentence for her.)

SOAPY: As awesome as me, you'd love yourself too.

SIKA: Hey!

CAYLEY: Wow, Soapy, you've only been here one day and you've got Sika pegged already.

SIKA: Fine, mock me. I don't care.

(Cayley smiled then looked up towards the sky.)

CAYLEY: I hope Nivea can sleep alright in this heat. If that haze breaks *tonight* and she's been awake all day...

(Soapy looked uncertain.)

SOAPY: This haze...

CAYLEY: Yeah?

SOAPY: It can break any time, right?

CAYLEY: Yeah, why?

SOAPY: Then... wouldn't it make more sense to be dressed and ready?

(Sika scoffed and gestured down at her bikini.)

SIKA: This is as dressed as I'm gonna get today.

CAYLEY: What Sika said.

SOAPY: Yeah, but rather than lazing about, shouldn't we...

CAYLEY: Sit bolt upright and be on our guard?

SOAPY: Yeah!

(Cayley shook her head.)

CAYLEY: We'd get tired in no time doing that. And if the haze breaks tonight, we'll all be shattered. No, relaxing is definitely a good idea. Take a nap if you can, in fact. As long as we're not *all* asleep when they spawn, we'll be fine.

SOAPY: I guess.

(Sika looked thoughtful.)

SIKA: If there's like, loads of them, do you think they'll spawn in the barracks too?

CAYLEY: Possibly! That's happened a few times, actually. As long as it's at ground level, they can spawn anywhere.

SOAPY: Wait, what? Ground level?

CAYLEY: Yeah, they don't spawn upstairs, on rooftops or in trees. Their spirit remnants float down to ground level, through roofs and treetops to the ground. That's why every flight of stairs has a gate on it. No surprises in the night that way.

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: My hometown was built in the treetops. Nobody ever gets caught by surprise *there* either because there's no homes at ground level.

SIKA: My hometown is built on stilts; it just makes sense to build above or below ground.

(Soapy looked thoughtful.)

SOAPY: I don't have a hometown as such. It's just a place where lots of boats are moored.

SIKA: What do you mean?

SOAPY: Our homes float, they're boats. We stick close to land though for farming and such.  
(Sika beamed.)

SIKA: Cool. If you got bored living there you could literally move your house to a new town.

CAYLEY: You have on-land cities though, right?

SOAPY: Yeah, we lived in one for a while but then we moved away to the country.

SIKA: When I retire from this army rubbish, I want a floating house!

CAYLEY: You get sea sick!

SIKA: Oh, yeah! Scratch that then!

CAYLEY: Anyway, in answer to your question, Soapy, relaxing is the best idea. We can all be ready in a split second anyway. We won't get caught off guard. Nivea's room is in the basement, so she's safe there. Kasira is sticking close to Ambre, so they're both safe and us three all have powerful magic on tap. So don't worry about a thing, as soon as they spawn we'll get killing, but until then conserve your energy, this might be a long day.

(Soapy nodded.)

SOAPY: Okay!

(With that, she climbed to her feet and headed inside.)

SIKA: Where are you going?

SOAPY: Toilet, if you must know.

SIKA: Well, I do like to be kept informed. Number one or number two?

(Soapy chuckled.)

SOAPY: Get help, Sika.

(Grinning to herself, Soapy paced through the mess room and out into the corridor beyond.

As she passed Kasira's office en route to the toilet, however, she heard Ambre's voice and paused in mid-step with a confused look on her face. Ambre appeared to be speaking in slow motion. Scratching her head, she slowly stepped up to Kasira's slightly open office door and peaked through the gap. Much to her amazement, Ambre was perched on Kasira's knee and they were staring at an open book on the desk together. At once, Soapy's mind ran riot.

Could it be that Ambre and Kasira were lovers? It would certainly explain why she never got told off. And seducing her lesbian boss would definitely be the sort of thing a manipulative toe-rag like Ambre might do to get ahead, she thought. Letting her curiosity get the better of her, she furrowed her brow then stepped back to listen. Within seconds of purely listening to them however, she swiftly realised her lesbian theory was very wrong.)

AMBRE: E... lee... um...

(Kasira spoke softly to her.)

KASIRA: You can do it, darling.

AMBRE: I'm not sure...

KASIRA: Then sound it out, like we practiced.

(Ambre sounded far from confident.)

AMBRE: Okay... so... L. E. Um...

KASIRA: And how did we say PH is pronounced?

(Ambre sounded encouraged.)

AMBRE: Like an F!

KASIRA: That's it. Now try again.

(There was silence for a moment then Ambre spoke up slowly.)

AMBRE: L... E... Fan... it is elephant?

(Kasira sounded delighted.)

KASIRA: There you go! Good girl!

AMBRE: Yay, me!!!

(She sighed.)

AMBRE: It doesn't look like elephant though.

KASIRA: No?

AMBRE: Not at all.

KASIRA: It will once you've mastered the basics.

AMBRE: I guess.

(Kasira smiled.)

KASIRA: Carry on then. If you finish this page we can play a board game.

AMBRE: Yay!

(Soapy heard nothing for a moment then Ambre spoke in slow motion once more.)

AMBRE: Mister... Elephant... had... been... a good... boy...

(Thrown by what she'd overheard, Soapy scratched her ear then headed off towards the toilet. Still trying to get her head around it as she did her business, she started to feel a little uncomfortable with herself. Trying not to let the feeling get the better of her, however, as soon as she was finished in the toilet, she pushed it to the back of her mind and headed back towards Kasira's office again. Intent on not listening in this time, she put her head down and paced as quickly as she could past the door, when Ambre's voice caught her full attention once again.)

AMBRE: Kasira?

KASIRA: Yes, sweetheart?

AMBRE: Soapy doesn't like me, does she?

(Frozen once again in her walking pose, Soapy couldn't help but stand up and listen in.)

KASIRA: Does she not?

(Ambre sighed.)

AMBRE: No!

(She shrugged.)

AMBRE: I don't know why. I've tried to be nice.

KASIRA: Maybe she's just shy of you.

AMBRE: I don't know... she told me to get lost.

(She sighed again.)

AMBRE: She definitely doesn't like me.

(Kasira sighed on Ambre's behalf.)

KASIRA: Well... maybe it's because she doesn't know you yet.

AMBRE: Really?

KASIRA: I reckon so. Give it time and I'm sure she'll learn to love you to bits like the rest of us do.

AMBRE: That'd be awesome.

KASIRA: Good girl. Now let's get on and finish this page, yeah?

(Sounding much happier thanks to Kasira's advice, Ambre replied in a chirpy voice.)

AMBRE: Okay!

(Having heard enough, Soapy put her head down and trudged back through the mess room towards the exit. As she emerged in the courtyard a few moments later, Cayley gave her a warm smile.)

CAYLEY: You took your time.

SIKA: Number two probably!

(Soapy gave Sika a disturbed glance then shook her head. Feeling somewhat empty inside, she then paced to the shady corner behind the parasol and sat down.)

SOAPY: For pity's sake, guys.

SIKA: What? Don't feel bad, we all poo, it's natural.

SOAPY: It's not that!

(She puffed out sorrowfully.)

SOAPY: Why didn't you tell me Ambre was retarded?

(Cayley and Sika looked to one another.)

SIKA: Would you have treated her any differently?

SOAPY: Of course I would!

SIKA: Then that's your answer.

CAYLEY: Besides, she's not retarded. She's...

SIKA: She's a retard, Cayley.

CAYLEY: Yeah, but I don't like that word. Let's just say she's... slow?

(She sighed.)

CAYLEY: That sounds terrible too.

SOAPY: Well, whatever you wanna call it, I feel awful now. I thought she didn't get told off for her mistakes because she was Kasira's favourite, I didn't know she was... special.

CAYLEY: Aw, Soapy...

(Cayley shrugged.)

CAYLEY: Ambre *is* Kasira's favourite!

SIKA: She's my favourite too!

CAYLEY: And mine. The point is though, the reason she *didn't* get told off is because she made mistakes. *You* got told off because you disobeyed orders. They're very different things.

SIKA: Yeah, I've made loads of mistakes and Kasira's never said a word to me. When I used to disobey orders and get all stropky though... different matter.

(Absorbing their words, Soapy nodded solemnly.)

SOAPY: I'm so stupid. That never even occurred to me.

CAYLEY: Ambre tries harder than anyone else I know; she never answers back and always does as she's told. Yes, she's prone to panic attacks and makes mistakes, but that's beyond her control. It'd be wrong to chastise her for that.

(Soapy puffed out.)

SOAPY: You know, last night, I realised how wrong I was to answer back and disobey orders. I figured that much out for myself. And I thought I could be happy here if only it wasn't for that bitch, Ambre. I feel terrible now.

SIKA: Let me guess, you resented her being so pretty right from the moment you met her, and everything she did felt like a deliberate attempt to piss you off?

(Soapy looked astonished.)

SOAPY: That's exactly how I felt.

SIKA: Been there, babes. I hated her for the first few days too. That's how Tahiti, may the gods rest her soul, felt about her at first as well.

(She puffed out.)

SIKA: You feel really guilty right now, don't you?

SOAPY: Of course I do. I was hating on a retard.

(She threw her arms in the air in defeat.)

SOAPY: And a nice one at that.

(She spanned her forehead.)

SOAPY: Looking back she's never been *anything* but friendly towards me.

CAYLEY: Yup, that's our Ambre. A little ray of sunshine.

SOAPY: I'm an idiot.

(She puffed out and shook her head before looking to Cayley with uncertainty.)

SOAPY: So, how come you haven't healed her? Surely if her brain is wrong you can heal it, can't you?

(Cayley rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: Everyone asks me that, I'm sick of explaining it!

SOAPY: I'm just curious.

CAYLEY: Look, if she could be healed, someone would have healed her years ago. Long before she met me! Fact is, she can't be healed. Her brain isn't malfunctioning, it works perfectly. Unfortunately, it's not a very good brain.

(She sighed.)

CAYLEY: She developed wrong in the womb... that sounds horrible. Still, that's how it is. Her brain has a smaller capacity than normal and isn't as quick as it should be. That's how



she was born. With that brain! I can't heal what isn't broken. If she had a normal brain that wasn't functioning, hell yeah. I'd have healed her long ago, but I can't. And yes, I have tried.  
(Soapy looked thoughtful.)

SOAPY: Poor thing.

SIKA: She's fine. She's happy and she's got people who love her, Soapy. She doesn't need our sympathy.

SOAPY: I guess.

SIKA: So don't suddenly go all dough-eyed and start mollycoddling her all day like I did when I found out she was... different. Treat her like you would anyone else. In my case, that involves teasing her, but that's just me.

(She looked thoughtful.)

SIKA: Damn, I'm a horrible little shit, aren't I?

(Cayley chuckled then swung her feet over the side of her hammock to sit up.)

CAYLEY: Actually, Sika, no you're not.

(She grimaced.)

CAYLEY: Ambre's come across a lot of horrible people in her time and you're not one of them, believe me.

SIKA: What do you mean?

(Cayley shook her head then leant forward.)

CAYLEY: Until she came here, everyone in her life was a... how do you say it without swearing?

SOAPY: Say what?

CAYLEY: Let's just call them vaginas!

SOAPY: Oh... right.

CAYLEY: You know the army sent her here fully expecting her to be killed, right? Just to get her off their hands!

(Sika and Soapy looked horrified.)

SIKA: What?

SOAPY: You're kidding?

CAYLEY: I wish I was.

(She shook an angry head.)

CAYLEY: Her parents did the right thing and submitted her to training at the age of fourteen, like they're supposed to, and it was pretty much downhill from there. She didn't learn a thing. It's all in the official report; I'm not making this up. They wrote that she panicked when pressured to do anything and turned into a gazelle all the time. Now, I can imagine what her captain was like, shouting at her and forcing her to hurry. As you well know, Sika, she can't concentrate that well when she's relaxed, you stress her out she won't learn a bloody thing.

SIKA: Yeah, absolutely.

CAYLEY: Anyway, they filled out a form when she was sixteen, stating she wasn't fit for the army and made the preparations to send her back to her parents.

(She sighed.)

CAYLEY: She was all ready to leave, when she received a letter from her hometown stating that both her parents had been killed in a fire.

(Soapy and Sika both pouted simultaneously.)

CAYLEY: I know; heart-breaking, right?

(She shook her head.)

CAYLEY: So, anyway, the army were stuck with her. They kept trying to train her and got nowhere. It actually says on several reports that she was awarded an A for effort, but she didn't pass a single exam. Then at the age of nineteen, she mysteriously passed all the exams from level one through to level nine in a single month.

SIKA: That's weird.

SOAPY: Yeah!

CAYLEY: Turns out somebody took them for her.

SIKA: Makes sense.

CAYLEY: We found that out from General Wilson, himself. He admitted it. He's the one who sent her here, in fact.

SIKA: Shock horror, he picked the pretty one!

(Cayley nodded.)

CAYLEY: Yeah, not that he expected to have his way with her, he expected her to die.

SOAPY: No way!

CAYLEY: HQ admitted it! When Ambre first arrived with us, Kasira couldn't do a damn thing with her. I mean Ambre tried to do what she was asked but she didn't have a bloody clue about anything. Slightest bit of pressure and she'd keep fainting or turning into a gazelle. (She puffed out.)

CAYLEY: Anyway, Kasira wrote to HQ and asked why they'd sent her someone who was clearly incapable of doing the job and requested a replacement.

(Cayley looked annoyed.)

CAYLEY: You won't believe what they wrote in their reply.

SOAPY: What?

SIKA: Something mean?

CAYLEY: They told us not to worry because they fully expected Private Ambre to die in battle within a few weeks and a competent replacement would be sent shortly after. They referred to her as an 'expendable stopgap'!

SOAPY: Expendable? Oh my god!

SIKA: Wankers!

(Cayley clenched a fist.)

CAYLEY: Kasira was livid. She couldn't believe they'd treat a fellow human being so callously! Like her life was worthless, you know? I've never seen her so angry. I remember it like it was yesterday. She stormed into the mess room with the letter in her hand, calling the army every name under the sun. She was raging, I mean really furious. Then... she spotted Ambre shyly eating her breakfast like she was afraid someone was going to steal it. Kasira's whole demeanour changed right there. She walked round the table, put a loving hand on Ambre's shoulder and said, "If they won't do it, then I bloody well will. Let's make a soldier out of you, sweetheart."

(Soapy and Sika both tipped their heads to one side and exhaled.)

CAYLEY: For the next six months, Kasira taught her everything. She must have the patience of a saint too, because she didn't yell at her once. She encouraged her, helped her understand things and made her feel wanted. Ambre went from being frightened of her own shadow to having the confidence to summon her familiar and use it in battle. All because Kasira took the time to nurture her talent, rather than shouting at her and declaring her useless.

(She nodded with pride.)

CAYLEY: I helped, of course. And I feel really good about that. The army couldn't do anything with her, so they sent her off to war to die when all she needed was love and attention... and understanding, of course. Well, we gave her that. Now she's somebody. Still, we couldn't have done anything if Ambre hadn't tried so damn hard and worked her bum off for it. Little thing was so determined to succeed. She really is an inspiration, that girl, she really is.

(Cayley smiled at Sika and Soapy then chuckled at the sight of them both wiping away tears from their eyes.)

SIKA: I'm gonna go and hug her!!!

(With that, Sika leapt from her hammock and charged indoors.)

SOAPY: Wow, Cayley... is that all true?

CAYLEY: As true as we're out here in the sunshine.

SOAPY: Damn.

CAYLEY: So, anyway, if you were wondering whether Kasira has what it takes to make you into a soldier, I'm thinking yes.

(Soapy looked thoughtful.)

SOAPY: I think I'm already there, actually. I won't disobey orders ever again, I've decided that much.

CAYLEY: Good to know, but you should cut the lip too. I don't think I've *ever* heard Ambre talk back and I reckon that's a major reason for her success. If you can do the same, then that'll be a big step in the right direction.

(Soapy nodded.)

SOAPY: I agree.

CAYLEY: Good girl!

(Soapy then looked skyward and mused to herself.)

SOAPY: Was kinda weird seeing an adult learning to read, you know?

CAYLEY: Yeah?

SOAPY: Yeah. I wonder why her mother didn't teach her.

(Cayley smiled.)

CAYLEY: Her mother *is* teaching her, actually.

SOAPY: Eh?

CAYLEY: The army declared Ambre incompetent.

(Soapy furrowed her brow.)

CAYLEY: Yeah, I know; then sent her off to war.

SOAPY: That's sick.

CAYLEY: Yeah, well, it worked out well in the end. Kasira's now her official guardian, she adopted her. And because Ambre's officially been declared incompetent, she can leave the army at any time providing a relative is willing to be her guardian. So, when Kasira leaves next year, she's taking Ambre home with her.

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: For someone who had such a crappy start in life, Ambre sure is getting a happy ending.

(Cayley then rolled her eyes at the sight of Soapy wiping more tears from her eyes.)

SOAPY: Kasira must really love her.

CAYLEY: You want to run and hug her too now, don't you?

SOAPY: I do!

(She then shrunk where she sat.)

SOAPY: I won't though. I'd feel silly.

(She then puffed out and looked up.)

SOAPY: Though it's a bit late for me to worry about looking silly, really.

CAYLEY: What do you mean?

SOAPY: After my tantrum last night over the cake an' all. And what was I thinking at the flag ceremony? All I had to do was say nothing.

CAYLEY: Yeah... that wasn't impressive, I won't lie to you.

SOAPY: I should go and apologise to the townspeople.

CAYLEY: What?

SOAPY: Not that I owe them an apology, but... I dropped us all in it. That was bad.

(She nodded.)

SOAPY: If I apologise it might go some way to stopping the hatred.

CAYLEY: I wouldn't bother. They'll never stop hating us.  
(Soapy climbed to her feet.)  
SOAPY: Still, I should try, right?  
CAYLEY: No! Not this time.  
(Soapy looked nervously between Cayley and the gate.)  
SOAPY: I...  
CAYLEY: Don't bother, Soapy. I'm not going with you and nor will any of the others.  
(She nodded.)  
CAYLEY: And seeing as the rules clearly state that we're not allowed to leave the compound on our own, and should *never* approach the public, not even in pairs, I think this discussion is over.  
(Soapy sighed then sat down again.)  
SOAPY: Fair enough.  
CAYLEY: Your heart's in the right place, I can't condemn you for that, but they'll use your apology as an excuse to hurt you. We'll never be accepted, you just have to get used to that.  
SOAPY: Okay.  
CAYLEY: Now... let's see if I can nab forty winks.  
(With that, she laid back on the hammock and closed her eyes. Soapy watched her for a moment then smiled. With hating Ambre no longer an issue, she felt much happier about her whole experience. After only twenty four hours, she actually felt at home.)

---

Shortly after midday had passed, Kasira, Cayley and Soapy trudged up the hillside in skimpy summer dresses, looking all about themselves for any immediate signs of wraiths. With no breeze to keep them cool, Kasira and Soapy looked especially uncomfortable. Able to flap her head-wings to keep herself cool, Cayley was the only one who seemed at ease. As she paced further up the hill in between her two comrades, however, her ease started to wane and a grimace appeared on her face. Feeling like they were melting, both Soapy and Kasira had edged closer to her and had tipped their heads towards hers. Stuck in a Soapy and Kasira sandwich, she furrowed her brow and stop walking.

CAYLEY: Guys, please. Give me some room.  
(Looking exhausted Kasira stopped then leant her head even closer to Cayley's and puffed out.)  
KASIRA: Just a bit longer.  
(On her other side, Soapy shared Kasira's sentiments.)  
SOAPY: Another ten minutes.  
(Cayley stopped her head-wings flapping and folded her arms.)  
CAYLEY: Guys! Stop that!  
(Kasira stood up straight and sighed.)  
KASIRA: I'm just so hot.  
SOAPY: Same here.  
CAYLEY: Then fan your faces with your hands.  
KASIRA: That's exhausting.  
CAYLEY: Well you can't keep squashing into *me*!  
SOAPY: We should have brought some water along.  
(Kasira sighed then looked to the top of the hill.)  
KASIRA: Yeah, we should have. My bad. As leader I should have thought of that.  
(She then raised a distrusting eyebrow at Soapy.)  
SOAPY: What? What did I do?  
(Kasira looked a little startled and grinned.)

KASIRA: Sorry. I'm just so used to having Sika around; I was expecting some sort of smarmy comment about being a lousy leader.

SOAPY: Oh. Worried you'd been found out, huh?

KASIRA: No, it's not that...

(Seeing Soapy smirk, Kasira started to chuckle.)

KASIRA: You git. Yeah, *that* kind of smarmy comment! Cheeky sod.

(She then started to walk again, still chuckling to herself.)

KASIRA: Come on, guys, let's get this over with.

(Resuming walking with her, Cayley and Soapy shared a warm smile.)

CAYLEY: You and Sika are so alike.

SOAPY: In a good way, right?

KASIRA: Don't answer that, Cayley, let her believe what she likes.

(Soapy chuckled then glanced over her shoulder.)

SOAPY: Remember when you mentioned looking for signs of wraiths?

KASIRA: Yeah?

SOAPY: Well... like what?

CAYLEY: Seeing one or hearing one, pretty much.

KASIRA: Yeah, that's about the *only* sign, they don't poo or anything. Maybe the odd cat or dog carcass, perhaps.

SOAPY: Right... only we weren't on the lookout for that kind of thing on *yesterday's* patrol!

CAYLEY: Yeah but today there's a haze overhead. So there'll either be no wraiths or a bloody lot of them. Probably enough to spot before we get there.

KASIRA: And if there's too many, I aint gonna blow my wraith whistle.

(Soapy bit her lip.)

SOAPY: What if there's loads but we can't see or hear them? You might blow your whistle expecting nothing and hundreds turn up.

(Kasira mused outwardly.)

KASIRA: That's exactly what *I'm* afraid of.

SOAPY: So... what then? What are we gonna do?

(Kasira shrugged.)

KASIRA: All we can really do is get to the top of the hill and look the island over with our eyes.

CAYLEY: Maybe I should have a quick fly around.

KASIRA: I think that's a good idea actually, Cayley.

(Cayley nodded.)

CAYLEY: Righto, I'll meet you at the top in a bit.

(With that, Cayley's wings sprung magnificently from her back. Having never seen an airborne sprout her wings before, Soapy shrieked and leapt away from her.)

SOAPY: What the hell???

(Her jaw then dropped.)

SOAPY: That looked awesome. They sprung out of nowhere. I've never seen that before.

(Cayley just took to the sky and smiled at her. As she watched her soar into the air in awe, Kasira placed her arm around her shoulder. At once, Soapy's eyes widened and she shuddered all over.)

SOAPY: Not gonna punch me are you?

KASIRA: No! Don't be ridiculous. I just figured we could help each other up this damned hill.

(Soapy looked most relieved and put an arm around Kasira.)

KASIRA: Why would you think I was gonna punch you?

SOAPY: My captain used to do that to the boys in my class.

KASIRA: Really?

SOAPY: Yeah, he'd place a friendly arm round them then punch them in the gut.

KASIRA: Nasty.

SOAPY: He never hit *me* though. Even though I knew he wanted to sometimes.

KASIRA: Sexist was he? Didn't hit girls? Only that's my favourite kind of sexist.

SOAPY: No, it wasn't that. It was against academy rules for a male teacher to hit a female student.

KASIRA: I see.

SOAPY: Plus, he had a crush on my dorm attendant, so he daren't hit me.

KASIRA: Ah, nice.

(Kasira puffed out again then looked to the top of the hill.)

KASIRA: So near, yet so bloody far. I hate this weather!

(A good five minutes or so later when Kasira and Soapy finally reached the top of the hill, they both collapsed to the grass, exhausted.)

KASIRA: Thank god it's *downhill* on the way back.

SOAPY: Let's not *go* back. Ever.

KASIRA: Don't be silly, there's water down there!

SOAPY: Can we go now?

(They shared a grin then looked up to see Cayley floating down from the sky. As soon as she landed she looked at them both laying on the grass and chuckled to herself.)

CAYLEY: Two mighty warriors, powerful soldiers in their physical prime... defeated by a slope.

(Soapy frowned at her.)

SOAPY: The slope is gay!

KASIRA: Yeah, it's the hundred degree heat we can't fight.

(She sat up slightly and fanned her face.)

KASIRA: See anything?

CAYLEY: Apart from you two slackers? Not a thing!

KASIRA: No wraiths anywhere?

CAYLEY: I certainly didn't see one.

(Kasira climbed to her feet and nodded.)

KASIRA: Okay, well let's double check. Get back a bit, Soapy.

(Soapy struggled to feet and saluted.)

SOAPY: Yes, ma'am.

(As Soapy paced away, Kasira glanced around the island.)

KASIRA: I figure that if you didn't see any, there's either very few today or none. Either way, it's safe to blow my whistle I reckon.

CAYLEY: Agreed.

(With that, Kasira placed her wraith whistle to her mouth and blew as hard as she could.)

KASIRA: And now we wait.

(Looking down the hill, anxiously hoping some wraiths would appear, Soapy tapped her leg impatiently. From what she understood, if a few wraiths appeared it meant the haze had gone away and things were back to normal. Looking forward to killing them she licked her lips and started to bounce with anticipation. Several minutes later, however, a mixture of tiredness and disappointment caused her shoulders to sink.)

SOAPY: There's nothing coming is there?

(Wilting atop the slope, Kasira shrugged.)

KASIRA: Doesn't look that way.

CAYLEY: That means we're in for a big one when they *do* spawn.

KASIRA: Yes, it does.

(She sighed.)

KASIRA: Come on, let's head back to base.

(With that, she headed off down the hill. Swiftly joining her, Soapy and Cayley both looked disappointed.)

CAYLEY: I was hoping the haze had moved on.

SOAPY: Yeah, I really wanted to get killing.

KASIRA: You'll get your chance, Soapy. When that haze breaks you'll be killing a lot.

(She puffed out and wiped sweat from her brow.)

KASIRA: Hopefully if the haze breaks tonight, it'll be a lot cooler.

SOAPY: A *lot* cooler.

KASIRA: Some rain would be nice.

CAYLEY: I think you're being a bit ambitious there, Kasira.

KASIRA: Probably.

(She sighed.)

KASIRA: This heat sucks.

CAYLEY: Don't worry, there's not a cloud in the sky, if it stays that way, when we come out tonight it should *definitely* be cooler.

(Kasira nodded then looked about the empty township below and puffed out.)

KASIRA: Well, until then, whatever it takes to cool down.

(With that, she whipped her dress over her head and proceeded to use it to fan her face.

Shocked to see Kasira pacing down the hill in only her thong and shoes, Soapy stared at her in disbelief.)

KASIRA: What's the matter, Soapy? You never seen a pair of tits before?

(Soapy whimpered.)

SOAPY: People will see!

KASIRA: Who? The town is empty. We're the only three fools dumb enough to go out in this heat!

SOAPY: But... isn't it illegal?

KASIRA: Kind of, but we're *always* going to the beach on the other side of the island and skinny-dipping.

SOAPY: Seriously?

KASIRA: Yeah, nobody goes there, so why not?

SOAPY: But what if somebody *did* go there? What if they saw you?

KASIRA: Happy birthday to *them*.

(Cayley smiled.)

CAYLEY: You're such a prude, Soapy.

SOAPY: I'm not a prude, I just...

CAYLEY: Relax, I'm kidding. You're fifteen; you *should* find the concept of public nudity bewildering.

KASIRA: Yeah? Then explain Sika; *she* couldn't wait to get her bits and bobs out when she was fifteen.

CAYLEY: Well, Sika is... Sika.

(Soapy stared at her agog for a moment then looked down the hill.)

SOAPY: I'm not doing that.

KASIRA: Nobody said you had to, but like I said, anything to cool down a bit.

SOAPY: Do you really skinny dip? All of you?

CAYLEY: Yeah, it's very liberating actually. You'll see.

SOAPY: No I won't

CAYLEY: Yeah, you will. You won't feel subconscious at all when everyone else is naked.

(Kasira laughed.)

KASIRA: First time Sika came with us, she bragged about her great body all the way there.

CAYLEY: Yeah, that was funny.

(Kasira then thought of something and bit her lip.)

KASIRA: It wasn't *that* funny really; she actually caused a big argument, if you remember.

(Cayley blushed and looked away bitterly.)

CAYLEY: Oh, yeah.

(Soapy looked bemused.)

SOAPY: What? What happened?

(Kasira grinned.)

KASIRA: She was bragging about her boobs and it was getting annoying. We ended up arguing over whose were biggest.

(Cayley pouted.)

CAYLEY: I came last!

(Kasira laughed.)

KASIRA: Yeah, Sika came second last and got the hump.

SOAPY: Who won?

CAYLEY: Who do you think?

SOAPY: Ambre?

KASIRA: Got it in one.

(Cayley sighed.)

CAYLEY: It's not like mine are small... you lot just have... massive ones.

SOAPY: Mine aren't *that* big!

KASIRA: That's rubbish and you know it.

(Soapy blushed.)

SOAPY: I have to admit, I *was* the envy of my classmates.

KASIRA: Exactly. General Wilson is very insistent on a *few* things. Big tits being one of them.

SOAPY: Sick bastard.

CAYLEY: That he is.

(Kasira smiled.)

KASIRA: Still, I'm not gonna be ashamed of having a nice rack, especially in this heat.

(She exhaled as she fanned her face with her dress some more.)

KASIRA: That feels so good. Try it, Soapy.

(Soapy looked away.)

SOAPY: Is that an order?

KASIRA: No, of course not.

SOAPY: Then, no. I don't want to.

KASIRA: Suit yourself.

(As they entered the courtyard to the barracks a short while later, with Soapy still blushing and staring at her feet, Kasira looked to Cayley.)

KASIRA: Let's make the preparations, like we planned.

CAYLEY: Okay.

(Soapy looked up.)

SOAPY: Are we...

(Spying Sika and Ambre also sunning themselves topless, Soapy hid her face again and rushed indoors.)

SIKA: What's up with her?

(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: Did she get told off again?

(Kasira chuckled.)



KASIRA: Nope, she's just a bit scared of bare breasts from the looks of things.

(Sika looked to the sky and exhaled.)

SIKA: If only we could bottle that and force feed it to Nivea.

KASIRA: Oh, god yes.

(With that, she slung her dress over her shoulder and paced into the barracks.)

---

Soapy had been warned by her captain about practical jokes before she headed for Capsway Island and had made light of his words. Little did she know, however, he wasn't being entirely dishonest. It was by now mid-afternoon and she'd been sent to Nivea's bedroom in the basement with important instructions. Eager to carry out her order and prove she could be trusted, the obvious didn't even dawn on her. And so, without question she headed to Nivea's room, unaware of the amused smirks Kasira, Sika and Cayley were giving her as she went. Upon arriving at the room, she stood tall to affirm herself then hammered on the door. Hearing no reply, she took a deep breath then pushed it open. Slowly stepping inside the dark, windowless room, she strained her eyes and spoke up.

SOAPY: Hello? Nivea?

(A half awake groan came from the corner.)

NIVEA: Huh?

(Soapy stood tall.)

SOAPY: I have orders from Kasira, ma'am.

(As Nivea sat up, Soapy could just about make her out in the darkness.)

NIVEA: Orders?

SOAPY: Yes, ma'am.

(Nivea rubbed her eyes and looked up, shielding them from the light over Soapy's shoulder.)

NIVEA: Don't stand there. Come over here a bit.

(Soapy stepped closer to Nivea's bed and away from the light.)

NIVEA: That's better...

(She yawned.)

NIVEA: So, what are these orders?

(Soapy stood tall and delivered the message with pride.)

SOAPY: Kasira says the haze is likely to break tonight, so until then, get as much rest as possible.

(As she stood there feeling pleased with herself, Nivea furrowed her brow.)

NIVEA: You woke me up to tell me to get some rest?

(Starting to realise the orders were more than a little odd, Soapy scratched her head.)

SOAPY: Come to think of it, that *is* a bit strange.

(Nivea shook her head then exhaled regretfully.)

NIVEA: Oh, Soapy, Soapy, Soapy.

(Soapy whimpered.)

SOAPY: What? I was only following orders.

NIVEA: I realise that, babe, and I sympathise... but you know I'm going to have to punish you for this, don't you?

(Hearing Soapy's scream up in the mess room, Kasira, Cayley and Sika laughed heartily.)

AMBRE: Wow, guys, that was kinda mean.

(Cayley grinned.)

CAYLEY: Yeah, but sometimes these things have to be done.

KASIRA: Absolutely. It's all part of her induction.

SIKA: They *do* say you're not one of the group until you've been had.

(Kasira frowned.)

KASIRA: Yeah, General Wilson says that too.

(Cayley sighed.)

CAYLEY: Soapy's still got that to come, poor little sod.

SIKA: Yeah... I tell you, losing your virginity to that old fart don't half make you wish you'd been a massive slut at the academy. Of all the people to lose it to! Embarrassing.

(Cayley and Kasira looked to one another uncomfortably.)

CAYLEY: Totally is, yes.

KASIRA: Yeah, couldn't agree more! So embarrassed.

(As they both looked away uncomfortably, Ambre looked baffled.)

AMBRE: I thought you said you lost yours at your academy, Kasira. You know, to that boy in your class. And all his friends!

(Kasira furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: Can we change the subject please?

(As Sika and Cayley chuckled to themselves, Ambre shrugged.)

AMBRE: Fine by me. I don't like General Wilson... or his giant willy.

KASIRA: Yeah, well... moving on.

(She placed her hands on her hips and scowled at Sika.)

KASIRA: Stop giggling!

(Sika pulled a straight face.)

SIKA: Sorry!

KASIRA: You will be!

(She ruffled her neck.)

KASIRA: Anyway... we need to post a message on the town bulletin board. Just write something simple like...

CAYLEY: I already drew one up, Kasira.

KASIRA: Oh. Great. What does it say?

CAYLEY: Just stuff like, no flag changing ceremony tonight, possible haze break; please remain indoors, preferably on an upper floor if possible. I can't remember the exact wording.

KASIRA: That's perfect.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: You three should go and post it together. After last night I think going out in threes for a while would be a good idea. And we'll keep Soapy away from the town for a week or so.

CAYLEY: Makes sense.

KASIRA: I'm just worried nobody will see the message. The town was deserted earlier. It's too hot to go out.

SIKA: They'll see it after dark, I expect. They're bound to come out to poke fun at us during the flag changing ceremony.

CAYLEY: Yeah, and when we don't turn up, hopefully one of them will have the sense to check the bulletin board.

KASIRA: That would be the hope. Okay then...

(Just then, an angry and dishevelled looking Soapy, with hair all over the place, staggered into the mess room wearing only her knickers and flip-flops. Covering her bare chest with her hands, she snarled at Kasira.)

SOAPY: You cow!!!

(As Sika and Cayley started laughing, Ambre hid her face and Kasira shrugged innocently.)

KASIRA: What?

SOAPY: Making me wake her up to tell her to get some rest!!! What the hell was that???

(She sneered.)

SOAPY: You knew she'd do stuff to me! That's why you did it!

(No longer able to hold it in, Kasira laughed out her denial.)

KASIRA: I've got no idea what you're talking about.

(Seeing Sika, Cayley and Kasira laughing hysterically at her while Ambre cringed, fearful of her raised voice, Soapy shook her head.)

SOAPY: That was well out of order!

(She pouted.)

SOAPY: She stole my dress, pinned me down and... groped me.

(She then growled and dropped her arms to the side angrily.)

SOAPY: I fail to see how that's funny!!!

(Staring hard at the floor, she gave a stifled laugh.)

SOAPY: Actually...

(A huge grin emerged onto her face.)

SOAPY: I can't believe I fell for that!

KASIRA: Nor could I, to be honest. You just went off without even questioning it.

(Soapy laughed.)

SOAPY: I was trying to prove I'm a good soldier. Guess I just proved I'm a gullible one.

(Kasira smiled.)

KASIRA: Actually, you *did* prove there's a good soldier in there somewhere, Soapy. I was impressed. Amused, but impressed. With a little more fine tuning, you're gonna fit in well here, I reckon.

(Soapy smiled.)

SOAPY: Thanks.

(She then gestured down herself.)

SOAPY: Well... looks like I'm not so afraid of being topless in public after all, doesn't it?

(With that, she about turned and headed out of the room.)

SOAPY: I'll just put some clothes on.

(As Soapy headed away, Sika smiled.)

SIKA: She took that well.

CAYLEY: Yeah, once she calmed down.

SIKA: She's definitely one of us. I've got a good feeling about her.

CAYLEY: Yeah me too.

(In little doubt that Soapy didn't like her, Ambre gave them both a nervous glance and hung her head.)

AMBRE: She's okay... I guess. *I like her*, anyway.

SIKA: Yeah, but you've liked everyone you've ever met! Except General Wilson.

(She grimaced.)

SIKA: And his giant willy, apparently.

KASIRA: Anyway, enough chat. You guys take that message down to the bulletin board and I'll start dinner!

(Cayley looked horrified.)

CAYLEY: Maybe that's not such a good idea!

KASIRA: What?

CAYLEY: You're a dreadful cook, Kasira! No offence!

KASIRA: Some taken!

SIKA: She's right though!

AMBRE: Yeah, Kasira, your cooking's pretty terrible.

(Kasira furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: Et tu, Ambre?

AMBRE: Just saying.

KASIRA: Fine, get the message you made, Cayley. I'll go and post it with these two and *you* can cook.

(At once, they all drew animated sighs of relief.)

KASIRA: Hey, you cheeky buggers!

(She grinned.)

KASIRA: Out of order, guys. Out of order.

---

Just after darkness had descended that night, Soapy found herself perched on the roof of the base, overlooking the courtyard. Starting to get bored with the lack of wraith activity and with nothing else to do, she opted for watching what she could see of the ocean between the trees. Finding the sight really quite relaxing, she exhaled and sat forward to lean her chin on her palm. As she sat there feeling at ease with herself, she remembered the night before and cringed. Finding her actions in calling the townsfolk "wankers" somewhat ridiculous, she shook her head then puffed out. She was an intelligent girl and she was finding it hard to believe she could have done something so stupid. On her first day, she might have got her entire unit lynched and the foolishness of it all was eating away at her. Only wishing there was a way she could take it back and do something nice for her new friends, she hung her head and cringed.

SOAPY: What an idiot.

(Just then, she heard a merry humming sound and lifted her head up.)

SOAPY: Huh?

(Beneath her, Ambre strolled into the courtyard carrying some sheets of paper and a small container. Humming joyously under the mistaken illusion that she was the only one out there, she sat herself against the wall then stared up at the moon.)

AMBRE: Hi, Mister Moon!

(Finding her actions as cute as they were amusing, Soapy replied.)

SOAPY: Hi, Ambre.

(At once, Ambre's jaw dropped.)

AMBRE: What the?

(She then leapt to her feet and raced to the door.)

AMBRE: The moon spoke to me!!!

(Highly amused, Soapy called down to her from the roof.)

SOAPY: That was me, Ambre!!!

(Ambre froze and looked up at her.)

AMBRE: Soapy?

SOAPY: Yeah, it was me.

AMBRE: What are you doing up there?

(Soapy shrugged.)

SOAPY: Thinking.

(Ambre nodded then hung her head.)

AMBRE: Do you want me to get lost again?

(Soapy sighed.)

SOAPY: No. Look, sorry I said that earlier... I thought you...

(Realising how silly the truth might make her look or how offended Ambre might be by it,

Soapy shrugged and decided a white lie was in order.)

SOAPY: There's no excuse for it. I was just in a bad mood. I don't like sweeping up. Sorry.

(Ambre smiled warmly.)

AMBRE: That's okay. I know I can be annoying. I wish I could make *myself* get lost sometimes.

(With that, she paced back to her paper and container and sat down. Soapy watched her and raised a curious eyebrow.)

SOAPY: What are you doing?

AMBRE: Just helping Nivea with her art.

(She gestured to the paper.)

AMBRE: She does amazing drawings. And I help her with them.

(Soapy raised an interested eyebrow then clambered down from the roof.)

SOAPY: Can I see?

AMBRE: Sure.

(Soapy stepped up to her and sat down cross-legged before her. As she got comfortable, Ambre passed her the drawings.)

AMBRE: She draws them and I colour them in.

(Soapy smiled at her warmly, fighting the urge to gush. Her parents used to draw crude pictures for her to colour in too. They also told her that by colouring them in, she was helping them, just as Nivea had told Ambre.)

SOAPY: You're so cute I could strangle you, Ambre.

(Ambre whimpered.)

AMBRE: What?

SOAPY: Not literally. Just saying, you're cute.

(Ambre looked uncertain.)

AMBRE: Okay... just don't strangle me, I don't like it! At least I'm pretty sure I won't.

(Soapy chuckled.)

SOAPY: Agreed.

(She then passed the drawings back to Ambre and moved herself to the wall, to sit at Ambre's side.)

SOAPY: You know something, Ambre?

AMBRE: No.

SOAPY: I like it here. It's not what I thought it'd be like, but still... it's alright.

(Ambre yanked the lid from the container and pulled out a crayon.)

AMBRE: Do you like *me*?

(Soapy gave a single laugh.)

SOAPY: Yes, I do.

(Ambre smiled at her.)

AMBRE: I like you too. But I like everyone apparently.

(Soapy grinned then gave Ambre a sideways glance.)

SOAPY: Why would you come out in the dark to colour them in? Surely, it'd make more sense to do that indoors.

AMBRE: No, it's more fun this way. I have no idea what colour is what and so I get a nice surprise when I go back inside.

(She pouted.)

AMBRE: Or a bad surprise. I coloured a tiger green once.

(Soapy chuckled.)

SOAPY: A green tiger, huh?

AMBRE: Yeah, it looked really silly.

(Soapy smiled and glanced around the courtyard.)

SOAPY: I really wanna kill something. I really do.

(Ambre looked nervous.)

AMBRE: Like what?

SOAPY: Wraiths, obviously.

AMBRE: There aren't any yet.

SOAPY: Yeah, I know. It sucks.

(She shrugged.)

SOAPY: If this haze would hurry up and break I can show everyone how awesome I am.

AMBRE: You sound just like Sika.

SOAPY: I just want to get busy doing the job, you know? I wanna make up for that stupid mistake at the flag ceremony yesterday.

(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: I couldn't help that, I panicked.

SOAPY: Not *your* mistake; mine!

(She looked thoughtful.)

SOAPY: There must be something I can do.

(As she sat there deep in thought, Kasira appeared in the doorway.)

KASIRA: There you are!

(She looked most relieved.)

KASIRA: Oh, hi Soapy, I thought you were in your room. Never mind then. I was just worried you'd come out here on your own, Ambre.

(She looked to Soapy.)

KASIRA: She doesn't have an attack spell, Soapy, so don't leave her out here on her own. The wraiths could appear any time.

SOAPY: Okay!

(With that, Kasira paced inside again.)

AMBRE: She worries.

SOAPY: I noticed.

(She sighed.)

SOAPY: Ambre?

AMBRE: Yeah?

SOAPY: I'm bored.

AMBRE: You can help me colour if you want!

(Soapy nodded unenthusiastically.)

SOAPY: Why not?

(Just then, the sound of a boisterous crowd started to rise up from outside the gate.)

AMBRE: What the hell's that?

SOAPY: People!

(Soapy climbed to her feet.)

SOAPY: What do they want?

AMBRE: I don't know! People don't normally come here.

(Ambre then climbed to her feet also.)

AMBRE: We should get Kasira!

(Just then, several stones flew over the gate and angry voices rose into the air.)

TOWNSMAN 1: Bitches out! Bitches out! Bitches out!!!

(As Ambre trembled, Soapy rushed up to the gate and peered through a gap in it.)

SOAPY: It's a bunch of angry men!

AMBRE: I'll get Kasira!

SOAPY: Good idea!

(Just then, the gate burst open, knocking Soapy onto her back.)

SOAPY: Hey!!!

(At once, Ambre screamed and turned to run inside. In something of a panic, however, she slipped on her sheets of paper and fell flat on her face.)

AMBRE: Ouch!!!

(Looking excited, and somewhat deranged, several men burst into the compound.)

TOWNSMAN 1: Take this one!!!

(Soapy screamed in a panic as the man grabbed her legs and started to drag her towards the gate.)

SOAPY: Get the fuck off me!!!

(Instinctively, she stuck out her hand to fire her magic, only for a second man to put a knife to her throat.)

TOWNSMAN 2: Shut the fuck up, bitch!

(As Soapy closed her mouth and stared down at the knife in horror, Ambre struggled to her feet, slipping once again on the paper before making a dash for the door. Before she could pass through it, however, one of the townsfolk dived at her, bringing her crashing to earth.)

AMBRE: Help!!!

(Snarling, the man quickly leapt to his feet then whacked Ambre's leg with an iron bar.

Hearing the bone snap in two, Soapy bellowed out.)

SOAPY: Ambre!!!

TOWNSMAN 1: Come on, guys, let's go!!! We've got one!!!

(As Ambre lay there yelping in pain, the man who'd smashed her leg stood there and sneered down at her.)

TOWNSMAN 3: Tell your leader this shit is gonna keep happening to you bitches until we get some real soldiers to defend the island.

(With that, he threw down the iron bar and helped his angry associates drag the terrified Soapy out of the gates.)

TOWNSMAN 1: If she starts screaming or tries to use her magic, just slit her fucking throat!

(As they slammed the gates behind them, the terrified Ambre struggled to crawl forth, crying her eyes out from the trauma and immense pain.)

AMBRE: Kasira!!! Kasira!!!

(Gritting her teeth and struggling not to pass out, she battled to crawl forth desperately.)

AMBRE: Kasira!!!

(A solid minute passed before she managed to get half way inside the entrance hallway and scream loud enough to be heard. Rushing to her aid in a blind panic, Kasira raced into the hallway with a distressed look on her face. Wearing a tortured expression she then jumped down to her knees before her.)

KASIRA: Ambre!!!

(Ambre looked up to her and whimpered in agony.)

AMBRE: Soapy!

KASIRA: Soapy did this?

AMBRE: They took her!!! And my leg!!!

(Kasira looked distraught and confused.)

KASIRA: Who took your leg???

(She then noticed Ambre's lower leg, sticking out at an obscene angle and cried out.)

KASIRA: Cayley!!!

(Such was the desperation of Kasira's shriek, Cayley raced out into the hallway in terror, dreading to think what had happened.)

CAYLEY: Kasira???

KASIRA: Fix her! Quick!!!

(Upon sighting Ambre's broken leg, Cayley rushed towards her and proceeded to grab it with both hands. Placing them tightly around the break, she then proceeded to heal her.)

CAYLEY: It's okay, darling. There you go.

(Ambre pouted and bent her leg to check it was okay then looked to Kasira desperately.)

AMBRE: The townspeople smashed their way in and broke me! And they stole Soapy.

(Kasira snarled.)

KASIRA: I knew I should have made you come in!!!

AMBRE: It wasn't Soapy's fault, she was just helping me colour and they smashed open the gate. They said they'd cut her throat if she used magic.

(Kasira stroked Ambre's hair.)

KASIRA: It's okay, I didn't say it was her fault. I shouldn't have let you stay out there.

CAYLEY: You couldn't have known this was gonna happen.

(Just then, Nivea popped her head round the door, casually eating a chicken leg.)

NIVEA: What's all the racket about?

(Kasira looked to her urgently.)

KASIRA: The townspeople smashed their way into the compound. They've got Soapy.

(Nivea was gobsmacked.)

NIVEA: No way!

KASIRA: Fetch Sika and tool up, Nivea. We're gonna get her back right now.

(As Nivea darted away, Cayley bit her lip nervously.)

CAYLEY: What about the haze break? It could happen any minute and we don't wanna be spread out all over town if it does.

KASIRA: Fuck the haze break! We'll deal with it if and when it happens, we're gonna get our soldier back this minute!!!

(Cayley nodded.)

CAYLEY: Okay.

KASIRA: I don't mean to be rude, Cayley...

CAYLEY: No you're right. Our comrade comes first!

(Kasira looked up and snarled.)

KASIRA: Ambre, come with me. Make sure the last one out locks the gate, Cayley. I'm going to get her.

---

Within minutes, Sika and Nivea were dashing round the moonlit town, desperately searching for Soapy. In the sky above them, Cayley was circling repeatedly, looking for any sign of her out there in the darkness. Frantically checking the buildings on the outer edge of the town, Kasira was leading Ambre forth.

KASIRA: I mean it, Ambre. If we find them and things get ugly, I'm gonna need you to run and get the others, okay?

AMBRE: But, maybe I can help.

KASIRA: You will be helping. Even in human form, you can run faster than anyone.

AMBRE: I don't want you to get hurt though.

KASIRA: And if you get help, I won't. So, let's make that an order, okay?

(Ambre sighed.)

AMBRE: Fine!

KASIRA: Sorry, darling, but Fluffy is just a big rock, there to be hit by wraiths, he won't be able to help us in a fight against people. He doesn't hit back.

AMBRE: I understand.

KASIRA: That's my girl.

(With that, she veered around a corner and stepped up to the windowed side of a barn. Taking a peek through the window, she sighed and shook her head.)

KASIRA: Nothing! It's pitch black in there.

AMBRE: There's two more barns *behind* this one!

KASIRA: Let's go then.



(With that, they headed back and paced across the front of the barn then turned to walk down the other side of it. As they did so, a chorus of loud, boisterous voices rose up into the air from the barn behind. Ambre immediately looked to Kasira.)

AMBRE: That's what they sounded like.

KASIRA: All rowdy bunches of guys sound the same, Ambre, it might not be them. Be calm, okay?

AMBRE: I'm calm.

KASIRA: Good girl, now be careful.

(With that, she pressed herself against the side of the barn and encouraged Ambre to do the same. Instantly doing as was expected of her, Ambre stepped behind Kasira and pushed herself against the barn.)

AMBRE: What are we going to do?

KASIRA: We're gonna take a look. Be nice and quiet now.

(Ambre nodded then grabbed her lips between her thumb and forefinger and pushed then tightly closed. Giving Ambre a warm smile to keep her calm, Kasira then edged forwards, barely visible in the moon's shadow.)

KASIRA: Okay, let's see.

(Upon reaching the corner of the barn, Kasira peered cautiously around the side of it, towards the barn behind. Its large doors were wide open and thanks to several lanterns dotted around inside the barn, she could see a gagged Soapy bent over a table with large muscular townie pinning her down by her neck. All around her, a large group of men were drinking beer and mocking loudly.)

TOWNIE 01: Who are the wankers now, bitch?

TOWNIE 02: Yeah, who needs to wank when we've got your muff to play with?

(They all laughed except the muscular one who was pinning her down. He furrowed his brow and spoke out in a somewhat feminine voice.)

GANISTER: Never mind the talk, just have her knickers off and stick one in her, will you? (He rolled his eyes.)

TOWNIE 03: Yeah, alright, Ganister, keep your hair on. Ungag her, but slap her if she screams. And if she tries to use magic, just snap her fucking neck. I'm going in.

(Ganister smirked then pulled Soapy's gag loose. Soapy immediately whimpered desperately.)

SOAPY: Don't hurt me!!!

(Watching furiously, as Townie 03 started to fiddle with his trousers, Kasira clenched her fist.)

KASIRA: Get ready to run away, Ambre.

(Ambre whimpered.)

AMBRE: Okay!

KASIRA: Don't follow me!

(With that, Kasira took off like a rocket towards the barn. Looking terrified, Ambre stepped from the corner and watched as Kasira charged into the barn and leapt into a high-kick towards Ganister. Taken by surprise, Ganister screeched like a banshee as Kasira kicked him backwards, causing him to let go of Soapy.)

GANISTER: Bitch!!!

(Having crashed to the ground, Kasira instantly leapt to her feet and bellowed at the bewildered Soapy.)

KASIRA: Run! That's an order!

(Needing no second invitation, Soapy immediately did just that. Ducking to avoid a townie's determined attempt to grab her, she charged out of the barn door then swiftly glanced back. Seeing Kasira's attempt to run for the door fail miserably in the wake of several heavy tackles, she yelled out.)

SOAPY: Kasira!!!

(From beneath the scrum of angry men, Kasira screamed out.)

KASIRA: Get help!!! Now!!!

(Before Soapy could say another word, the barn doors pulled closed violently.)

SOAPY: No!!!

(Whimpering, Ambre dragged her away by the arm.)

AMBRE: We have to get help!!!

(Inside the well lit barn, the group of furious townsmen pulled Kasira to her feet, one of them opting to punch her full in the face, as soon as she was up. Knocked backwards, the dazed Kasira hit a table and was immediately spun around and pinned down, face first over it by Ganister.)

GANISTER: Now stop pissing about and rape the bitch already!

(Townie 03 grinned from ear to ear.)

TOWNIE 03: Even better, this one's the boss.

(He smirked to the townie beside him.)

TOWNIE 03: Do the honours for me, mate.

TOWNIE 02: Happy to.

(With that, he reached up Kasira's dress and yanked her underwear down to her ankles.)

TOWNIE 02: There you go.

TOWNIE 03: Nice.

(As he pushed his trousers down and stepped towards her, Kasira snarled.)

KASIRA: Think this makes you big men, do you?

TOWNIE 03: No, it makes us *happy* men!

GANISTER: Oh stop complaining, you stupid woman. What I wouldn't give to get what you're about to get.

(He winked at her to amuse himself.)

GANISTER: I'm very gay.

KASIRA: Go on then, fucking do it! I don't care! I saved my soldier, that's all I care about. So, if you think you can break me, you're wrong.

TOWNIE 03: We don't want to break you...

(With that, he pushed his penis deep inside her vagina, causing her to scream out.)

TOWNIE 03: We just want to make you realise something.

(He snarled.)

TOWNIE 03: You're bitches, not soldiers. We *fuck* bitches.

(He then proceeded to thrust hard, forcing an anguished sneer on Kasira's face.)

Several minutes later, out in the centre of the darkened town an anguished Soapy and a frantic Ambre, raced down the central thoroughfare, desperately searching for their unit mates. Calling out their names, Ambre had tears streaming down her face.)

AMBRE: Cayley!!! Nivea!!! Sika!!!

(Soapy looked to her and pouted.)

SOAPY: She's in shit 'cause she saved me! I should go back and attack them with my magic. Why am I running?

AMBRE: Because Kasira told you to.

(She pouted.)

AMBRE: Do what she told you! Kasira knows best. She *always* knows best.

SOAPY: But Ambre, they're doing stuff to her!!!

(Just then, Cayley zoomed towards them from the night sky up ahead. First to spot her, Ambre jumped up and down frantically.)

AMBRE: Save her!!! Save her!!!

(Cayley landed in a run and stopped before them.)

CAYLEY: What's wrong???

AMBRE: They've got Kasira!

SOAPY: She saved me, but they got *her* instead.

CAYLEY: Shit!!!

SOAPY: She ordered me to run, but I should have stayed and saved her.

(Cayley furrowed her brow.)

CAYLEY: No. They might have caught you again, then you'd both have been in the shit. Wait there, I'll get Nivea and Sika.

(As she took off into the sky Ambre looked to Soapy in terror.)

AMBRE: She swore! She never swears. This is bad.

(Soapy turned swiftly to the panicking Ambre and placed her hands on her upper arms.)

SOAPY: Ambre, Calm down!!!

(She looked her sternly in the eye.)

SOAPY: We'll get her back, okay?

(Ambre pouted and forced a nod.)

SOAPY: Good girl.

(She then pulled her close for a hug.)

SOAPY: Your mum's gonna be fine, babe.

(Ambre pulled back from the hug and raised a bewildered eyebrow.)

AMBRE: Kasira's not my mum. She'd have been two when I was born.

(Soapy shrugged uncomfortably.)

SOAPY: She's sort of your mum... she adopted you.

AMBRE: No, she became my legal guardian because I'm too stupid to be left on my own. She's my best friend, not my mum.

(Soapy scratched behind her ear.)

SOAPY: Okay... I wasn't sure how you saw her, that's all. Sorry.

AMBRE: Don't be sorry.

(Ambre smiled at her warmly then burst into tears.)

AMBRE: I'm scared, Soapy.

(Soapy swiftly pulled her into her arms.)

SOAPY: Hey! It's okay. Don't cry.

AMBRE: I can't help it!

SOAPY: What would Kasira, say? She'd tell you to be brave and to be a soldier, right?

(Ambre whimpered.)

AMBRE: No. She'd hug me.

(She then pouted and stepped back from the hug.)

AMBRE: I don't want anything to happen to Kasira, Soapy. I was rubbish until she came along.

(Soapy clenched her fist angrily.)

SOAPY: I wanna go back and save her.

(She growled.)

SOAPY: I know I said I wouldn't disobey orders again, but I'm so tempted right now!

(Just then, Nivea appeared, racing from the darkness between two houses and Cayley and Sika started to glide down to them from the sky.)

SOAPY: Thank fuck.

(As soon as Cayley landed before them, she looked to Soapy urgently.)

CAYLEY: You lead us to her and when we get there, you, me and Sika are gonna magic their bums back to hell.

(She looked somewhat peeved and rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: Without killing them, of course. If we did that, the entire population would round us up and hang us all from the tallest tree.

(Hovering above them, Sika furrowed her brow.)

SIKA: What are we waiting for?

(Nivea then raced past.)

NIVEA: Good question! Show us the way, Soapy.

(Without even a moment's hesitation, Soapy immediately about turned and raced to Nivea's side.)

SOAPY: She's in a barn down here.

(Just then, Ambre charged past with her head down and raced around a corner, running at the kind of speed any other race could only dream of achieving.)

SOAPY: She won't go in there before we get there will she?

NIVEA: I fucking hope not. If she was to head butt one of them with her horns, she'd kill them. That'd be the last thing we need.

(Thankfully, once they reached the barn next to the one where Kasira was captured, they found Ambre impatiently pacing up and down in the moonlight.)

AMBRE: You took your time.

(Nivea nodded.)

NIVEA: I agree, we've wasted too much time already!

(With that, she drew her sword and snarled.)

NIVEA: Let's go.

(Cayley was swiftly to steal her thunder, however.)

CAYLEY: Wait! We're gonna do it sensibly. Now listen, here's the plan...

(Inside the barn at this time, Townie 03 was sitting on a hay bail with a smug look on his face, next to a grimacing fellow townsman. Watching as a third townie plunged his manhood deep into Kasira, he puffed out joyfully.)

TOWNIE 03: That's was great. I aint had a good shag in ages.

TOWNIE 04: That was a good shag was it?

(Townie 03 looked miffed.)

TOWNIE 03: Well, *I* enjoyed it!

TOWNIE 04: I'm glad *you* did. Thirty seconds in and splat, I shot my load up her biff... and you were no better.

TOWNIE 03: *What* a thirty seconds though.

(Townie 04 furrowed his brow and looked to the townsman who was currently defiling Kasira.)

TOWNIE 04: Look at that smug git. Nearly three minutes he's been banging her. Bloody show-off.

(The townie in question had a tight grip on Kasira's hips and was thrusting powerfully, belittling her as he did so.)

TOWNIE 01: That's right, you cry, bitch! The truth hurts, doesn't it?

(Kasira gritted her teeth.)

KASIRA: I aint crying. You'll *never* make me cry, you're nothing. And what the fuck does the truth have to do with anything?

TOWNIE 01: I'm talking about the fact you're a bitch, only fit for fucking. Do you think that general of yours doesn't come to the town inn and tell us about it?

KASIRA: You know nothing.

TOWNIE 01: I know you're a slut, not a soldier. Real soldiers don't get raped.

(Holding Kasira's head firm to the table, Ganister puffed out.)

GANISTER: You have to admit, she's a tough one. I thought she'd be bawling her eyes out by now.

KASIRA: Never gonna happen.

TOWNIE 01: We'll see. Once we're all done fucking her, we'll see how well she can handle a beating. She'll break sooner or later.

(Determined to show them no sign of weakness despite how she was feeling, Kasira snarled.)

KASIRA: Just shut up and do me if you have to, you've got nothing to say and I'm sick of listening to you.

(Townie 01 was furious and lifted his hand up to slap her.)

TOWNIE 01: You fucking bitch.

(Before he could bring his hand down, however, the barn door blew to pieces.)

TOWNIE 01: What the???

(As pieces of wood rained down around the townies, Soapy, Sika and Cayley all burst into the barn. As Soapy fixed her stance, ready to back them up, Sika and Cayley immediately set about firing their tornado-like magic at the townies. Using lighter amounts of magic energy than they would on wraiths, Sika kept the furious townies at bay while Cayley used a slightly stronger dose to blow both Ganister and Townie 01 across the barn and away from Kasira. Looking mightily relieved, Kasira pulled her knickers up then limped over to Cayley.)

KASIRA: I...

CAYLEY: Go outside, Kasira. Ambre's freaking out and I'm afraid she'll come in.

(Kasira nodded to acknowledge her request then staggered out of the barn. As soon as Kasira was out of the way, Cayley joined Sika in keeping the livid townies at bay. Snarling and desperate to throw punches at the girls, they fought against the magical wind furiously.)

TOWNIE 02: Get out!!! This barn is private property! This is illegal!

(Firing off another wind to keep them back, Cayley furrowed her brow.)

CAYLEY: So is rape, kidnapping and trespassing on military property!

TOWNIE 02: Rape isn't illegal!!!

TOWNIE 03: Um, actually, Steve...

(He looked shocked.)

TOWNIE 02: It is? That's a ridiculous law.

SIKA: You might want to lay low for a while, because if we can identify you...

CAYLEY: You'll all be going to jail.

SIKA: Yeah.

(Townie 01 stepped back, encouraging his fellow townsmen to relent their angry stances and stand down.)

TOWNIE 01: Fine. Whatever. But you mark my words. We *will* run you bitches out of town somehow.

(As his fellow townsmen all cheered then desisted in their attempts to advance, Cayley looked to Sika.)

CAYLEY: Come on.

(With that, they backed out of the barn leaving a scene of discord behind. Feeling hard done by, the townies all grouped together angrily.)

TOWNIE 02: Now what?

TOWNIE 01: Like I said, we'll find a way.

TOWNIE 03: Even if it means killing one of them?

TOWNIE 01: It may come to that!

TOWNIE 04: Well, before it does can you at least pull your bloody trousers up.

(Townie 01 looked embarrassed and bent to yank up his trousers.)

TOWNIE 04: Thank you.

(Outside in the moonlit town at this time, Cayley and Nivea were supporting the paining Kasira back towards the base. Looking deeply disturbed, Ambre followed on. For their part, Sika and Soapy were keeping their eyes peeled for townsmen, just in case of any reprisals.)

AMBRE: I don't like this town!

SIKA: You're not the only one, darling.

NIVEA: This whole island is full of wankers.

(She looked to Soapy.)

NIVEA: You shouldn't have called them that, but it was an apt description.

(Soapy looked deeply troubled.)

SOAPY: This is my fault, isn't it? If I hadn't said that...

(Kasira snarled.)

KASIRA: They'd have done this anyway, probably.

(She then winced in agony.)

KASIRA: Cayley, I don't think it can wait.

(Cayley looked somewhat troubled.)

CAYLEY: Are you sure, babe?

(Kasira winced.)

KASIRA: Maybe a little bit further.

(Struggling onwards, Kasira looked to Soapy again.)

KASIRA: Don't you dare blame yourself for this, Soapy. That's an order.

(She snarled.)

KASIRA: For all we know they might have had this planned for days.

(Soapy bit her lip then nodded unconvincingly.)

SOAPY: Okay.

(As soon as they reached the edge of town and started to head along the darkened, tree-lined path which lead to the base, Kasira winced in agony again.)

KASIRA: Now, Cayley. Please.

CAYLEY: Okay.

(Soapy looked on nervously as Cayley to lead Kasira two feet off of the path, towards a thick tree.)

NIVEA: Don't watch them, Soapy!

(Confused by the moment, thus not hearing the warning from Nivea, Soapy looked to her then back at Kasira and Cayley.)

NIVEA: Okay... fine, but don't come crying to me when you go blind.

(Unaware that Soapy was looking, Kasira leant her back against the tree.)

KASIRA: Quickly, please, it really hurts.

(Cayley gave her a nervous smile and tried to lighten the situation with humour.)

CAYLEY: It had better bloody do.

(Cringing with agony, Kasira then parted her legs and Cayley slipped her hand up her dress.)

CAYLEY: Next time, you can buy me dinner first.

(Soapy's jaw dropped and she turned away.)

SOAPY: She's fingering her muff!

(Looking very much in a different direction, Nivea rolled her eyes.)

NIVEA: She's healing it, stupid!

(Seconds later, Kasira let out a cry of relief.)

KASIRA: Oh my god, that's wonderful.

(Cayley managed an uncomfortable smile.)

CAYLEY: Yeah? You like that do you? Slut!

(As she slipped her hand out of Kasira's underwear, Kasira laughed.)

KASIRA: That kind of language just sounds wrong on you.

(Cayley scratched behind her ear.)

CAYLEY: Yeah, I know. I was just deflecting my embarrassment with a joke.

(Kasira gave a relieved smile then stood up straight.)

KASIRA: Thanks, Cayley.

CAYLEY: My pleasure.

(She shook her head swiftly.)

CAYLEY: I mean you're welcome.

(She grinned.)

CAYLEY: The pleasure was all yours, sweet cheeks.

(Kasira sighed.)

KASIRA: We're gonna be making embarrassed jokes all night, aren't we?

CAYLEY: Yes! And I expect it'll be a good few weeks before we can look each other in the eye again.

(Kasira shook her head then put a hand on Cayley's shoulder.)

KASIRA: No it won't.

(She then looked directly into her eyes.)

KASIRA: Thank you. That was uncomfortable and... disgusting, but you did it for me.

Thanks, babe.

(Cayley smiled back at her.)

CAYLEY: You're welcome.

(With that, they resumed their trek back to the base.)

CAYLEY: I'm just glad everything worked out okay.

(Nivea nodded.)

NIVEA: Yeah, not only did we get her back, but you got to slip her a finger or two and you didn't even have to buy her a drink first.

(Kasira and Cayley glared at her.)

NIVEA: What? Too soon?

---

Ten minutes later, back at the locked up base, Ambre, Cayley, Kasira, Nivea, Sika and Soapy were all seated around the mess room table. In light of the evening's events, Kasira had decided a group meeting was in order.

KASIRA: My worry is, they've got a taste for it now. They just threw things before or chased us now and again. This time, they actually had the audacity to break into our compound. And I'm not sure if it was a one-off moment of madness or an escalation.

(Soapy sighed.)

SOAPY: I shouldn't have called them wankers!

KASIRA: Irrelevant!

(Soapy pouted.)

SOAPY: Is it though? We can't be sure of that.

(A tear formed in her eye.)

SOAPY: I might have got you raped!

(Kasira leant forward and placed her hand on Soapy's.)

KASIRA: Darling, if I thought you'd got me raped, Cayley would be scraping pieces of you off of the ceiling right now. I know it may look like it was your fault to you, but trust me; those townspeople didn't become bastards overnight. I reckon they had this planned for quite a while. I really can't see them going to such an extreme, just because you called them wankers. Lynching us and knocking us about, sure, but to break into a military compound over it? No. I'm sure they had this planned.

(Still not convinced, Soapy nodded.)

SOAPY: Maybe.

(She then sat up and looked into Kasira's eyes.)

SOAPY: Thank you for saving me, Kasira. That would have been me in there if you hadn't... thank you so much.

(Kasira smiled.)

KASIRA: If you want to thank me, become the best soldier you can be, Soapy. I get my jollies from seeing you guys succeed.

(Soapy nodded.)

SOAPY: I will!

(Just then, Ambre whimpered. She was staring across the table at Kasira with tears pouring down her face.)

AMBRE: I was... and you were there... and I couldn't help...

(Her pout then doubled in size.)

AMBRE: I don't like it when bad things happen. It was hard when Tahiti... if it happened to you...

(Cayley pulled Ambre's head onto her shoulder.)

CAYLEY: It's okay, Ambre. She's fine now.

(She looked to Kasira.)

CAYLEY: Poor thing was going nuts.

AMBRE: I love you, Kasira.

(Kasira leant over the table and stroked her face.)

KASIRA: I love you too, Ambre. And it's okay, it'll take more than a group of twisted perverts like them to get rid of me. Okay?

(Ambre forced an uncertain smile.)

AMBRE: Okay.

(Sika shook her head.)

SIKA: This is too much. We're gonna report them, right?

NIVEA: Definitely. There's no way we can let this kind of thing slide.

(Kasira nodded.)

KASIRA: I'll report it... those guys need to be arrested. I'm just worried we'll be playing into the townspeople's hands though.

SIKA: What do you mean?

KASIRA: If we send reports that the local people are breaking into our compound and attacking us, we might look incompetent. That's exactly what the townspeople want. They might send a male unit here instead and split us all up into different units elsewhere.

AMBRE: No way!!!

KASIRA: It's possible.

(She shrugged.)

KASIRA: But then again, every female unit has similar problems being accepted and they can't replace *every* single one with a male unit!

(Nivea rolled her eyes.)

NIVEA: So, the likelihood is, they'll ignore the report and just tell us to buck our ideas up.

AMBRE: Or split us up! Don't send the report!

(Kasira sighed.)

KASIRA: I'm gonna have to sleep on this decision I think. We could be damned whether I report it or not. Right now, I'm leaning towards *not* sending it but if I don't and something happens to one of you guys...

(She shuddered.)

KASIRA: I don't want to think about it.

CAYLEY: This sucks. Our choices are to report it and run the risk of being split up and replaced, or say nothing and run the risk of further attacks.

SIKA: So unfair.



(Ambre sighed heavily.)

AMBRE: We're in trouble, aren't we?

(Little did Ambre know just how right she was. Upon finishing her sentence, a wolf-like wraith spawned right under the table, and two more spawned at the side of the room. First to spot the two at the side of the room, Soapy instinctively blew them to smithereens, causing mass panic in the mess room.)

KASIRA: What the hell???

(Nivea cried out in agony.)

NIVEA: Wraith!!!

(As blood from her leg sprayed out onto the carpet, she punched downwards in distress.)

NIVEA: Get off me!!!

(Within seconds, two extremely sharp blades slashed into the wraith and it evaporated.)

KASIRA: Cayley!!!

CAYLEY: I'm on it.

(Cayley leapt to Nivea's side and proceeded to lay her hands on Nivea's leg wound.)

CAYLEY: They're you go, babes.

NIVEA: Thanks, Cayley.

(She grinned.)

NIVEA: It bit my boobs too; maybe you should lay your hands...

CAYLEY: No, Nivea. Just, no!

NIVEA: Fine. You can't blame a girl for trying.

(As Cayley and Nivea climbed to their feet, Kasira immediately went into commander mode.)

KASIRA: The haze has broken. Ambre stand on the table, you don't have a physical attack so you'll be safe up there. Sika, Cayley; clear the courtyard and the entrance then head to the sleeping quarters. Soapy, Nivea, come with me.

(Despite not liking being left out, Ambre immediately did as she told and leapt up on the table while Nivea unsheathed her sword. Sika and Cayley then rushed towards the entrance, while Kasira, Soapy and Nivea raced out into the kitchen.)

NIVEA: There's one here too!!!

(Immediately, she raised her sword and Kasira readied her blades, only for Soapy to blow the wraith up with her magic.)

NIVEA: Damn, you're quick.

SOAPY: Nah, you're just old and slow.

(Nivea furrowed her brow.)

NIVEA: Did that groping you got earlier teach you nothing!

(Soapy whimpered.)

SOAPY: I'll behave!

KASIRA: Never mind nattering you two, let's check the bath.

NIVEA: Good idea, wraiths do like a nice soak in the tub before a killing spree.

KASIRA: Do you ever stop talking nonsense, Nivea?

NIVEA: How long have you known me?

KASIRA: True, forget I asked.

(With that, they darted from the kitchen and rampaged towards the luxurious, communal bath.)

KASIRA: Wraiths can't spawn in water, so hopefully there won't be many down here.

SOAPY: If there's too many we can jump in the water then, and shoot them from there.

KASIRA: No, we don't have time to dry off afterwards. We've got a busy night ahead of us.

NIVEA: Excellent!

SOAPY: Excellent?

NIVEA: Yeah, I'll have something to do for once.

(As they raced from the corridor and into the large, square bathroom, six wraiths charged them from the walkway that surrounded the bath in the centre. Once again, Soapy leapt into action, firing off her magic at the snarling beasts. Kasira and Nivea could only look on as she wiped them all out in very little time at all.)

KASIRA: We should just put our feet up and leave her to it.

NIVEA: I was just thinking that!

KASIRA: Come on; let's check the communal rooms then my office.

(With that, they about turned and raced away again. Finding two more wraiths in the exercise room, a further one in the corridor and two more in Kasira's office, Kasira was starting to get worried.)

KASIRA: They're everywhere! I hope Sika and Cayley are alright.

NIVEA: They should be, Sika's pretty fast and Cayley will keep her in check.

KASIRA: Yeah, you're probably right. Anyway, back to the mess room.

(Looking extremely urgent, Kasira lead them back to the mess room as quick as possible.

Upon racing inside the room, she then froze and horror, causing Soapy and Nivea to run into her. Having been shunted forward, Kasira steadied herself then looked to a shame-faced Ambre.)

KASIRA: What happened?

(Standing next to her stone beast, Fluffy, among a pile of broken wood where the table used to be, Ambre pouted and hung her head.)

AMBRE: I was on my own and I got nervous.

(Kasira shook her head.)

KASIRA: So you summoned Fluffy while you were still standing on the table?

(Ambre whimpered.)

AMBRE: I forgot he was heavy.

KASIRA: He's made entirely of stone, Ambre.

(She sighed.)

KASIRA: Don't worry; we can always get the old table from storage.

AMBRE: Sorry!

(She then mumbled under her breath.)

AMBRE: It wouldn't have happened if you'd just let me come with you.

KASIRA: Look, don't worry about it. It's fine. Besides, we've got far bigger worries than that, right now.

NIVEA: To put it mildly.

(Kasira looked thoughtful and started to recap events out loud.)

KASIRA: Three spawned in here and we just took out... one, seven, ten... twelve more!

NIVEA: Fifteen! Shit!

SOAPY: That's a *lot* of wraiths to spawn in such a small area, isn't it?

(Just then, Sika and Cayley raced back from the sleeping quarters.)

SIKA: We killed hundreds of them!

CAYLEY: We killed thirteen!

SIKA: See?

CAYLEY: There were seven in the courtyard, but from the sounds of it, there's hundreds of them just outside the gate.

(Kasira bit her lip nervously as she pondered Cayley's words.)

KASIRA: You killed thirteen of them... we found fifteen... twenty eight of them spawned *inside* our base alone?

(Cayley shared her dismay.)

CAYLEY: Yeah. Which means there must be literally thousands of them outside.

(At once a deep sense of foreboding filled the air. Such an unprecedented amount of wraiths was something they'd never dared comprehend. Knowing it was down to them to kill them all, everyone's hearts were filled with terror. First to break what became a prolonged fearful, silence, Sika raised a worried finger in the air.)

SIKA: What's Fluffy doing here? And what happened to the table?

(Looking lost in thought, Kasira held her palm to Sika to quieten her.)

KASIRA: Thousands, you say Cayley?

CAYLEY: Seven or eight thousand possibly.

KASIRA: You reckon that many?

CAYLEY: Well we got twenty eight in this base alone, and it's not the biggest building in the world. And don't forget they spawn much closer together outdoors as a rule.

(She rubbed her chin nervously.)

CAYLEY: So, yeah, if the number we got in here is anything to go by, that's my guess.

(She shook her head.)

CAYLEY: I thought we might get five or six in here at most if the haze broke tonight, but twenty eight... bum!

(Nivea furrowed her brow.)

NIVEA: If there's that many, how are we even going to start killing them? We'll get swarmed as soon as we leave the compound.

KASIRA: I know.

(Silence then filled the air as they all paused to consider their next move. Moments later, Cayley gave Kasira an enlightened glance.)

CAYLEY: So our immediate problem is getting out of this base safely, yeah?

(Kasira looked to her.)

KASIRA: Yeah! As soon as we open the gates they'll swarm us from all directions.

CAYLEY: Actually, I think I know a way around that. I can fly over the gate and get them to chase me, leaving you lot free to sneak out of the base. But, then what? Getting out is one thing, then what are we going to do?

(Kasira looked thoughtful.)

KASIRA: Well... our first priority should be to clear the town of wraiths.

(She sneered.)

KASIRA: Though half of me is hoping the townsfolk have been eaten by them already.

(She shrugged.)

KASIRA: Our duty is to protect them though, unfortunately, so we should head there.

CAYLEY: That's simple then. I'll lead *all* the wraiths between here and the town on a merry dance for a bit then when you've had enough time to get out of the base, I'll fly out to sea until they lose interest in me. I'll meet you all in town when I'm done.

(Sika nodded.)

SIKA: I can help with that. I can keep an eye on everyone from above and let you know when it's safe to come out.

(Kasira nodded thoughtfully.)

KASIRA: That'll work.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: Okay, here's the deal, while you two are doing your airborne bit, Soapy, Nivea and I will head to town and start killing the wraiths in a group. Then, once you two get back, I think we should split into two teams.

AMBRE: Wait, what about me?

(Kasira turned to Ambre and smiled lovingly.)

KASIRA: You should be safe here, darling.

(The world's most sorrowful pout appeared on Ambre's lips.)

AMBRE: You're leaving me out again???

KASIRA: Well, yeah...

AMBRE: Why would you do that to me?

KASIRA: Because it's not safe to use Fluffy or a wraith whistle against that many wraiths. This is all going to be about individual attack skill, and well... you don't have any. So... you'll be safer in here.

AMBRE: But... you can't leave me out of something *this* big! You said we were a team, all in it together!

KASIRA: Yeah, but that doesn't apply to what's happening now. You're not equipped to help this time.

(A tear rolled down Ambre's cheek.)

AMBRE: So despite everything you said to me about part of the team, and being a good soldier, the truth is, you just think I'm useless.

(Looking into her eyes, Kasira could see Ambre's heart visibly breaking.)

KASIRA: I don't think you're useless. I just don't think your skills are suited for this particular fight, sweetheart.

AMBRE: You think I'm a pathetic retard who'll just get in the way, you mean!

(As Ambre turned away, quite clearly crying, Kasira gave everyone else a troubled glance.)

KASIRA: I'm not being unreasonable, am I?

(Everyone looked away, not wishing to say anything that might hurt Ambre's feelings.)

KASIRA: Sorry, Ambre. Look, when this is over we can...

AMBRE: Go away!!!

KASIRA: Ambre...

AMBRE: I can hit wraiths with a sword just as well as anyone else can.

(Nivea mumbled under her breath.)

NIVEA: Well, she does have a point.

AMBRE: See, *she* knows! I'm stupid and I panic a lot, but that doesn't make me useless. And I never thought *you* of all people would *think* I am.

(Kasira looked extremely peeved.)

KASIRA: Hey! I've never treated you as anything but an equal! How dare you?

AMBRE: Well, why start now then?

KASIRA: Because I'm scared you'll get hurt!!!

(Kasira then looked to her feet and scratched her head.)

KASIRA: I couldn't handle that.

(Ambre turned to her and looked her directly in the eye.)

AMBRE: I'm scared of getting hurt too. But I'm even more scared of being left out because people think I'm useless. Don't do that to me, Kasira. Not you.

(Kasira sighed and shook her head.)

KASIRA: Nivea?

NIVEA: Yeah?

KASIRA: Can you grab her a sword from the armoury?

(Nivea nodded and headed away.)

NIVEA: Sure can.

KASIRA: Just promise me that if you feel overwhelmed, you'll come back, Ambre.

(Ambre bounced excitedly.)

AMBRE: Can't do that. If I feel overwhelmed and panic, god only knows where I'll end up.

(She beamed.)

AMBRE: I *can* promise you that I'll run so fast the wraiths will never catch me though!

KASIRA: Just make sure you do.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: Okay. Well, change of plan then. Nivea, Ambre, Soapy and I will head to town once you've cleared the path by air then we'll split into two teams of three. Ambre, Soapy and I in one, Cayley, Nivea and Sika in the other.

CAYLEY: Works for me.

SIKA: Our team are gonna kick your arse.

KASIRA: We're fighting wraiths, not each other, you idiot.

SIKA: You know what I mean.

KASIRA: Well, now we know what we're gonna be doing, good luck everyone. Be careful and watch each other's backs. No heroics and absolutely no wraith whistles, okay?

(She looked to Ambre.)

KASIRA: Now put Fluffy away. As soon as Nivea comes with your sword, Ambre, we're out of here.

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When trouble raises its ugly head, the mind can be a terrible thing if given time to run riot. It can turn a mild concern into deep anxiety, and slight nervousness in absolute terror. Left to its own devices, the brain is an expert at making things seem a thousand times worse than they are. In times of hardship, thinking becomes over-thinking then swiftly moves on to thinking the worst. Well aware of the effect that thinking about their situation might have on her youngest troops, Sika and Soapy in particular, Kasira wasted no time in getting the wraith cull started. As soon as they were ready, she led everyone into the courtyard and gave Cayley and Sika the order to "go when ready" then watched on as they took off into the sky.

KASIRA: Good luck, guys!

CAYLEY: Right back at you. See you in town!

(With that, Cayley flew slowly over the gate and circled around slightly to gather the attention of the blood-lusting wraiths below her. Watching her whilst hovering just above the gate, Sika bit her lip.)

SIKA: She's got all the ones near the compound.

(She then nodded firmly.)

SIKA: There she goes. She's on her way down the path to town.

KASIRA: Is it clear?

SIKA: Not quite.

(She puffed out.)

SIKA: Damn, there's a lot of them. Looks like she's being chased by the entire wraith population of the world.

(She then nodded to Kasira.)

SIKA: She's out of sight.

KASIRA: Go, head to the end of the path and make sure it's clear for us. We're moving out.

SIKA: Yes, ma'am.

(As Sika flew away, Kasira nodded to Ambre, Nivea and Soapy.)

KASIRA: Let's go.

(With that, she pushed the gate open and led her unit out of the compound. Pushing the gate shut behind her, Nivea tightened her grip on her sword then raced to Soapy's side.)

NIVEA: You okay?

SOAPY: Yeah... bit nervous maybe.

NIVEA: You'll be okay, just concentrate and everything will be fine.

(She then looked to Ambre.)

NIVEA: You okay?

AMBRE: I feel silly!

(Wearing metal shin guards, knee protectors, a steel vest and airborne head armour, she felt extremely uncomfortable. When Nivea had first started to put the armour on her she'd been delighted that the gaps in the helmet, made to accommodate airborne head wings, fitted her horns perfectly. Now, having to run, and clanging like a bag full of spoons, however, she wasn't so enamoured with her attire.)

AMBRE: I look ridiculous.

NIVEA: You look fine.

SOAPY: No, she looks ridiculous.

(Nivea furrowed her brow.)

NIVEA: So sue me, I saw the armour there and thought it'd be a good idea for her to use it.

Pardon me for putting her safety first.

AMBRE: It's uncomfortable and makes annoying noises.

NIVEA: Just like Sika when she first joined us. You learned to love her; you'll learn to love the armour.

(Worried about their morale, Kasira raised her voice as she led them towards town.)

KASIRA: Just try it, Ambre, if you can't get used to it we can ditch it later.

AMBRE: Okay.

KASIRA: Now, calm down, girls, save your aggression for the wraiths.

NIVEA: We're calm.

SOAPY: Yeah, it's all good.

(Kasira gave them all a reassuring smile then raced onwards, keeping an eye open for Sika.

Hearing Soapy reply was quite the relief. She knew Nivea was rarely stressed and was experienced enough to handle whatever might lay ahead. Ambre would also remain calm.

Thinking was not her strong point therefore she was unlikely to let her mind wander and end up stressed by the thought of the battle ahead. Soapy, however, she was young and intelligent. A terrible combination when battle is about to commence. A vivid imagination and the possibility of death had very often left younger soldiers hyperventilating in distress. Hearing her reply with no panic in her voice, however, she knew Soapy was ready to fight.)

KASIRA: Any moment now, ladies, keep your guard up.

(Hearing three calls of "ma'am", Kasira nodded then raced onwards. As she did so, a contented smile crossed her lips. There was no longer any time for any of them to start worrying and scare themselves to death. Sika was right ahead of them. Battle was imminent.)

KASIRA: Any moment now.

(As she approached her, Sika hovered down and saluted.)

SIKA: Wraiths dead ahead, ma'am. The town centre is full of them.

KASIRA: Good work, Soldier. Now go and find Cayley, then head back.

SIKA: Ma'am.

(With that, Sika took off into the night. Left behind, Kasira glanced at the town ahead and nodded.)

KASIRA: Right, this won't be easy, so watch your backs, okay? And if you start to feel overwhelmed, remember, safety first!

NIVEA: And when I start to spin, remember to keep your distance.

(Ambre saluted.)

AMBRE: Understood!

SOAPY: Ma'am!

KASIRA: Okay, let's show this town what us useless bitches are made of. Go!

(With that, she raced onto the cobbled streets of the town and immediately started to pile into wraiths with her swift blades. Soapy and Nivea did likewise. Bringing up the rear, Ambre looked right down the lengthy thoroughfare before her and bit her lip. Seeing wraiths packed tightly between the homes on one side and the buildings on the other, her jaw dropped.)

AMBRE: Whoa, there's billions of them.

(She then shrugged.)

AMBRE: Oh well.

(With that, she too, came out fighting. Being unintelligent creatures, the wraiths close enough to smell blood, made an instant beeline for Kasira and her troops. Those slightly further back, however, stood about aimlessly like the soulless empty creatures they were. This was excellent news for the allies. Being at one end of the town centre, and not being swamped by every single wraith on the street at once, their goal became obvious. They'd have to cut them all down, continually advancing down the street until they reached the other end, leaving no wraith undefeated. Spotting this immediately, Kasira called out to Nivea.)

KASIRA: If you're going to spin, try not to go too far away from us.

NIVEA: Okay!

KASIRA: The ones at the back are ignoring us, so let's try to keep it like this for as long as we can.

NIVEA: I hear you!

(Firing off her magic with her usually swagger and precision, Soapy couldn't help smiling. She felt perfectly safe right now and there were creatures to blow up for as far as she could see. It was almost her idea of heaven. Kasira was ever professional and swift in her work, as was Nivea. Ambre, however, wasn't having much success. Weighed down by her armour and feeling somewhat silly, her sword work was very much laboured. Releasing a shrill, girly shriek with every swing of her blade, she looked far from at home.)

AMBRE: I'm not good at this.

(Mindful of Kasira's warning to be careful, she'd opted to act as Kasira's back up, rather than getting into a position where she had to defend herself from attack. As a result, she was only killing wraiths that Kasira hadn't quite got round to yet. To make matters worse, she was throwing out her arm and cutting into wraiths at such a woefully slow rate, her contribution was making very little difference, and she knew it.)

AMBRE: Not really helping much, am I?

KASIRA: You're doing great, babes.

(Well aware that Kasira was only being polite, Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: This armour isn't helping!

KASIRA: No?

AMBRE: I know Nivea meant well but I can barely move in this.

KASIRA: Better take it off then, sweetheart. Just be careful while you're doing it.

(Ambre looked overjoyed. Unused to fighting with a sword, she was struggling enough, without being weighed down by heavy metallic garments.)

AMBRE: Thank heavens.

(At once, both her knee protectors were thrown to the ground and she started to wrestle with her body armour. With no idea how to start undoing it, she contorted to her left and spotted a strap on the back. Looking enlightened, she then reached out for it. Being just out of her reach, she stretched for it then walked round in a circle three times trying to grab it.)

AMBRE: Come here!!!

(Finally getting a hold of it, she tugged it with all her might and the front of her armour shot up, whacking her in the chin. Crumpling to the ground, she sat there looking peeved for a moment then removed her shin guards.)

AMBRE: Stupid armour.

(Throwing her head gear on the floor, she then struggled to her feet and jumped to Kasira's side, whacking her sword into a wraith as she did so, with her trademark squeak.)

AMBRE: I can't get the top bit off!

(Kasira replied swiftly, her eyes fixed on the plethora of wraiths she was slaughtering.)

KASIRA: There's a strap on the side!

AMBRE: There is?

(Ambre looked to right side then beamed.)

AMBRE: I didn't check that side.

(Looking delighted she stepped back then pulled at the strap. Immediately, the body armour fell down her body, thudding onto her toes. Trying not to blaspheme, she hopped about in agony then fell over again.)

KASIRA: You okay back there, Ambre?

(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: I got it off!

KASIRA: Good. Now come here and fight.

(Feeling pretty certain that Kasira meant 'now stand where I can see you', Ambre clambered to her feet then trudged to Kasira's side.)

AMBRE: I *am* trying, you know!

KASIRA: I know that, babe. I just need your help, that's all.

(Well aware that Kasira was doing just fine without her, Ambre just sighed and raised her sword. She felt more than a little patronised but she knew Kasira *meant* well and that was always enough to put the smile back on her face.)

AMBRE: Eat cold steal, wraiths!

(Freed from the steel prison of her armour, Ambre lashed into several wraiths, one after the other, each swing accompanied to by a high-pitched squeak.)

AMBRE: This is fun!

KASIRA: Yeah, but don't get cocky. They might be going down like flies right now, but it only takes one to break our guard and you could get seriously hurt.

(Heeding that warning, Ambre's smile evaporated and she laid into the wraiths with concentration etched onto her brow. Her squeaks becoming more like high-pitched groans.)

KASIRA: That's the way, Ambre. Keep it up.

(With Kasira on one side of her, slashing her way through every wraith who dared come near, and Soapy on the other, making short of work of wraiths with one deft magic blast after another, Ambre felt extremely confident. Glancing briefly to where Nivea was dancing around with her sword, killing with extreme ease, she bit her lip then tried to emulate her. Not having Nivea's natural sword ability, however, her exaggerated movements simply usurped a lot of her energy and her killing rate slowed.)

KASIRA: What are you doing, Ambre?

(Ambre replied through tired breaths.)

AMBRE: I'm fighting like Nivea does.

KASIRA: Why? You were doing fine!

AMBRE: But, she has a sword and I thought...

KASIRA: Well don't think, just do what you were doing before.

(Not quite sure what she'd been doing before, Ambre stopped in her tracks then lashed her sword upwards at a wraith and squeaked.)

AMBRE: Like that?

KASIRA: No! Do what's natural to *you*, not what's natural to Nivea.

(Ambre looked lost.)

AMBRE: Summoning Fluffy is what's natural to me.

(Kasira furrowed her brow, desperately trying not to let on that her nerves were getting frayed.)

KASIRA: Find your own rhythm!

AMBRE: I'll try!



(Ambre looked determined then lashed at a wraith. Watching as it was obliterated; she then pulled her sword back swiftly to her side.)

AMBRE: I'll get the hang of it.

(As she flicked her sword back up, however, it snagged on her skirt and cut into the material.)

AMBRE: What the???

(Glancing down at the rip in the hem of her favourite skirt, her nostrils flared and she gritted her teeth.)

AMBRE: Stupid wraiths; now look what you made me do!!!

(With that, she came out fighting. At last, she'd found her rhythm. Chopping and slashing vehemently, she looked quite the accomplished swordswoman, albeit with a squeak. Soapy looked most impressed.)

SOAPY: Who are you and what did you do with Ambre?

(Ambre beamed as she lashed into more wraiths.)

AMBRE: I killed her, Ambre was such a retard!

SOAPY: Piss off, Ambre's awesome.

(Ambre blushed then carried on about her duty.)

AMBRE: Thanks. You're awesome too.

(Despite a safe and trouble free start to their cull, the town centre was still packed with wraiths. Progress was slow, largely due to the amount of wraiths that were still coming into the town centre from the side streets beyond. From down on the ground, Kasira and her three comrades couldn't see too far ahead and to them progress looked good. Coming down towards them from the sky however, Sika and Cayley could fully appreciate the task ahead of them.)

SIKA: They're everywhere!

CAYLEY: Yeah they are. And before Kasira and the girls get very far, more wraiths are gonna start spilling out onto the street behind them as well.

SIKA: Not only that, but if those wraiths we lead on a wild goose chase come this way too... ouch.

CAYLEY: Absolutely, the last thing they need is to be attacked from both sides.

SIKA: Yeah, I was thinking that.

CAYLEY: Let's get down there as fast as we can, Sika. The sooner we can clear the street, the better. This is gonna take all six of us at full throttle.

SIKA: Yes, ma'am.

(As they headed down towards their unit mates, Sika bit her lip nervously.)

SIKA: Why have so many of them converged here?

CAYLEY: They can probably smell human blood.

SIKA: I guess.

CAYLEY: So I'm thinking, the sooner we clear the town, the sooner we can get on and fight small groups in the countryside. I know *I'll* feel much safer then.

SIKA: I hear you.

(Upon gliding down to the cobbles, Cayley immediately raced up behind Kasira and filled her in with the details.)

CAYLEY: Kasira, they're coming into the town centre from the side streets, it's really packed further down.

(Kasira furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: It is?

CAYLEY: Yeah!

KASIRA: Shit!

(Continuing to battle hard, Kasira looked thoughtful.)

KASIRA: Okay, here's the plan. You and Sika fly down the other end and thin the herd from the rooftops or something.

CAYLEY: Yes, ma'am.

KASIRA: If that doesn't reduce their numbers then I'll get Nivea to do her spin thing and the rest of us will back her up.

(She bit her lip.)

KASIRA: The more they gather in one place, the more other wraiths will be attracted to them, I reckon.

CAYLEY: Quite possibly!

KASIRA: Then we need to clear this street as quickly as possible before they *all* end up here!

CAYLEY: Okay, I'll take Sika down there then. I'll let you know if it works.

KASIRA: Okay.

(Cayley sneered.)

CAYLEY: I hate wraiths! That squeaking noise is unbearable!

KASIRA: That's not the wraiths!

(She gestured with her head to where Ambre was doing battle with her sword.)

CAYLEY: Why's she doing that?

KASIRA: Ambre is Ambre, Cayley!

CAYLEY: Good point.

(With that, she looked to Sika urgently.)

CAYLEY: Come with me!

(Having planted themselves on a rooftop, some way down the high street, Sika and Cayley immediately set their magic in motion. Flailing their arms towards groups of wraiths, hoping to catch several in their vortex-like spells at a time, they both looked the embodiment of focus and determination. Their job was essential to stopping their unit mates from being overwhelmed as time went on. Not about to let that happen, they unleashed their spells with full ferocity one after the other. Continuing their hard word work down on the cobbles, Kasira, Ambre, Soapy and Nivea were also fully absorbed by the task at hand. Kasira was swift and precise in her blade work, Soapy was her normal powerful and fast self, Nivea was devastating in her accuracy and even Ambre looked accomplished, despite being in unfamiliar territory with a sword. At this moment, they were most definitely earning their meagre army wages. For several minutes, none of them spoke, solely concentrating on using their talents to the full and despatching as many wraiths as possible. The silence, however, was soon broken by Ambre. Looking more than a little tired, she puffed out and whimpered out loud.)

AMBRE: I'm knackered!

(Kasira looked to her briefly without pausing her cull.)

KASIRA: Take a break if you have to, I'll cover you.

AMBRE: No way, nobody else is slacking! I told you I could do it and I will!

KASIRA: Ambre, everyone else is using their natural born skills. You're bound to tire first; a sword isn't your thing.

AMBRE: Even so!

KASIRA: Look, rest if you have to. I don't want you getting burnt out.

AMBRE: Maybe... in a minute.

KASIRA: Fine, but if you look like getting too tired, I'm gonna pull you out of the fight.

(Ambre sighed.)

AMBRE: Fine, I'll back off then!

(With that, she stepped back from the fight and Kasira took a step to her side to cover her.)

AMBRE: I'll just take a minute or two.

KASIRA: Whatever. Just, don't interrupt me, babes, I'm a bit busy here!

AMBRE: Okay!

(Ambre took a relaxing breath then flexed her aching muscles. With a shake of her head, she then sighed and looked down, mumbling to herself.)

AMBRE: Stupid wraiths.

(She then glanced up through her hair and raised a curious eyebrow.)

AMBRE: I wonder...

(As Kasira continued to do battle, she looked bewildered by the sight before her. One of the wraiths in the pack in front of her bizarrely went on the rampage and proceeded to attack the other wraiths.)

KASIRA: What the hell?

SOAPY: Weird but... okay! I'll take it!

(Nivea couldn't believe her eyes.)

NIVEA: Why the hell is it doing that?

SOAPY: I don't know.

(She furrowed her brow.)

SOAPY: I'm not gonna complain though, at least that wraith is helping out. Ambre's having a nice sit down and some tea and cake!

(Standing just behind her, Ambre pouted bitterly.)

AMBRE: I'm not sitting down *or* having tea and cake!

KASIRA: She's taking a break, I told her to.

(Ambre smiled.)

AMBRE: I'm not though! I'm using my mind to make that wraith attack the other ones.

(Almost losing her concentration, Kasira did a double take in her direction then stared back at what she was killing.)

KASIRA: You can do that?

SOAPY: That's *you* doing that?

AMBRE: I'm as surprised as you are!

KASIRA: I didn't even know that was possible!

AMBRE: Nor did I.

(She shrugged.)

AMBRE: Just *felt* like I could do it while I was standing here so I gave it a go.

SOAPY: That's awesome.

NIVEA: You had an instinctive skill you didn't even know about???

(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: Don't tell Sika!!!

KASIRA: Don't worry about her. There's a big difference between not knowing you had a skill, and not having one you should have!

AMBRE: There was way too many words in that sentence, Kasira.

NIVEA: She's saying Sika can't mock you for *having* a skill.

SOAPY: No, not when she's missing her race's most famous one.

(Kasira smirked knowingly.)

KASIRA: That's perfect then. Now we're all using natural skills that should make things a lot quicker.

(Just then, the wraith that Ambre was controlling was savaged and killed by one of its own kind.)

AMBRE: Crap!

(She sneered then stared hard at another one. Immediately, that one then set about attacking the other wraiths.)

AMBRE: Yay, it's actually really easy! It's just like controlling Fluffy except I don't have to heal it.

KASIRA: But Fluffy doesn't attack...

AMBRE: It's doing that on its own; I'm just pointing it in the right direction!

(Soapy grinned.)

SOAPY: Ambre, you're full of...

AMBRE: Hey!

SOAPY: Surprises!

AMBRE: Oh! Thanks!

(With Sika and Cayley working determinedly further down the high street, and the other four making full use of their natural attributes, it wasn't long before their efforts started to bear fruit. Within an hour, wraiths had stopped flowing in from the side streets and the number in the high street itself started to decrease rapidly.)

Determined to speed up the progress further still, Kasira soon ordered Nivea to adopt spin mode then called Sika and Cayley back to assist in covering her. With this tactic in play, Nivea managed to walk a solid twenty feet into the wraiths without even breaking her stride, every wraith that wasn't despatched on her blade, being disintegrated by magic from Soapy, Sika or Cayley. With Kasira supervising the effort, Ambre could only follow on, hoping desperately that she'd get a chance to use her new skill again, as soon as possible. Her chance wasn't long in coming. As Nivea strolled onwards in a permanent spin, a giant wolf-like wraith appeared from a side street. Standing over eighteen feet tall, it was a most intimidating sight.)

SOAPY: What the fucking hell is that thing?

SIKA: It's massive!!!

(Kasira furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: It's a king wraith!

SIKA: A what?

KASIRA: They sometimes appear after a haze!

SOAPY: But it's huge!!!

CAYLEY: It's where the remnants of a lot of wraiths get pushed tight together in the sky, sometimes they fuse to create a giant one.

SOAPY: What are we gonna do about it???

KASIRA: Shoot it, obviously!!! Before Nivea walks straight into it!

NIVEA: That would be appreciated!!!

(At once, Sika, Soapy and Cayley all released their powerful spells, firing them directly at the giant wraith. As if they'd thrown mushy peas at it, however, the spells just evaporated on it's giant head.)

SOAPY: No effect!!!

(Kasira's eyes bulged.)

KASIRA: Wanna bet??? You pissed it off no end!

(Sure enough, the giant wraith had reared up and was now charging straight at them, crushing other wraiths in its determination to get there and attack them.)

NIVEA: Shit!!! Now what???

(As they all stood there looking horrified, the giant wraith reared up again and started to savage every other wraith in sight.)

KASIRA: What the...

AMBRE: And to think you were going to leave me at home.

(Looking understandably smug, Ambre was standing with her hands on her hips, staring at the giant wraith.)

AMBRE: Who's the retard now?

SIKA: You're still retarded, Ambre!

AMBRE: Hey!

KASIRA: Sika!!!

SIKA: Well, she is!

AMBRE: Even so! Mean!

SIKA: She didn't even know she had that skill until...

AMBRE: At least I *have* a skill!!!

SIKA: Yeah, but...

(Kasira clenched an angry fist.)

KASIRA: Pack it in!!!

(Sika hung her head.)

KASIRA: This is no time to be acting like moronic schoolgirls!

AMBRE: She started it!

KASIRA: Enough!!!

(She took a deep breath to calm herself then spoke up.)

KASIRA: Sika, Cayley, Soapy, finish off the wraiths in Nivea's path so she can stop spinning without being attacked. Ambre, keep it up.

AMBRE: Easy cheesy.

SIKA: It's easy pea...

KASIRA: Sika!!!

SIKA: Sorry!

(Kasira rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: Today, ladies!!!

(At once, Soapy, Cayley and Sika fired off a heavy stream of magic blasts into the wraiths in front of Nivea. At once, Nivea stopped spinning and jogged back to Kasira's side.)

NIVEA: Thanks, girls.

KASIRA: Now take a break, conserve your magic energy. I'd say Ambre seems to have it pretty much covered.

(Ambre beamed.)

AMBRE: And then some.

(Sika gave her a sideways glance then watched on with the others as the giant wraith ripped and tore through the rest of the wraiths.)

NIVEA: That big fella's one angry creature.

CAYLEY: Yeah, it's got the bulk, the rage *and* the appetite of hundreds of wraiths all wrapped up in one angry body.

KASIRA: Which, amazingly, has worked out nicely for us.

(They all nodded in agreement as the giant continued to destroy wraiths at a ferocious rate, giving them a well earned break.)

SOAPY: We could clear the whole island in no time with that thing!

(Ambre whimpered sheepishly.)

AMBRE: Um... guys, once these wraiths have all died out, you'd better run...

SIKA: What?

AMBRE: It's attacking stuff because it wants to, I'm just guiding it. I won't know what to do once there's nothing left to make it fight!

(Kasira bit her lip.)

KASIRA: You'll lose control?

AMBRE: I don't know!

KASIRA: Then we need to kill it!

SOAPY: How? Our magic was useless against it.

SIKA: Yeah, didn't even slow it down!

(Cayley looked thoughtful.)

CAYLEY: Wraiths die if they're immersed in water, right?

KASIRA: Yeah!

CAYLEY: Then we should make it chase Soapy!

(Soapy looked horrified.)

SOAPY: Fuck off!!! I thought you were nice!!! Why do you want to kill me???

CAYLEY: I don't!!! And nice language by the way!

SOAPY: What did you expect???

(She pouted.)

SOAPY: I knew this would happen. First bit of trouble and you want to kill the new girl.

CAYLEY: No, you idiot! If it chases you and you run into the sea, Ambre can make it follow you!

(She glanced at Ambre.)

CAYLEY: Can't you?

AMBRE: Yeah, as long as it's attacking something it'll go wherever I send it!

SOAPY: *You* run into the sea then!

CAYLEY: You can go deeper and move faster in water than I can. And if it goes wrong, I can heal you!

SOAPY: You can't heal death!

AMBRE: She's right, you tried that once, remember?

CAYLEY: Look, it won't come to that! Not if you're already on the beach when she starts to send it after you!

(Kasira nodded sternly.)

KASIRA: Sounds good to me! Soapy, head for the beach, that's an order!

SOAPY: But...

(She bit her lip.)

SOAPY: Fine, just don't send it until my toes are already in the water.

AMBRE: Okay!

SOAPY: And if I die, I'm gonna come back and haunt the bloody lot of you!

(With that, she pouted and raced off between two buildings, towards the beach, mumbling to herself.)

SOAPY: *She's* new; nobody will miss *her* much if she dies, let's make *her* do the suicide mission.

(Kasira watched her go then looked to Sika.)

KASIRA: Sika, fly up would you...

SIKA: Sure! Why?

KASIRA: I was coming to that!

(She shook her head.)

KASIRA: Tell us when her toes are in the water, we won't be able to see her from here!

SIKA: Ah, okay!

(With that, Sika rose up into the air.)

SIKA: She's going to the beach to the right of the quay.

AMBRE: That's no good! If I can't see her, I can't make it attack her!

CAYLEY: Really?

AMBRE: Yeah!

CAYLEY: Not a problem, Sika and I will lift you up there.

(Sika glanced down.)

SIKA: I dunno, there's only two of us and she's been piling on the pounds lately!

(Ambre looked livid.)

AMBRE: I have not!!!

(Kasira looked furious.)

KASIRA: Ambre, focus on what you're doing!!!

(As Ambre pouted then resumed concentrating on her task, Kasira snarled up at Sika.)

KASIRA: We're in the middle of a mission, Sika. This is no time for teasing people and acting like a dick!

(Sika pouted.)

SIKA: Sorry!

(She sighed then looked to Ambre.)

SIKA: I was just kidding, Ambre.

AMBRE: I know. I weigh myself everyday!

KASIRA: Right, well... good grief! Never mind. Look, is Soapy ready, Sika?

(Sika peered over the rooftops.)

SIKA: Yeah, she just gave me a one fingered salute!

(Kasira hung her head and mumbled.)

KASIRA: Kids, bloody amateurs.... what the hell did I do to deserve...

(Snapping out of her despair, she then nodded firmly.)

KASIRA: Get back down here then, private. Help the sergeant lift private Ambre.

NIVEA: That's very formal all of a sudden, Kasira.

(Kasira sighed.)

KASIRA: Sometimes they need reminding they're in the army and not at school.

NIVEA: Very true.

(As Kasira and Nivea watched on, Sika landed on the ground, then she and Cayley stepped either side of Ambre. Looking nervous, Ambre placed her arms around their shoulders then whimpered.)

AMBRE: Don't drop me!

SIKA: We won't. You know we wouldn't hurt you. Not on purpose anyway!

CAYLEY: Relax, Ambre, we won't drop you, I promise!

(Telling her to keep calm and not to panic, they both then placed a hand behind her leg and lifted her from the ground, into a seated position between them.)

KASIRA: Okay, go!

(Upon Kasira's word, they then flew upwards. Ambre was terrified.)

AMBRE: Don't drop me!!!

CAYLEY: Calm down!!!

SIKA: We've got you, babes, you're fine!!!

(Ambre breathed heavily for a few moments then took a deep breath to calm herself.)

AMBRE: I'm alright!

(Kasira then yelled up to them.)

KASIRA: Send the giant wraith after Soapy!

AMBRE: Okay!

(Kasira then looked to the giant wraith and clenched her fist.)

KASIRA: There it goes!

(Sure enough, abandoning the few wraiths that remained in the high street, the giant wraith raced off between two houses.)

KASIRA: Come on.

NIVEA: Uh-huh!

(Determined not to miss anything, Kasira and Nivea charged between the nearest two buildings and raced after the rampaging wraith. Feeling extremely nervous on Soapy's behalf, Sika and Cayley then flew after the wraith with Ambre.)

SIKA: This will work right?

CAYLEY: Only if Soapy remembers to go deeper.

SIKA: She will right?

CAYLEY: She'd have to be a blithering idiot if she doesn't.

(Stood alone on the beach, watching as the giant killer rampaged towards her from the edge of town, Soapy screamed.)

SOAPY: Why do I have to be the human sacrifice???

(Filled with dread and fear she then about turned and raced into the sea. Not about to let herself get eaten, she transformed her legs into fins as soon as possible and proceeded to swim away on the surface of the ocean, bobbing like a dolphin.)

CAYLEY: That ought to do it!

AMBRE: Yeah! As long as I can see her, I can make it chase her.

(Just as Cayley had hoped, the wraith then lived up to its dumb animal tag and rampaged across the beach, charging straight into the sea.)

CAYLEY: Keep going!!!

(Acting on killer instinct but driven by Ambre's control, the giant wraith snarled and battled the waves until it was entirely submerged. Just then, it raised its head as if leaping to catch a breath, only to evaporate into dust.)

CAYLEY: Perfect!!!

(Moments later, they floated Ambre down to the sand then raced over to where Nivea and Kasira were standing at the water's edge.)

CAYLEY: We did it, guys!

SIKA: It went perfectly.

AMBRE: And they didn't drop me!

(Their words, however, were greeted by silence. Kasira and Nivea only had eyes for the empty ocean.)

KASIRA: The little shit isn't coming back, is she?

NIVEA: Doesn't look like it!

SIKA: Well, can you blame her? She did seem to think we were trying to kill her!

KASIRA: She didn't think that!

(She bit her lip and grimaced.)

KASIRA: She just thought we didn't care if she lived or died.

AMBRE: She was scared, that's all. So would I have been.

(She beamed.)

AMBRE: She'll come back. I know she will.

NIVEA: I wish I had your faith in mankind, Ambre.

(She sighed.)

NIVEA: I'd kill for your boobs too, but we can't have everything!

(Ambre covered her chest.)

AMBRE: You leave my boobs alone!

(Just then, Kasira spoke up with more than a hint of relief in her voice.)

KASIRA: I can see her! She's coming back!

SIKA: The fool!

KASIRA: What?

SIKA: Nothing!

KASIRA: Sika, I'm really gonna slap you in a minute!

AMBRE: Aw, don't be mad, Kasira. Soapy's coming back, now we can all go home and have tea and cakes.

KASIRA: No we can't!

AMBRE: We can't?

(She looked horrified.)

AMBRE: Are we out of cake?

KASIRA: No! We've still got an island full of wraiths to clear.



CAYLEY: Yeah, we just cleared the town, Ambre. That was just the beginning.  
(Ambre pouted.)  
AMBRE: Poop!  
SIKA: Gonna be a long time before we get any cake.  
AMBRE: That's annoying!  
(She shrugged.)  
AMBRE: Still, I'm kinda having fun using my new skill. And it *is* nice out tonight.  
NIVEA: Nothing can dampen your mood, can it, Ambre?  
SIKA: I *try* to!  
NIVEA: Yeah, but you're crap!  
SIKA: Well it's not easy. She's unfeasibly chirpy nearly *all* the bloody time.  
AMBRE: I make no apology for that!  
CAYLEY: Nor should you, darling!  
(Just then, Soapy emerged from the sea, crawling forth with her hands, dragging her fish like lower body behind her.)  
SOAPY: That sucked!  
(Her legs then returned to human form and she clambered to her feet.)  
SOAPY: It worked though, right?  
KASIRA: Did a giant wraith eat you when you swam back?  
SOAPY: No...  
KASIRA: Then it worked.  
(She then placed her arm around Soapy and smiled.)  
KASIRA: Nice work, Soldier.  
SOAPY: Thanks, but... please don't ever make me do that again.  
KASIRA: Soapy, don't feel bad about it. You did good work, be proud of it.  
(Soapy forced a smile.)  
SOAPY: Yeah, okay!  
(She sighed.)  
SOAPY: My clothes are soaked.  
NIVEA: You'll dry off in no time in this heat.  
KASIRA: Absolutely.  
(She then rubbed her hands together.)  
KASIRA: Okay, here's the plan. We're gonna clear the coast now. Ambre and Soapy, you guys can come with me, the rest of you, head the other way. We'll circle the island and meet you on the other side. Then we can head inland. I want to make sure we cover inch of this island. Okay?  
CAYLEY: Gotcha! See you on the other side then!  
(And with no more ado, Kasira lead Soapy and Ambre away down the beach to the left and the others paced down the beach to the right. The first stage of the clearing operation was complete but a long night still lay ahead.)

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A short while later, as they headed from the beach and started to pace upwards along a cliff top, Ambre found herself being grilled by Kasira and Soapy in regard to her new skill. Happy to accept their attention, she couldn't stop smiling as she answered their questions. Enjoying the view from the cliff top and the warm night air, she felt extremely relaxed. Fighting wraiths as they went, however, Soapy and Kasira weren't anywhere near as laid back.

KASIRA: Feel free to join in, Ambre. You *can* talk *and* fight, you know!  
AMBRE: Yeah, I know that.

(She beamed.)

AMBRE: I can't talk and fight when I summon Fluffy, but these wraiths are easy to control.

SOAPY: Well, do that then!

AMBRE: Fine.

(Culling their way through a large group of wraiths as they headed forth, Kasira and Soapy looked to one another then back at Ambre.)

KASIRA: Like Soapy said. Do that then!

SOAPY: Yeah!

AMBRE: I am!

(She beamed.)

AMBRE: It's just so easy it doesn't look like I'm doing anything.

KASIRA: Fair enough!

(She grinned.)

KASIRA: I can't believe you just plucked a new skill out of thin air.

(Ambre beamed.)

AMBRE: Me either. How cool is that?

(She shrugged.)

AMBRE: Though really, it makes sense that I can control wraiths with my mind.

KASIRA: Yeah?

AMBRE: Yeah! Wraiths are made from animals and I'm an animal too. Well, part of me is. I'm a gazelle.

KASIRA: People are animals too, Ambre. And *we* can't do it.

AMBRE: Yeah, but I'm part *dumb* animal!

(Soapy grinned.)

SOAPY: And part gazelle!

(Kasira furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: Sika!

SOAPY: Sika?

KASIRA: Sorry, force of habit!

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: Not quite grasping your logic here, Ambre.

AMBRE: It's easy. Because I'm part dumb animal, I can control other dumb animals.

KASIRA: There might be something in that, I suppose.

(She looked thoughtful.)

KASIRA: Though the swift human we had here before you came, she couldn't do it.

AMBRE: She couldn't?

KASIRA: Or at least she never said she could.

SOAPY: Maybe she *could* do it but never had to, so didn't mention it.

KASIRA: More than likely. She was never called to do anything except summon her Saxum.

AMBRE: Or maybe I'm just more cleverer than her.

SOAPY: That sentence suggests otherwise, Ambre.

AMBRE: Eh?

(Kasira gave Ambre a kind smile.)

KASIRA: Yeah, I think you're right Ambre. It's probably down to you being a clever girl.

SOAPY: What, seriously?

(Kasira glared at Soapy and mumbled to her quietly.)

KASIRA: Let her have her moment.

SOAPY: Oh! Okay!

(Soapy smiled at Ambre.)

SOAPY: You go, Ambre, you super fighter, you.

(Ambre pouted back at them both.)

AMBRE: I do know when I'm being patronised, you know.

(She then beamed.)

AMBRE: And I'm okay with it!

SOAPY: Really? I'd have slapped us both in the face.

KASIRA: With a sword!

AMBRE: Not me. It doesn't matter to me if you *mean* your compliments or not, the fact you say these nice things means you like me. And that makes me a happy Ambre.

(Soapy grinned and shook her head.)

SOAPY: She's too cute for words.

KASIRA: I know, right?

(Kasira then paused and looked ahead of herself.)

KASIRA: Okay, guys, this doesn't look too bad. The wraiths just inland seem to be happily wandering about ignoring us. We're not getting swamped or attacked by anything except the ones we're aiming for. That's exactly what we need. If they remain this passive we should make it round to meet the others in no time.

SOAPY: I have to say, I expected chaos but this isn't hard work at all. We're just strolling forth, killing them at our leisure and having a nice chat.

AMBRE: I just hope it stays this way.

KASIRA: Well for now, let's just keep going. We can only fight what we come across. If it gets harder then so be it, but until then, let's keep doing what we're doing!

SOAPY: Works for me.

(As they continued on up the slope then headed across the high cliff edge, the wraiths nearby continued to attack and those a little way inland continued to behave passively and ignore them. As a result, progress was swift. Kasira was lightning fast at close up fighting and Soapy was first class at despatching those slightly further back. With the wraiths also being attacked by one of their own, courtesy of Ambre, they'd so far encountered no hardships whatsoever.)

SOAPY: Don't get me wrong, I could do this all night but I can see it getting monotonous.

KASIRA: Yeah well, I'll take monotony over danger any time.

(She shrugged.)

KASIRA: Besides, you might *well* be doing this all night. Depends how long it takes you to run out of magic energy.

SOAPY: I've never run out of magic energy.

KASIRA: Have you ever been up all night killing wraiths with it before though?

SOAPY: No, good point.

AMBRE: Hope *I* don't run out of magic. I don't wanna use this silly sword again.

SOAPY: I don't want you to either, that squeaking was annoying.

AMBRE: What squeaking?

SOAPY: You squeaked every time you swung the sword.

AMBRE: Did I?

(She looked stumped for a moment then changed the subject.)

AMBRE: How do you run out of magic anyway?

KASIRA: Just like you would energy, I guess.

SOAPY: Yeah, everyone has a finite amount of magic energy.

AMBRE: Finite?

SOAPY: Exhaustible!

AMBRE: What?

(Soapy rolled her eyes.)

SOAPY: Everyone has a limited amount, once it's used up, you can't cast magic anymore.

AMBRE: Oh, right.

KASIRA: And how do you know when you're running low?

SOAPY: You just do.

(She beamed.)

SOAPY: I've got loads of it. I regenerate it quickly too. My captain used to say I was unique in terms of magic energy.

(She then bit her lip.)

SOAPY: He also used to say I was a unique pain in the arse too. He wished me dead a few times, but that's another story.

KASIRA: Didn't get along, huh?

SOAPY: No, he was a fussy old git and I was... well, me. I couldn't resist antagonising him.

KASIRA: I wouldn't worry about that. We all come across people we clash with.

(She puffed out.)

KASIRA: My first captain at the academy was a complete bitch. An absolute harridan.

(Soapy glanced away innocently.)

SOAPY: It's a good thing you're nothing like that!

(She then felt a clump around the head.)

SOAPY: Ouch!

KASIRA: Just be grateful I didn't toss you off the cliff.

(Soapy gave a stifled laugh.)

SOAPY: Yeah, okay.

KASIRA: Cheeky shit.

(Laughing to herself, Kasira laid into the next few wraiths in her path then glanced at Ambre.)

KASIRA: You're quiet!

AMBRE: No, I'm not!

KASIRA: I stand corrected.

(Just then, an almighty cacophony and howls and croaks filled the air.)

SOAPY: What the?

(They'd reached a point where the cliff face cut inland and a vast hoard of wraiths had gathered, too lazy to move around it. Having not seen how many there were in the moonlight, Kasira, Ambre and Soapy were taken completely by surprise.)

KASIRA: Look lively, girls!!!

(With well over two hundred wraiths charging straight at them from only twenty or so feet ahead, they all looked terrified.)

AMBRE: We should jump off the cliff!!!

KASIRA: No we shouldn't!!!

(Soapy looked determined.)

SOAPY: No, but *I* should!!!

(With that, she threw herself over the cliff towards the sea below, leaving Ambre and Kasira alone to face the incoming hoard.)

AMBRE: I don't like her anymore!!!

KASIRA: Me either!!!

(Much to their amazement, however, a whistle sound emanated up from over the side of the cliff. Before landing in the sea, Soapy had blown her wraith whistle just loud enough to attract the wraiths in the nearby area. Fully expecting to battle for her life against the sizeable mob, Kasira looked on in bewilderment as several of the wraiths fell off the cliff and the others growled and paced up and down the edge, focussed solely on the girl in the sea below.)

KASIRA: This is our chance!!!

(At once, Kasira set about culling them and Ambre weaved her spell on one of the wraiths. With them all distracted, they knew they had a limited time to cull them before their attention was drawn away from Soapy.)

KASIRA: As quick as you can, Ambre.

AMBRE: I can only go as fast as that wraith can.

KASIRA: Okay, sweetheart.

(Going into overdrive, Kasira rapidly increased her attacks, determined to kill as many as possible before they lost interest in Soapy and started fighting back. With her fists moving at lightning speed, they were a virtual blur. Such was the ferocity of her attack, at one point she found herself apologising to Ambre.)

KASIRA: My bad!

AMBRE: It's fine; I'll just possess another one.

(With her teeth gritted, Kasira snarled as she cut a swathe through the wraiths, obliterating them into explosions of dust, one after another.)

AMBRE: I've never seen you attack *that* fast before, Kasira!

KASIRA: I've never had too!

(Mercifully, Kasira's sorties were so quick and precise that when the wraiths finally forgot about Soapy, there was only one left.)

AMBRE: Seems a shame to kill this one, he's been great!

(The wraith then evaporated on the end of Kasira's blade.)

AMBRE: Oh well, easy come, easy go.

(Panting for breath, Kasira placed her hands on her hips and shook her head.)

KASIRA: We've got to be more careful, Ambre. That's worn me out.

AMBRE: Yeah, you were like a whirlwind!

KASIRA: From now on, we have to be aware of points where they might converge into a large group like that.

AMBRE: Okay!

KASIRA: Eyes wide open from now on, darling.

AMBRE: I hear you!

KASIRA: That's my girl.

(She stood tall and puffed out.)

KASIRA: A few hours from now, I might not have the energy to do that again.

AMBRE: Yeah, that looked exhausting.

KASIRA: It was.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: We're just lucky Soapy reacted quickly.

AMBRE: She didn't blow the whistle too loud either.

KASIRA: No, you're right. She saved our bacon there.

(Ambre exhaled.)

AMBRE: Can I have a bacon sandwich when we get back?

(Kasira gave her a sideways glance.)

KASIRA: Are you hungry by any chance? You wanted cake earlier!

AMBRE: Yeah, but then I always want cake.

KASIRA: You and Sika would just eat cake all day if I let you!

(Ambre beamed.)

AMBRE: And all night!

KASIRA: You'd be so fat.

AMBRE: Nah, I'd exercise more.

KASIRA: And work up an appetite for more cake! It'd become a vicious cycle.

AMBRE: Yeah, but... it'd be worth it for cake.

(Kasira furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: That's enough about cake! You're making me hungry.

AMBRE: For cake?

KASIRA: What did I just say, Ambre?

(Ambre hung her head.)

AMBRE: Enough about cake?

KASIRA: Exactly.

(Just then, Soapy came trudging towards them from behind, having swum to the beach and walked back up. Soaked to the skin, her boots were squelching and her face bore a look of extreme annoyance. Calling out to them from several metres away, she sounded thoroughly fed up.)

SOAPY: I'm gonna scream if this dress shrinks! It's my best one!

(She sighed.)

SOAPY: And the salt isn't going to do my boots much good either.

(Smiling, Kasira paced up to her.)

KASIRA: The army can fork out to replace your clothes, Soapy. They can't replace people.

(She scratched behind her ear nervously.)

KASIRA: Actually, they can do that too. My point is; your actions saved our lives, Soapy. Outstanding.

AMBRE: Thanks, Soapy. You're awesome!

KASIRA: I can't praise you highly enough for you actions just now, soldier.

(Having always thrived on compliments, Soapy gave her a nervous grin.)

SOAPY: You could always try!

KASIRA: Let's just say I was impressed.

SOAPY: How impressed?

KASIRA: Extremely.

(Soapy beamed.)

SOAPY: I was amazing, wasn't I?

KASIRA: Yes, you were!

SOAPY: You don't see quick thinking like that every day, do you?

(She exhaled.)

SOAPY: Yeah, I've always excelled at improvising.

(She shrugged.)

SOAPY: That's why my academy rated me so highly you see. I've got power *and* brains.

All round I'd say I'm pretty awesome. My skill set...

(Ambre's jaw dropped.)

AMBRE: Oh my god, she's *exactly* the same as Sika.

(Kasira furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: Identical!

(Soapy looked to her and grinned nervously.)

SOAPY: Just saying.

KASIRA: Well save it. Once we're all done, providing we all survive you can boast until you're blue in the face, until then, let's move on.

(As they started to head away, Soapy grinned.)

SOAPY: Fair enough, but when this is all over and you get sick of me boasting, just remember you said I could.

(As Kasira and Soapy shared a grin, Ambre looked thoughtfully to the sky.)

AMBRE: When *will* it be over, you reckon?

SOAPY: When there's no wraiths left.

AMBRE: Yeah, but how long?

KASIRA: I honestly can't answer that, babes.

AMBRE: Damn.

(Kasira patted her bag.)

KASIRA: Once all the wraiths are dead and we've lit the firework to signal the all clear, then we'll be done.

AMBRE: Fireworks? Awesome! I love fireworks.

KASIRA: There's just one, Ambre. After a haze break it's used as a signal to local people that it's safe to go out again.

AMBRE: Even so, fireworks are cool.

(And so, they paced on ahead, Ambre beaming excitedly at the prospect of ending the night with a sparkling explosion in the sky.)

---

On a cliff top on the other side of the island, Nivea looked somewhat peeved. Spinning as a plethora of wraiths obliterated themselves on her sword; she couldn't help but air her grievance.

NIVEA: This isn't right. I'm the only one in any danger!

(Floating in the air, attacking wraiths from several feet beyond the cliff edge, Cayley and Sika looked at one another then back at Nivea.)

SIKA: It's not our fault airborne people are awesome!

CAYLEY: Yeah! Blame your ancestors for taking to the ground, nobody forced them!

SIKA: Yeah, *our* ancestors took to the air... and I bet you lot mocked us; stuck up there in all weathers, but who's laughing now?

(As Sika and Cayley shared a sly grin, Nivea furrowed her brow.)

NIVEA: Has anybody ever told you two, airborne people make shit comediennes?

(She rolled her eyes.)

NIVEA: Besides, even if I *could* fly, I wouldn't have any magic to attack them with anyway!

SIKA: Yeah, also true! What a crap race you come from.

NIVEA: Excuse me?

SIKA: Can't fly, can't cast ranged spells, can't go out in daylight...

NIVEA: I can't heal people either!

(She sneered.)

NIVEA: Bit like someone else round here, eh, Sika?

(Sika pouted.)

SIKA: No need to get personal, Nivea!

CAYLEY: Let's not be petty now, ladies. *Both* our races have excellent attributes, I'm sure.

SIKA: Trust you to be the voice of reason!

CAYLEY: That a bad thing then, is it?

NIVEA: No. It's not. Well said, Cayley... now let's drop it. I've got better things to do than argue with a small breasted delinquent!

(Continuing to spin with a sly grin on her face, Nivea tried not laugh as Sika bit, hook line and sinker.)

SIKA: My breasts are perfect, thank you!

NIVEA: Yeah, a perfect fit for you tiny bra!

SIKA: I don't have small breasts!!! I'm perfectly proportioned!

(She ruffled her neck.)

SIKA: Besides, Cayley's are smaller!

CAYLEY: Don't you bring *me* into this!

SIKA: Well they are! They're tiny.

CAYLEY: So are yours then!!!

SIKA: They're bigger than...

CAYLEY: By a fraction!!!

(She rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: You make it sound like I've got little girl boobs.

SIKA: Don't be mad, Cayley. Some guys find small breasts cute!

CAYLEY: *You're* in luck then!

SIKA: Me???

CAYLEY: Yes, you!

(Just then, the sound of Nivea laughing rose up from her swirling vortex. At once, Cayley raised a suspicious eyebrow.)

CAYLEY: What are *you* laughing at?

NIVEA: Don't worry; I'm not laughing at *you*, Cayley.

SIKA: What? Are you laughing at *me*?

NIVEA: Never gonna be able to let it go, are you, Sika? Coming fifth in the boob measuring contest.

SIKA: Cayley came...

CAYLEY: Leave me out of it! I'm perfectly happy with my boobs!

NIVEA: It's so easy to pull your strings, Sika.

SIKA: No it's not!

NIVEA: I get it though. Must be hard for you. Even the new girl has bigger boobs than you. (Sika pouted.)

SIKA: You don't know that for sure! We haven't measured hers yet!

NIVEA: I have! I groped both of you last night, remember? Groping *her* took longer!

SIKA: That's not a precise way of...

(Cayley rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: She's pulling your strings again, Sika!

NIVEA: Too easy!

(Sika scowled at Nivea bitterly.)

SIKA: That's mean, you know how sensitive I am about my...

NIVEA: You shouldn't have started bragging about how awesome they were that time then!

SIKA: I...

NIVEA: You set yourself up for that one.

SIKA: Even so. Mean!

NIVEA: It's not mean, it's funny!

(Just then, a wraith raced up from the back of the pack and used the rump of another one to leap up and over Nivea's blade.)

NIVEA: Crap!!!

(As the wraith sunk its teeth into her shoulder, Nivea cried out in pain.)

NIVEA: Wanker!!!

(Swift to react, Sika blew the wraith to smithereens and Cayley fired a concentrated pillar of healing magic into her shoulder to dull the pain.)

SIKA: No. *That's* funny!

NIVEA: Funny?

(She sneered.)

NIVEA: It's a good thing we're almost finished with this bunch of wraiths.

(Sika trembled.)

SIKA: Uh-oh, don't grope me!

NIVEA: I've got no intention of groping those tiny things! I'm gonna deck you!



(Sika's eyes bugled and she flapped her wings rapidly, swiftly climbing into the sky. Seconds later, when the final wraith in the pack exploded on her blade, Nivea halted her spin then turned to face the hovering Sika.)

NIVEA: Get back down here, you little shit. I'll show you how funny pain is.

(Cayley landed then paced up to Nivea, placing her hand on her injured shoulder.)

CAYLEY: Let me just heal that properly before you go any further.

(Allowing Cayley to heal her, Nivea growled towards the airborne Sika.)

NIVEA: I mean it, get down here!

SIKA: No! You'll hit me!

NIVEA: That's an order!

(Having never heard Nivea angrily pull rank before, Sika whimpered and proceeded to float down.)

SIKA: Not the face!

NIVEA: Yes, the face!

(Sika then flew up again.)

SIKA: I'm not coming down then!

NIVEA: I gave you an order!!!

(Cayley rolled her eyes.)

CAYLEY: I can give orders too! Sika get down here and Nivea, calm down!

(Nivea gave her a sideways glance and mumbled from the corner of her mouth towards Cayley.)

NIVEA: I'm not really gonna hit her, I just wanna scare her!

CAYLEY: Well mission accomplished. Now stop it.

(Nivea sighed.)

NIVEA: Fine!

(As Sika landed on the cliff top and hid her face, Cayley stood tall.)

CAYLEY: Now, we're on an important mission here. So less bugging about please.

NIVEA: Okay. Sorry, ma'am.

SIKA: Sorry, ma'am!

CAYLEY: Now shake hands like grown women, please.

(Nivea and Sika both sighed.)

NIVEA: Fine!

SIKA: Okay!

(They then reached out and shook hands.)

NIVEA: Now I've got you!

SIKA: What?

(Sika then felt a sharp pain in her hand as Nivea started to squeeze.)

NIVEA: We subterranean folk have such a vice like grip, don't you think?

(Sika turned red and dropped to her knees.)

SIKA: Ow! That hurts!!!

NIVEA: I expect it does!

SIKA: Stop it!!! Let go!!!

NIVEA: Nope!

SIKA: Cayley, she's hurting me!

CAYLEY: Yeah? Well, that's what you get for being a cheeky little poo.

(Sika looked horrified.)

SIKA: But Cayley...

CAYLEY: Fine! Let her go, Nivea.

(As Nivea let go of Sika's hand, Cayley sighed.)

CAYLEY: I'm way too nice sometimes.

(Shaking her paining hand, Sika pouted.)

SIKA: I hate you, Nivea!

(Nivea raised her hands towards her at chest height.)

NIVEA: What did you say?

SIKA: I love you!!!

NIVEA: Thought so.

(Just then, an angry male voice rose up from some nearby trees.)

TOWNIE 06: Are you seeing this, lads? The island's jam packed with wraiths and these fucking bitches are up here pissing about!

TOWNIE 07: I saw it!

(Four men then approached them from the silhouettes of the trees, all were carrying swords.

Cayley swiftly glanced at her two companions.)

CAYLEY: Not a word, you two, that's an order. I'll handle this!

SIKA: Okay.

NIVEA: Fine.

(Walking with a swagger, one of the townsmen scoffed and pointed his sword at them.)

TOWNIE 08: You bitches are out of order.

TOWNIE 06: Not to mention out of your depth!

(Cayley stood respectfully tall.)

CAYLEY: Actually, good men of the town, we weren't messing about. We were...

TOWNIE 06: I said pissing about.

CAYLEY: Yes, you did. But I can assure you, we weren't.

TOWNIE 09: Doesn't matter if you were, like a bunch of scrawny whores are gonna make a difference anyway. Luckily for us, every *man* on this island is out killing the wraiths.

TOWNIE 07: Yeah, which is something we shouldn't have to do.

TOWNIE 08: And *wouldn't* have to do if we hadn't been saddled with an army unit full of bimbos.

CAYLEY: With all due respect, sir, we're not bimbos.

(She gestured towards Sika.)

CAYLEY: She's a fully trained airborne warrior and the good lady the other side of me is ranked officer.

TOWNIE 06: You're still bimbos!

TOWNIE 07: You're cock thimbles, not soldiers.

CAYLEY: I can assure you...

TOWNIE 09: Don't even try it. Women are shit soldiers. Especially when they're only chosen because they're fit.

TOWNIE 08: Yeah, your general told us as much himself. You're only here so he can fuck fit birds when he's on leave!

CAYLEY: Well, the general is entitled to his words, but you can rest assured my colleagues and I are extremely capable.

(Townie 07 laughed to himself, full in the delusion that he was about to make the world's funniest joke.)

TOWNIE 07: Yeah, capable of sucking my cock!

(Silence descended as the townie shrunk with shame.)

TOWNIE 07: Um...

(Cayley looked to Townie 08 and forced a reassuring smile.)

CAYLEY: Anyway...

(Townie 08 looked considerably flustered.)

TOWNIE 08: Look, never mind *that* silly fucker, point is...

TOWNIE 07: Silly fucker?

TOWNIE 08: You heard me!

(Townie 07 pouted.)

TOWNIE 07: Yeah, cheers, dad.

(Townie 08 snarled at Cayley.)

TOWNIE 08: Listen here, you pointless whore...

(Suddenly, the sound of a rampaging wraith hoard filled the air. Stunned by the hideous racket the wraiths were making, the townsmen all spun to their side to see a large group of one hundred beetle-like wraiths charging along the cliff top towards them.)

TOWNIE 06: Wraith stampede!!!

TOWNIE 07: Ready your swords!!!

TOWNIE 09: Don't be afraid, chaps!!!

TOWNIE 08: Afraid? I'm never afraid!

TOWNIE 09: That's crap, you were afraid *yesterday*!

TOWNIE 08: I thought I saw a shark!

TOWNIE 09: We were in the pub!

TOWNIE 08: So, I'd have a few.

(He rolled his eyes.)

TOWNIE 08: Point is, let's be ready to dispatch these fiends!

(While the group of townsmen stood there *talking* about being ready, however, the girls of the 123<sup>rd</sup> regiment were already on the move. Leading the fight, Nivea had started her trademark spin while Sika and Cayley flew either side of her, picking off any wraiths who dared try to pass her.)

TOWNIE 07: We're being put to shame by wenches here, men!

TOWNIE 09: I'm not standing for that! Let's go home!

TOWNIE 06: No, you idiot! Let's fight!

TOWNIE 08: Quite right! Let's show these sluts how real soldiers fight.

TOWNIE 06: *Retired* soldiers!

TOWNIE 08: Well, whatever. Let's go.

(With that, three of them charged into the fray, reluctantly followed by Townie 09.)

TOWNIE 06: We'll soon show...

(Before even reaching the melee, he then had to leap back to avoid Nivea's spinning blade.)

TOWNIE 06: Careful, whore!

(His fellow townies helped scoop him up then they raced around the side of the hoard, to begin slaying the wraiths at the back. Continuing their plans, Sika, Cayley and Nivea tried their damndest to ignore their unwanted assistance and retain their formation. With the magic from her two flying allies keeping the wraiths at bay, therefore unable to swamp her, Nivea was cutting through them swiftly. As she came to the end of the pack, however, she had to relent her spin to avoid culling an interfering townsman. Thankfully, she was swift enough with regular sword attacks to help Cayley and Sika kill off the remainder.)

CAYLEY: Nice alert work, Nivea.

NIVEA: Thanks, ma'am.

(The townie she'd managed to avoid culling glared back at them harshly.)

TOWNIE 06: That was rubbish! You stopped spinning far too early.

(As Nivea gritted her teeth and clenched her fists, fighting the urge to remind him it was his own fault, the townie scoffed.)

TOWNIE 06: Just goes to prove our point, doesn't it? Unlike us hardened veterans, you bitches are *not* soldiers.

(Cayley just glanced over his shoulder and bit her lip.)

CAYLEY: Are your friends, okay?

(Giving her a suspicious glance, Townie 06 raised an eyebrow then glanced over his shoulder. Much to his dismay, Townie 08 and Townie 07 were covered in blood and writhing in agony.)

TOWNIE 06: What are you idiots doing?

CAYLEY: No harm done, I'll heal them.

TOWNIE 06: You'll do no such thing, wench! We don't need your help!

(Townie 07, however, begged to differ.)

TOWNIE 07: Shut the fuck up, Howard.

TOWNIE 08: Just let them heal us; it's the least they can do!

(Cayley smiled then paced over and knelt between them, placing a hand on both of them at the same time.)

CAYLEY: It's a good thing you're *hardened* veterans really, these injuries look painful.

(She smiled.)

CAYLEY: Still... all healed now.

(She stood up then returned to Nivea and Sika. Watching her, Townie 08 climbed to his feet and sneered under his breath.)

TOWNIE 08: Bitch.

(He helped Townie 07 to his feet then shook his head.)

TOWNIE 08: Come on, men. Let's kill the wraiths somewhere else. Them sluts are getting in our way here.

TOWNIE 06: Yeah, we...

(He then looked about himself in bewilderment.)

TOWNIE 06: Hey... where's Barry?

(The townies looked around then shrugged at one another.)

TOWNIE 07: You don't think the wraiths...

(Unable to resist, Nivea spoke over them.)

NIVEA: Your mate left already!

TOWNIE 06: Left?

NIVEA: Yeah. Fast runner, isn't he?

(Townie 06 looked stumped.)

TOWNIE 06: Runner?

NIVEA: Yeah. He ran away... crying.

(Sika smirked.)

SIKA: He was crying, was he? I couldn't hear any crying... unsurprising though really, what with all that screaming he was doing.

(Townie 08 looked coyly to his two comrades then gestured to the woods with his head.)

TOWNIE 08: Right... well... let's go gentlemen.

(Wearing angered frowns, the three townsmen then shuffled away uneasily towards the trees, glancing back bitterly every few moments before disappearing into the darkness from whence they came. A few seconds after they'd vanished, unable to hold it in any longer, Cayley, Nivea and Sika all started to laugh.)

SIKA: Wow. They sure showed us a thing or two.

CAYLEY: Totally. I mean, *that*, bitches, is how seasoned veterans get fatally wounded. We learned a valuable lesson there.

NIVEA: Absolutely. That was an object lesson in how to look a complete incompetent dick!

CAYLEY: No, no, *we* were the incompetent ones. We're just sluts remember, they're real soldiers. So it must have been *our* fault they got wounded.

SIKA: In that case, healing them *was* the least you could do. Like they said.

NIVEA: Well they were *right* to be mad. We did mess up their fight by killing all the enemies, don't forget.

CAYLEY: Wow. We really *are* bitches. Fancy doing that.

(They all shared highly amused glances then looked along the cliff top.)  
CAYLEY: Now where were we?  
NIVEA: I was about to slap Sika I think.  
(Sika leant back.)  
SIKA: No! We got past that!  
NIVEA: Ah yeah, I squashed your hand instead.  
SIKA: Yeah, I could have died!  
(Nivea and Cayley gave her a sideways glance.)  
SIKA: Maybe not then...  
(She grinned awkwardly.)  
SIKA: Let's go and kill more wraiths!  
(As she paced away, Nivea and Cayley shared a grin.)  
CAYLEY: Let's do that!  
(Pacing after her, Nivea mused outwardly.)  
NIVEA: Sika's cute in her own, conceited, annoying way.  
CAYLEY: She is.  
NIVEA: It'd be a shame to strangle something that cute.  
CAYLEY: Then try not to.  
NIVEA: I'll do my best not to...  
(She chuckled.)  
NIVEA: It says something when you have to *try* not to strangle someone, doesn't it?  
CAYLEY: Yeah it does... it says Sika's nearby.

---

On a beach over the other side of the island at this time, Ambre stood in deep concentration with her eyes closed. Having summoned Fluffy and commanded him to do a very quiet whistle she was now concentrating on keeping him healed. Guarding her by the water's edge, and helping Kasira destroy the wraiths that Fluffy had attracted, Soapy couldn't help smiling. This tactic was attracting just enough wraiths with every whistle to maximise her enjoyment.  
SOAPY: This is awesome!  
(Chopping and slashing at wraiths, Kasira replied in amazement.)  
KASIRA: It is?  
SOAPY: I love killing stuff.  
KASIRA: Psycho!  
SOAPY: And proud!  
(She exhaled.)  
SOAPY: I'm glad you decided to use Fluffy after all, this is great fun.  
KASIRA: Well, it made sense. The wraiths are much more spread out here and it saves us chasing after them.  
SOAPY: I don't think Ambre was happy about not getting to use her new skill though.  
KASIRA: She'll be fine.  
(Having just blasted several more wraiths, Soapy glanced at Ambre then resumed fighting.)  
SOAPY: She's really in the zone tonight.  
KASIRA: She's always in the zone; she's brilliant at what she does...  
(She then grimaced.)  
KASIRA: When idiots like me don't shout her name and put her off.  
SOAPY: Yeah, you suck. Good thing *I'm* competent.  
(Kasira glared at her.)  
KASIRA: Are you really looking for a discussion about mistakes?  
(Soapy blushed and shied away.)

SOAPY: No thanks.

KASIRA: I didn't think so.

(With that, she despatched the last wraith of that particular group and stood tall.)

KASIRA: All done for that bunch, Ambre.

(Deep in concentration, Ambre didn't hear her. Kasira rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: You know the drill, Soapy.

(Soapy furrowed her brow.)

SOAPY: Again?

KASIRA: Just do it, please.

(Soapy pouted then tapped Ambre hard on the shoulder before diving swiftly to the ground.

Shocked by the tapping, Ambre screamed then lashed out in her direction. Opening her eyes, she glanced down and saw Soapy staring up at her from the sand.)

SOAPY: Really? Every time, Ambre!

(Ambre glanced down at her and blushed.)

AMBRE: Sorry. It frightens me when you do that.

(She pulled Soapy to her feet then smiled.)

AMBRE: I haven't hit you yet though, so that's nice.

SOAPY: Keep it that way!

AMBRE: Well rather than tapping me, you could just *place* your hand on my shoulder and tell me I can stop. That's what Kasira normally does.

(Soapy furrowed her brow then glared at a grinning Kasira.)

SOAPY: Oh, does she now?

KASIRA: Hey, don't get stropky. I never told you to tap her on the shoulder like that.

SOAPY: You didn't tell me *not* to either! Four times I've had to dive into the dirt...

(She sighed.)

SOAPY: This dress is going to be ruined.

(Ambre also pouted.)

AMBRE: Just like my favourite skirt.

(She held out the tear in her hem and sighed.)

AMBRE: I hope Cayley can fix it for me.

(Kasira paced over to them both looking thoughtful.)

KASIRA: Okay, so far so good I reckon. Using Fluffy like this, we're making steady progress.

AMBRE: With Nivea in their group the other three will be quicker though probably.

SOAPY: We should hurry up then; I don't wanna lose to Sika!

(She shrugged.)

SOAPY: I'd imagine she'd be unbearable.

KASIRA: Well yeah, she would, you're not wrong. Not that her opinion would matter, it's not a contest and I'm not going to rush. We'll go as quickly as our means allow.

(She nodded firmly.)

KASIRA: We're not gonna do a half-arsed job just because Sika will be unbearably smug if they get half way round the island before we do.

SOAPY: Okay.

KASIRA: I mean, if they do get half way first, it could just mean they faced less wraiths.

AMBRE: But if we get halfway first we can have a rest while we wait!

KASIRA: No. If we get there first, we'll keep going until we meet up with them.

AMBRE: Wow, that doesn't seem fair. Whoever gets halfway first has to do more work then!

SOAPY: That'll be fine by me if it's us. I like killing stuff.

AMBRE: There's no way in the world it'll be us. They've got Nivea, which means they'll be much faster... and have to do more work.

(She beamed.)

AMBRE: Yay!

KASIRA: Anyway, let's head to the end of this beach then call the next batch of wraiths. Come on.

(As they started to head away, Soapy looked at some of the wraiths up on the top of the beach further down then glanced out to sea.)

SOAPY: I wonder why fish didn't become wraiths. Land is so dangerous sometimes, but the sea is perfectly safe.

AMBRE: There's sharks in the sea!

SOAPY: Sharks are harmless. They can smell magic from miles away and won't come near. They only ever attack land-bound humans.

KASIRA: Yay for us.

AMBRE: They attack swift humans too.

SOAPY: Don't go in the sea then.

AMBRE: I'm not going to.

(Just then, they heard a male voice echo out from the cliffs behind them. Having taken a glance over their shoulders as they paced on, they all faced forwards again.)

SOAPY: Do you think that was a cry for help?

AMBRE: Might have been.

KASIRA: Might *not* have been! Men do like to shout. A lot!

AMBRE: Yeah, men are rubbish.

SOAPY: But if it *was* a cry for help... maybe we should...

KASIRA: That noise could have come from anywhere, Soapy. I'm not going to run back hunting for some guy when, chances are, he was just being a typical loud man!

SOAPY: Okay, I just thought, you know, duty wise...

KASIRA: Our duty is to kill wraiths, Soapy. We're doing that! All the townspeople have to do is stay indoors and leave us to it. So, if some idiot man thinks he can do better and goes out and gets himself killed then that's his own look out.

(She nodded.)

KASIRA: We cleared the town for the townsfolk, and if we see a townspeople in trouble we'll save them, but I'm not going to turn back just because someone, somewhere yelled something.

AMBRE: He might just have been yelling at his wife. They do that.

KASIRA: He could have been yelling at anything, men are loud and annoying.

(Soapy bit her lip.)

SOAPY: They're annoying here, no denying that... but I got on well with most boys in my class.

KASIRA: Oh, don't get me wrong, Soapy. I *like* some men, I really do. I just can't abide how they treat female soldiers.

AMBRE: They're mean to us!

KASIRA: They are.

(She half smiled.)

KASIRA: It'll be different once we've left the army though. We'll get a lot more respect then.

AMBRE: We will?

KASIRA: Yeah.

AMBRE: Yay!

KASIRA: And hopefully... with any luck... I dunno...

(She shrugged.)

KASIRA: I'd like to meet a nice guy, get married and settled down some day. Maybe have a few kids... in fact, definitely.

SOAPY: I don't want to have kids.

KASIRA: Good thing too, you're fifteen!

SOAPY: I mean when I'm older.

KASIRA: You say that, but you might change your mind when you're older. I didn't think I'd ever want any when I was younger but now... yeah, I do.

(Ambre puffed out heavily.)

AMBRE: You're so lucky, Kasira.

KASIRA: What?

AMBRE: I wish I could meet a nice guy and settle down.

KASIRA: It hasn't happened yet, Ambre.

AMBRE: Yeah, but it might.

KASIRA: And it might happen to you too.

(Ambre furrowed her brow.)

AMBRE: Yeah right. Stop patronising me!

(Kasira looked astonished.)

KASIRA: I wasn't!

SOAPY: How was she patronising you?

AMBRE: Men don't fall in love with stupid girls!

KASIRA: Of course they do!

SOAPY: Yeah... stupid men, mostly!

KASIRA: Soapy!

SOAPY: What?

(Kasira rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: Men do fall in love with stupid girls. Not that I'm saying you're stupid...

AMBRE: We both know I'm not exactly a genius, Kasira.

KASIRA: That's not the point, Ambre. Men love beautiful girls, and you're most definitely that! You're going to be really popular with the men when we get back to my hometown.

(Ambre looked terrified.)

AMBRE: I don't want that!

KASIRA: Well tough, you're a sexy woman, Ambre. Of all of us six in the unit, you're going to be the one who has least trouble getting a boyfriend.

SOAPY: Yeah, you lucky sod. You'll be able to have your pick!

(Ambre looked uncertain.)

AMBRE: You mean... I'll get to choose?

KASIRA: Yeah... from the ones who like you. Which will be most of them.

AMBRE: Wow!

(She looked to Kasira nervously.)

AMBRE: So I might be able to have my own family and stuff?

KASIRA: Absolutely!

AMBRE: And I won't have to grow old in your basement?

(Kasira looked stumped.)

KASIRA: My basement? Why would you grow old in there???

AMBRE: I just thought that once you found a nice man and had kids, I'd have to step aside, you know? Nobody wants a retarded gazelle in their house!

KASIRA: Oh, Ambre, that's madness.

SOAPY: Oh, I dunno, I wouldn't want a retarded gazelle charging around my living room.

KASIRA: Pipe down, Soapy.

(Soapy pouted.)



SOAPY: Fine.

KASIRA: Ambre, you're my best friend and I'm legally responsible for you. No matter what happens, you'll be part of my family.

AMBRE: Even if your husband and kids hate me?

KASIRA: I wouldn't marry a guy who hated you and my kids will love you.

(Soapy smiled.)

SOAPY: I can definitely see that.

AMBRE: You can?

(Ambre couldn't help smiling.)

AMBRE: I'm looking forward to that now.

(Kasira exhaled.)

KASIRA: Me too. Hopefully my husband will be tall, dark, well-read, with a tight body and a large...

(She then looked at Soapy and grimaced.)

KASIRA: Hat!

SOAPY: I'm fifteen, not five. You were talking about his penis!

KASIRA: I was not!

AMBRE: You want a guy with a large hat? Like a stovepipe?

(Kasira hid her face.)

KASIRA: Just, drop it.

SOAPY: She was going to say "penis" Ambre!

(Ambre looked peeved.)

AMBRE: General Wilson has one of those!

SOAPY: So do all men!

AMBRE: I know that!

(Kasira cut over her looking peeved.)

KASIRA: That'll do! Enough about men's... thingies!

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: Summon Fluffy again, Ambre. This looks like a decent spot for a cull.

(Ambre saluted.)

AMBRE: Yes, captain!

KASIRA: That's my girl. Keep up the good work. You too, Soapy. We've done brilliantly so far. Long may it continue.

SOAPY: Ma'am!

(Once again, Fluffy appeared and gave out a quiet whistle to attract the small group of wraiths at the top of the beach. Another skirmish in what looked like proving a lengthy battle had begun.)

---

Elsewhere on the island at this time, Nivea found herself spinning as she paced forth down a secluded beach, cutting through a large hoard of mostly passive wraiths. Backing her up from above, Sika and Cayley continued their usual role of taking out the wraiths from the sky. With this particular group seemingly disinterested in fighting, it was proving to be rather easy and Sika looked somewhat fed up.)

SIKA: She's cutting through them like butter and they're not even reacting until it's too late.

CAYLEY: If only all wraiths were like that!

SIKA: You reckon? This is boring!

CAYLEY: Boring?

SIKA: Yeah, normally I'm looking to take out the one that looks the biggest threat, but this lot are just pathetic.

CAYLEY: At least Nivea is in no danger!

SIKA: See? Another downside!

(Nivea then yelled up from below.)

NIVEA: I heard that, you little shit!

SIKA: I was kidding. Got to do something to pass the time, these wraiths are lame.

(She sighed then glanced to Cayley.)

SIKA: You have to admit, this is really dull!

(Cayley's eyes bulged and she yelled at her.)

CAYLEY: Careful!!!

(Sika reeled back from her slightly then let out a scream. Having lost concentration, she'd flown too close to Nivea. Feeling herself being sucked into the vortex, she flapped her wings furiously.)

SIKA: Nivea, stop!!!

NIVEA: I can't, I've got wraiths on me!!!

(Sweating profusely, Sika grimaced and flapped harder and harder until she managed to pull herself clear.)

SIKA: It's okay! I'm safe!

CAYLEY: You idiot, Sika! Pay attention, will you?

(Sika pouted.)

SIKA: I was...

CAYLEY: You weren't! You were looking at me and complaining!

(Nivea shook her head.)

NIVEA: If I'd have stopped then, I'd have been savaged!

(Sika furrowed her brow.)

SIKA: Can't believe you *weren't* gonna stop!

NIVEA: I'd have stopped, of course I would. But it would have fucking hurt!!!

(Sika hung her head.)

SIKA: Sorry!

CAYLEY: Look where you're going!!!

(Sika glanced up swiftly.)

SIKA: Okay, okay!

(She pouted and continued about her work.)

SIKA: Sorry, guys. I'm a bit tired.

NIVEA: It's fine, just... pay attention for your own safety. I don't want you getting hurt.

CAYLEY: Nor do I.

(She nodded.)

CAYLEY: Okay, if you're tired we can take five once we've despatched this lot.

NIVEA: Sounds like a plan!

SIKA: We can't! We need to beat Kasira, Ambre and Soapy!

CAYLEY: It's not a contest!!! How many times?

SIKA: Fine, okay. Just a *short* break then!

CAYLEY: I could use a breather too, actually. This *is* tiring.

NIVEA: No kidding.

(She smiled.)

NIVEA: It's kinda fun though!

(With that, her sword clanged into what felt like a giant rock. A vibration ricocheted up her arm and she staggered backwards. Swiftly taking out the wraiths around the side of the rock, Cayley's jaw dropped.)

CAYLEY: Where did that spring from???

SIKA: It just appeared!

(The rock was in fact a Saxum, just like Ambre's familiar, Fluffy. Assisting in clearing the rest of the wraiths around it, Nivea sneered.)

NIVEA: Stop pissing about, Ambre!

CAYLEY: Ambre isn't here!

NIVEA: Then why is Fluffy here?

SIKA: Yeah, that's Fluffy!

(As the rock-man took a swing at Nivea, however, Sika rapidly changed her mind.)

SIKA: Apparently, I lied! That's not Fluffy! Fluffy doesn't attack us!

(Nivea snarled as she ducked and swayed to avoid large, rock-like fists.)

NIVEA: It's a Saxum. Just like Fluffy; a wraith but formed into rock!

CAYLEY: And nobody's controlling it!

SIKA: Well, that can't be good! What are we gonna do?

CAYLEY: Just polish off the last few wraiths, Sika. I'll help Nivea.

(Nivea looked baffled.)

NIVEA: Help me do what? I'm just dodging it! My sword isn't going to hurt it!

CAYLEY: No, but if you can keep it busy, I can keep you healed while we think of a way to kill it!

(Sika polished off the last few wraiths then looked to her two seniors urgently.)

SIKA: Let *me* attack it!

CAYLEY: Like I'd stop you!

(Sika nodded then released her whirlwind-like magic. As the energy swirled around the sizeable, solid giant, it simply ignored it and carried on trying to crush Nivea with its massive hands.)

NIVEA: Useful!

SIKA: Now what?

CAYLEY: Keep defending! We'll think of something!

(Being forced into a retreat back down the beach, Sika looked furious.)

SIKA: We're going backwards. This is a disaster. I don't wanna lose to Soapy, guys! She seems like the boastful sort!

(Cayley gave her a sideways glance.)

CAYLEY: It's not a contest!!!!

NIVEA: And, oh my fucking god, *you* can talk!

SIKA: Just saying!

CAYLEY: Look, stop worrying about that and try to think of something!

(Sika looked stumped.)

SIKA: He's a rock man. Our magic is useless and so is Nivea's sword!

NIVEA: She's a helpful bugger!

SIKA: I was just thinking out loud! Maybe we can outsmart it somehow!

NIVEA: How?

SIKA: I dunno!

CAYLEY: The annoying thing is, these things rarely spawn outside of swift human land, and even then they're rare. The chances of one of these spawning was ridiculously small!

NIVEA: Not our lucky night, is it?

CAYLEY: Not at all, to get one of these here, its remnants must have blown all the way from swift human lands, and that's thousands of miles away.

(She looked extremely worried.)

CAYLEY: Unless a Saxum was killed nearby...

(Sika and Nivea looked highly alarmed as they paced back on the defensive.)

NIVEA: You mean? That might be Fluffy re-spawned?

SIKA: No way. Ambre...

(Cayley looked relieved.)

CAYLEY: No, it can't be Fluffy!

SIKA: It can't?

CAYLEY: No! Fluffy was fine when the haze broke. And wraiths don't re-spawn *that* fast!

NIVEA: No, you're right. If Fluffy had died tonight, then he wouldn't re-spawn for like 24 hours at least.

CAYLEY: Exactly.

(Sika wiped a worried tear.)

SIKA: That scared me then, I thought Ambre might have been...

CAYLEY: I'm sure Ambre's fine, babes, Kasira would never let anything happen to her.

NIVEA: Well, now that's established we can concentrate on stopping it from trying to splat me!

(They immediately shared a troubled glance as Nivea continued to duck, bob and weave to avoid the rampaging stone fiend. Pacing backwards, they had no idea how to stop it.)

SIKA: What are we gonna do???

CAYLEY: Keep firing magic at it!

NIVEA: Yeah, keep doing that, maybe your repeated futile gesture will confuse it!

CAYLEY: Well have you got a better idea?

NIVEA: No but firing magic at it isn't working!!! You might as well call it names!!!

(Sika looked determined.)

SIKA: It's worth a try! Hey, stone-head, you're mum's so fat, when she drinks milk she starts sweating yoghurt!

NIVEA: Insulting it won't help!!!

SIKA: It might! It might make a mistake if I piss it off!

NIVEA: If you wanna piss it off, just be yourself!

SIKA: Hey!

CAYLEY: I don't understand the yoghurt reference!

SIKA: It's 'cause she's... doesn't matter! How are we gonna stop it then?

CAYLEY: I don't know!

NIVEA: Well, we'll have to think of something, we'll end up back in town at this rate!!!

(Suddenly and inexplicably, the Saxum then about turned and charged towards the top of the beach. Lowering her sword, Nivea drew a deep sigh of relief.)

NIVEA: Thank fuck for that!

SIKA: Wait, where's it going?

NIVEA: Away from *me*! That's all I care about.

CAYLEY: It's attacking the wraiths in that massive group over there!

(They all shared a bewildered glance.)

SIKA: Can it handle that many?

NIVEA: Maybe, they're bloody strong!

CAYLEY: Not strong enough to handle that many though. If Ambre doesn't heal hers they can knock it over and dismantle it.

SIKA: Yeah, hundreds of wraiths on mass are bloody strong.

CAYLEY: I just wanna know why it suddenly switched from us to the wraiths.

(She glanced down the beach then her face lit up.)

CAYLEY: That'll be why then!

(On the beach before them, Kasira and Soapy were guiding Ambre forth. Ambre had her eyes firmly fixed on the Saxum she was controlling.)

CAYLEY: I know she already said this herself but, to think we were gonna leave Ambre behind.

(Sika beamed.)

SIKA: Ambre's awesome!

(Her face then dropped.)

SIKA: Wait! Does this mean they've won? We're only about a third of the way round the island!

CAYLEY: It's not a contest!

NIVEA: It's not a... you heard her!

(As Sika pouted, they watched the Saxum get toppled over under the weight of numerous wraiths.)

CAYLEY: And... thud!

(They then smiled to each other as the wraiths proceeded to fiercely savage the floored rock man, separating its limbs from its body, rendering it nothing but a pile of useless boulders.)

NIVEA: So that's how you kill a Saxum! Good to know.

CAYLEY: Yup! And more importantly, it looks like we've cleared the coastline already.

SIKA: Yeah... well done us.

(As Kasira, Ambre and Soapy finally caught up with them, Sika blushed.)

SIKA: You win!

KASIRA: It wasn't a contest!

CAYLEY: We kept telling her that!

(Soapy smirked and looked to Sika, mouthing "we won" and pointing to herself.)

SIKA: It wasn't a contest!!!

CAYLEY: Finally! The penny drops!

SIKA: No, I was telling Soapy!

SOAPY: I *knew* it wasn't a contest!

SIKA: Why, you little...

(Not about to let them stand there and argue, Kasira swiftly spoke over Sika.)

KASIRA: Anyway, we've cleared the coast now. Well done, girls. I think we should take five here.

NIVEA: I like that idea.

KASIRA: Let's sit on the sand for a bit. We'll have a breather then discuss our tactics for clearing the rest of the island.

(Unsurprisingly, she received no arguments.)

---

Sat around in a semi circle on the beach, facing inland as to remove the risk of any surprise attacks, the six young ladies of the 123<sup>rd</sup> regiment all looked somewhat worn out. It hadn't seemed like they'd been fighting for very long, but time had actually flown past. They were now just on the other side of midnight and there was still much work to be done. That realisation had been somewhat deflating for all. They'd thought they'd gone extremely quickly but alas they had not. They'd simply been busy and hadn't noticed time rocket past. Checking the position of the moon and the stars for a fifth time, Nivea furrowed her brow. She, more than anyone, was greatly concerned by the speed of their progress.)

NIVEA: I thought we'd been at it for like two hours tops!

SIKA: Same here!

NIVEA: And yet it's gone midnight.

KASIRA: Crazy, isn't it?

NIVEA: It's worrying. I'm no use to anyone after the sun comes up.

SIKA: Or before!

(As Sika screamed, a natural reaction to being pounced on by Nivea, Kasira bit her lip.)

KASIRA: That's a good point. We're gonna be a woman down after sunset.

SOAPY: What are we waiting for then? Let's get going.

KASIRA: Hold your horses, Soapy. We need a breather!  
SOAPY: We've had like three minutes already!  
CAYLEY: And we'll take a couple more.  
KASIRA: Yeah, you really need to learn to pace yourself.  
(She rolled her eyes.)  
KASIRA: You too, Nivea. Get off of her and relax for a couple of minutes!  
(Nivea sighed.)  
NIVEA: Fine!  
(As she got up and sat back in her cosy spot on the sand, Sika pushed her breast back into her top and sat up.)  
SIKA: Idiot!  
NIVEA: You just don't learn, do you? It's like you can't be taught!  
AMBRE: I *can* be taught! Kasira said!  
NIVEA: Not you!  
(She gestured to Sika.)  
NIVEA: Her! I always do the same thing to her when she's lippy but she never learns not to antagonise me.  
SIKA: But it's fun to antagonise you!  
(Nivea laughed.)  
NIVEA: And it's fun attacking your boobs! Guess everyone's a winner!  
SIKA: Except my boobs!  
(Nivea grinned.)  
NIVEA: No, they're definitely not winners! They came fifth, in fact!  
SIKA: Hey!!!  
(She pouted.)  
SIKA: They might not be fifth. We need to measure Soapy's.  
SOAPY: What?  
KASIRA: What's the point? Soapy's are clearly bigger!  
SIKA: You don't know that!  
CAYLEY: Looks to me like she might even run Ambre close!  
SIKA: Rubbish! Her boobs aint *that* big!  
(Soapy pouted and covered her chest.)  
SOAPY: Do you mind?  
SIKA: As soon as we get back, we're measuring *them*!  
SOAPY: No we're not!  
NIVEA: Oh, go on, Soapy, it'll be funny seeing Sika squirm again!  
SOAPY: No!  
KASIRA: Leave the girl alone!  
(She rolled her eyes.)  
KASIRA: Look, let's discuss what we're gonna do next.  
CAYLEY: Sounds good to me.  
KASIRA: Before we do that though...  
(She looked to Soapy.)  
KASIRA: Outstanding work so far, soldier.  
SOAPY: Of course.  
KASIRA: And Ambre?  
AMBRE: Yeah?  
KASIRA: You've been brilliant tonight. More than held your own. I'm very proud of you.  
(Ambre blushed.)  
AMBRE: Thanks, Kasira.

(Cayley smiled.)

CAYLEY: Nivea's been solid too. Must be shattering doing that spin for hours on end.

(Nivea shrugged.)

NIVEA: I didn't realise it'd been that long, to be honest. Thanks though.

KASIRA: So, well done everyone.

(Sika folded her arms and pouted.)

SIKA: Why does nobody ever single *me* out for praise?

(Receiving several cold glances, Sika winced and looked away.)

SIKA: Yeah, okay.

KASIRA: Moving swiftly on, we're gonna stick together from hereon in. We'll go as a party of six. I'm thinking we should fight our way to the top of the hill then reassess our options from up there.

(She glanced up at the top of the hill.)

KASIRA: It won't be easy as you can see!

(Staring up the hill, barely visible under a sea of wraiths, everyone nodded solemnly.)

KASIRA: I suggest we take it easy. Work hard but don't rush it. We'll have to be careful.

AMBRE: Shall I use Fluffy or my new skill?

KASIRA: The new skill. Individual attack skills only.

(Ambre beamed.)

AMBRE: Yay!

KASIRA: Now...

(She pulled a water bottle from her bag.)

KASIRA: You all brought water, I assume.

NIVEA: Of course!

SIKA: We're not stupid.

(Ambre slowly raised her hand.)

AMBRE: Actually...

KASIRA: You forgot to bring water?

AMBRE: No! I was raising my hand to say if anyone forgot theirs, they can share mine!

KASIRA: Oh. Good girl.

(She smiled.)

KASIRA: Drink some water, girls. We'll get moving in a minute.

(She sighed.)

KASIRA: It's gonna be a long night.

(With that, they all looked up the hill again and sighed.)

---

Feeling slightly refreshed, the girls of the 123<sup>rd</sup> regiment left the beach and began their way up the hill, culling everything before them. Working in a line, with Ambre just behind, they cleared their way through the grasslands at the top of the beach then continued on through a clump of trees. Concentrating hard and taking care to watch each other's backs, they made steady progress. Being the fastest killers, Kasira and Nivea worked at the extremes of their line, keeping an eye open for attack from the side. The tactic was working well.

KASIRA: Everyone okay?

SIKA: Yeah, this is easy.

AMBRE: I wanna walk in a line with you guys.

KASIRA: You can't, love. You can't defend yourself.

AMBRE: I know... I just feel a bit left out, that's all.

(She pouted.)

AMBRE: And the steeper this hill gets the more I can see right up your dress, Sika!

(Sika looked peeved.)

SIKA: Concentrate on your wraith!

AMBRE: I am, but it keeps running past and... now I can see up Nivea's skirt too.

NIVEA: Feast your eyes then, babes, behold the perfection.

SIKA: I wish you hadn't told me that, Ambre. I feel really awkward knowing you're down there staring at my butt!

AMBRE: I'm not staring at it!

CAYLEY: Just relax, Sika. It's not like she's never seen your bum before.

SIKA: What are you implying???

CAYLEY: I'm not implying anything! We have a giant communal bath! We've all seen each other's bits and bobs a million times, now calm down.

SIKA: Fine.

AMBRE: And I can't see any naughty bits anyway, you've got knickers on!

(She whimpered.)

AMBRE: Unlike Nivea!

NIVEA: That's right, sister!

SIKA: Gross!

(Suddenly, the air was filled with the sound of hoards of screeching wraiths. Horrified by the sound, they all looked up saw what looked like a thousand wraiths, rampaging down the hill towards them. Not recognising what she was seeing at first, Soapy shrieked.)

SOAPY: Landslide!!!

KASIRA: No, they're wraiths!!!

(She swiftly spun round towards Ambre.)

KASIRA: Sprint to the beach and stand in the sea, that's an order!!!

AMBRE: On it!!!

(And in a blinding flash she took off like a rocket down the hill.)

KASIRA: Get in the trees, guys!!!

(Reacting swiftly, Nivea managed to scale a tree in two seconds flat. Seeing Soapy starting to scale the tree after her, Kasira raced to scale the one next to it while Sika and Cayley took to the air.)

NIVEA: Where the hell did *they* all come from?

CAYLEY: Nobody blew a wraith whistle did they?

SIKA: I didn't hear one!

NIVEA: Maybe they're running from something then. They wouldn't stampede just for the hell of it!

(Struggling up the tree after Nivea, Soapy whimpered.)

SOAPY: I'm not good at climbing trees!!!

(Nivea glanced at the rapidly advancing stampede then back down at Soapy.)

NIVEA: I'll come down and give you a hand!

SOAPY: Hurry!!!

(Nivea barely managed to move, however, when the branch Soapy was pulling at snapped in her hand.)

SOAPY: Fuck!!!

(Looking terrified, she plummeted to the ground, landing with a thud at the base of the tree.)

NIVEA: Quick, Soapy!!! They're almost here!!!

(Soapy leapt to her feet and reached for the tree again then froze in horror. The wraiths were only a matter of feet away.)

SOAPY: No!!!

NIVEA: Climb!!!



(As Soapy started to climb in a blind panic, her foot slipped down the base of the tree and she remained firmly planted on the ground.)

NIVEA: Soapy!!!

(With the wraiths only a matter of seconds away from either savaging her or trampling her to death, Soapy screamed for dear life.)

NIVEA: Someone...

(Much to Nivea's relief, just as the lead wraiths reached her with their mouths open in readiness to make the kill, Cayley swooped down and pulled Soapy up by her armpits. Only managing to lift her a few feet from the ground, Cayley tried desperately to be reassuring.)

CAYLEY: It's okay! I've got you!!!

(With her life very much flashing before her eyes still, Soapy stared down at the wraiths below her and screamed out again.)

SOAPY: Don't drop me!!!

(Cayley gritted her teeth as she struggled to lift her higher. All the while, wraiths continued to rampage beneath them, several leaping upwards as they passed in a bid to savage her.)

SOAPY: The tree!!! Take me into the tree!!!

CAYLEY: I can't! My wings will get caught up in the branches and we'll *both* fall down!

(Kasira looked to them desperately then back to the top of the hill. With no sign of the wraith stampede ending, she looked to Cayley urgently.)

KASIRA: Cayley! Fly her down to Ambre if you can!

CAYLEY: I'll try!!!

SIKA: I'll help!!!

(With that, Cayley proceeded to struggle towards the beach, flapping her wings furiously as she struggled to hold Soapy off of the ground. Looking greatly disturbed, Sika flew at her side.)

CAYLEY: Get away, Sika!

SIKA: But, you need help!

CAYLEY: You *can't* help!

SIKA: I...

CAYLEY: If you try to grab her legs the wraiths might get you!!!

SIKA: Then I'll...

CAYLEY: Then you'll do nothing!!! I can't pass her to you, I might drop her!!!

(Soapy looked horrified.)

SOAPY: Go away, Sika!!!

(As Cayley struggled on, carrying the terrified Soapy beneath her, Sika flew up a little and watched on with a pout on her lips. Praying they'd be safe, she whimpered to herself.)

SIKA: Please, don't drop her, Cayley!

(With Kasira and Nivea also watching on desperately from the trees and Ambre biting her nails in the shallow ocean, Cayley felt extremely tense. Soapy wasn't a heavy person by any means but Cayley was very much a lightweight and she didn't know how much longer she could bear the weight. She knew she could lose her grip at any moment and Soapy would plummet to her doom. Determined not to let that happen; she snarled and tightened her grip, feeling weaker and weaker by the second as she flew her towards the ocean. Soapy for her part was just staring downwards in terror, tears streaming down her face.)

SOAPY: Please don't let me die.

(Terrified by the very thought of it, Cayley whimpered back to her.)

CAYLEY: I won't. I promise.

(At that moment, Cayley felt her resolve strengthen. When she made a promise she always kept it, regardless of the situation. Having made Soapy a promise, she knew right then she couldn't fail. She wouldn't allow herself to ever be the sort of person who'd let another

human down, and having given Soapy her word, that resolve had deepened immensely. Focussed very much on keeping her promise, she growled to herself and somehow found the strength to flap her wings harder and pick up speed.)

CAYLEY: Hang in there, darling.

(Soapy pouted repeatedly at the wraiths beneath her and said nothing.)

CAYLEY: Not far now!

(Much to the relief of their four watching unit mates, Cayley soared forth, putting in one last concerted effort before depositing Soapy in the ocean, just behind Ambre. Exhausted, she then floated down and landed in the water with them.)

CAYLEY: Thank heavens.

(As wraiths rushed up to the water's edge then set about dispersing along the beach, thwarted by the salty seas, a tearful Soapy leapt to her feet and threw her arms around Cayley.)

SOAPY: Thank you, thank you... thank you so much.

(Bursting into tears, Ambre then threw her arms round both of them.)

AMBRE: You saved her!!! I love you, Cayley!

(Allowing her own tears to flow, Cayley smiled.)

CAYLEY: I did okay, didn't I?

SOAPY: You were awesome.

AMBRE: You're the best!

(Sitting up in the treetops, Kasira wiped relieved sweat from her brow then glanced across to Nivea.)

KASIRA: Well, we're all okay, that's the main thing. Trouble is, they're down there, we're up here and the hill is covered in wraiths again.

(Nivea sighed.)

NIVEA: They seem to be dispersing though, so I might be able to spin my way down to them.

KASIRA: You sure?

NIVEA: I reckon so!

KASIRA: Okay. Sika and I will cover you and we can regroup down there on the beach.

NIVEA: Sounds like a plan. Let's do this.

(With that, Kasira and Nivea scrambled down from the trees and Sika hovered down over their heads.)

NIVEA: Here goes.

(After a good ten minutes or so of carving her way back down the hill with Kasira and Sika in support, they finally reached the beach. Having taken a route that side stepped the largest groups of wraiths, it'd been a far greater chore than expected. Once in the clear, they hurried to their ally's side, all taking the opportunity to hug Soapy.)

NIVEA: Thought we'd lost you for a minute.

SOAPY: Me too!

KASIRA: Thank heavens you're okay.

(Soapy couldn't help but smile. She felt very much loved at this moment, even by her commanding officer. She couldn't even imagine her captain or tutor at the academy being so genuinely warm with her and it lifted her heart. Her captain had made it sound like joining this unit would be a horrible experience, instead she felt wanted. Her fellow soldiers were like a group of friends and her boss was not only a good soldier but a loving, caring person to boot.)

SOAPY: You guys are so amazing. I've only been here five minutes and I love you all to bits already!

NIVEA: Thanks, Soapy... though that might just be your near death experience talking.

CAYLEY: Yeah, it's amazing how much you suddenly love everyone after you thought you were gonna die.

SOAPY: No, I mean it. You girls are brilliant.  
(Ambre threw her arms around her.)  
AMBRE: I love you too, Soapy.  
SIKA: Any excuse for a hug, huh Ambre?  
AMBRE: Hugs are cool!  
(Kasira stood tall and puffed out.)  
KASIRA: Anyway, let's get back to the job in hand, ladies.  
(She sighed.)  
KASIRA: Judging by the amount of wraiths in that stampede, there's endless numbers of the little buggers still to kill.  
NIVEA: I wonder what caused that stampede anyway.  
CAYLEY: Yeah, they were running from *something*! Coming across a tasty snack like us was just a bonus.  
KASIRA: I agree. *Something* made them all charge over the hill!  
(Soapy shrugged then looked skywards and bit her lip.)  
SOAPY: Um... guys...  
SIKA: Girls, actually.  
SOAPY: Shut up!  
KASIRA: What is it, Soapy?  
SOAPY: Smoke!  
(Wearing a shocked expression, she pointed over the top of the hill in the direction of the town.)  
SOAPY: Something's on fire!  
(Staring in the direction Soapy had pointed them, everyone gasped.)  
KASIRA: Oh hell no!  
CAYLEY: That's awful!  
KASIRA: Hope it's not our base!  
SIKA: Me too! I wouldn't put it past the townsfolk to set fire to it!  
AMBRE: They'd better not have, all our stuff is in there!  
KASIRA: Relax, it could be anything. Maybe the townspeople started a fire deliberately to keep the wraiths away. Wraiths hate fire.  
SOAPY: Or maybe lanterns got tipped over in a barn!  
KASIRA: Well yeah, could be anything.  
CAYLEY: Could be. One thing that *is* for certain though is, that's what the wraiths were running from.  
AMBRE: And Soapy almost got killed because of it!  
NIVEA: Yeah, but thankfully she's okay and that fire has given me an idea!  
(Kasira nodded.)  
KASIRA: Way ahead of you, Nivea. Yeah... fire would be perfect!  
SIKA: You've lost me.  
KASIRA: We can use a wall of fire as a shield between ourselves and the wraiths.  
SIKA: But they won't even come near fire!  
KASIRA: They might if they're lured towards it by a wraith whistle.  
NIVEA: And even if they don't come past the fire, you guys can fire magic through it.  
KASIRA: Yeah, you'll be able to pick them off easily.  
AMBRE: But what if the fire we're using starts to spread? We might catch fire!  
KASIRA: We'd do it on the beach obviously, so we could escape to the sea.  
NIVEA: I reckon that's got to be worth a try!  
CAYLEY: Me too. There's so many wraiths out here, I'm willing to try anything.  
KASIRA: Okay, fire it is then!

(She'd no sooner spoken, however, when a howling wind cut across them.)

NIVEA: Bloody hell, where did that come from all of a sudden?

(As if fate was having a laugh at them, the temperature then dipped and heavy clouds blew in, blocking the moonlight.)

CAYLEY: You know what's gonna happen now, don't you?

(Kasira sighed heavily.)

KASIRA: Unfortunately, yes!

(And with that, the heavens opened. In a matter of seconds it had transformed from being a warm moonlit night into an extremely wet and windy one. Hunching her shoulders and squinting through the driving rain, Soapy pouted.)

SOAPY: So much for the fire idea!

NIVEA: Yeah, that plan's totally gone up in smoke... if you pardon the pun.

CAYLEY: Yeah. Ruined. Ruined by the witty gods.

(She snarled.)

CAYLEY: Where was this wind when we needed it? A few hours earlier and we wouldn't have been in this mess.

(She groaned.)

CAYLEY: But no, it'd be too easy to start the wind blowing when there's a haze in the sky that needs breaking up, can't do that. They have to wait until the haze is broken and we're all outside for the night. Then to add insult to injury, they decide to make it pour down with rain!

KASIRA: Typical rotten luck!

(Just then, a thick streak of lightning raced across the sky, followed by a deafening boom of thunder. Reacting instantly, Ambre screamed and dived to the sand.)

AMBRE: Help!!!

(Soapy quickly knelt by the trembling and cowering Ambre.)

SOAPY: It's okay, Ambre, it's just a storm.

SIKA: Yeah, it won't hurt you!

AMBRE: Yes it will!!!

NIVEA: Ambre, sweetheart, there's nothing to be afraid of. It's just a loud noise from the sky, it can't hurt you.

KASIRA: You're not normally afraid of thunder storms, Ambre.

AMBRE: We're normally indoors.

CAYLEY: You're just as safe outdoors, darling.

(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: No, I'm not.

SIKA: Look...

(She thought quickly.)

SIKA: Lightning is just the gods practicing their magic in the heavens.

NIVEA: Yeah, and the thunder is the gods clapping when they get it right.

(Ambre gave them both belittling stares.)

AMBRE: How old do you think I am?

SIKA: Um... five?

AMBRE: I *do* know what storms are, you know!

(She looked sheepish.)

AMBRE: Kind of!

KASIRA: Then there's no need to be afraid.

SOAPY: Yeah, thunder is harmless.

AMBRE: I know that! I'm not worried about the thunder, it's the lightning!

CAYLEY: The lightning won't hurt you either, babes.

AMBRE: You don't know that! Lightning kills loads of swift human women!

SIKA: Sure, if they're really unlucky.

AMBRE: Not unlucky! You don't understand. It's a *common* way for women to die where I come from. My antlers attract lightning!

(She pouted.)

AMBRE: You think I'm being childish and stupid but I'm not. All women in my race are terrified of lightning. So would you be if *you* had antlers!

(Kasira and Nivea looked to one another.)

KASIRA: What are we gonna do?

NIVEA: Don't worry, I know just the thing.

(With that, she ripped a large cloth from her bag.)

NIVEA: I use this to wipe my sword down, but we can use it to cover Ambre's horns.

AMBRE: Antlers!

NIVEA: Sure, them too, if we can find any!

(As Ambre looked up at her nervously from where she crouched, Nivea set about wrapping her horns up in the large cloth. Using the sharp edge of her horn to tear the cloth in two, she managed to conceal them both perfectly.)

NIVEA: There you go!

AMBRE: Yay; thanks Nivea!

KASIRA: And that'll work will it?

AMBRE: Yeah, my mum used to wrap her antlers up all the time during storms. I've actually got a set of antler covers at the base but I didn't bring them.

KASIRA: Superb. That's sorted that out then.

NIVEA: Not really. I'm carrying a bloody great metal sword. That's just asking to be struck by lightning.

(Kasira glanced down at her metal blades and grimaced.)

KASIRA: I hadn't thought of that!

NIVEA: What are we gonna do?

(Kasira shrugged.)

KASIRA: Soldier on! Well, I am. If you wanna sit it out until the storm dies down...

NIVEA: No, it's okay. I'll risk it.

KASIRA: You sure?

NIVEA: Positive.

KASIRA: Okay then!

(With that, Kasira stared back up the hill.)

KASIRA: Okay then, ladies. Hill attempt number two. This time in the pissing rain with the ground turning to mud beneath our feet. Ready?

SOAPY: Sure. My dress is ruined anyway!

SIKA: I'm good to go.

KASIRA: Then let's do this!

---

Out on the calm ocean at this time, a military ship sat anchored a few miles off of the Capsway Island coast. Inside the luxurious main quarters, at deck level, two well built men stared from the window, towards the island. Wearing a knowing smile, the older one, General Wilson, nodded to himself as he watched the elements batter the island.

WILSON: The island's taking quite a pounding from the looks of things. Looks like I was right to drop anchor.

(His subordinate, Ellis, nodded.)

ELLIS: Yeah, approaching the island would be risky in a storm like that.

WILSON: Absolutely. We'll head for land in the morning instead.

(He shrugged then headed for a comfy armchair.)

WILSON: I mean, it's not like anyone's expecting me.

(He gave a stifled laugh.)

WILSON: Nor would they be pleased to see me.

ELLIS: No?

(Taking a seat, Wilson gave Ellis a baffled glance.)

WILSON: No, they...

(He then gave a conceding nod.)

WILSON: I forgot you were new.

(He gestured to the seat opposite him.)

WILSON: Please, sit!

ELLIS: Why, thank you, sir.

(Wilson watched him sit down then leant his elbow on the arm of his chair.)

WILSON: No, the unit on there don't like me one bit.

(A smile appeared, washing across his face.)

WILSON: Not one bit!

ELLIS: How come, sir? If you don't mind me asking.

WILSON: Mind? Not at all!

(He exhaled.)

WILSON: You see, I have a home on the island... you know that. I told you that when you agreed to be my bodyguard for the trip.

ELLIS: Yes, it's where you take all your leave.

WILSON: That's right.

(He beamed.)

WILSON: I like to play a little darts and drink with the locals at the inn there, but most of all, I like visiting the 123<sup>rd</sup> regiment.

ELLIS: You do?

WILSON: I do. You see, they're no ordinary group of soldiers, Ellis. They were handpicked by either myself or friends of mine who know what I like.

(He exhaled and placed his hands behind his head comfortably.)

WILSON: They're the most incredibly sexy gathering of troops you'll ever see.

(Ellis looked nervous.)

ELLIS: They're women... right?

(Wilson furrowed his brow.)

WILSON: Of course, they are! What do you take me for???

ELLIS: Sorry!

WILSON: Not just ordinary women though. Beautiful, sexy women with legs up to their arses and tits that make a man glad he's a man.

(He beamed.)

WILSON: During my stays on the island I make sure they all get a damn good seeing too. Every single one of them.

ELLIS: Really?

WILSON: Of course. And a new one joined a few days ago, so I'm told. I can't wait to sample *her* wares, I can tell you.

(He nodded.)

WILSON: Six choice fillies there for the fucking. I do enjoy my leave.

ELLIS: Wow.

WILSON: Wow, indeed.

ELLIS: And they just put out for you do they? Willing sex slaves?

(Wilson scoffed.)

WILSON: Willing, my arse!

(He gave a stifled laugh.)

WILSON: Good god, no. They resist as best they can but I always get my way.

(Ellis looked somewhat uncomfortable as Wilson elaborated.)

WILSON: Thing is, Ellis, I assembled that unit for a reason. I want to fuck beautiful women when I'm on leave. It's what I like doing on my days off. I'm a man.

(He sighed.)

WILSON: But they don't see it that way. Especially the leader. Kasira her name is.

(He rolled his eyes.)

WILSON: So, they make me dance a merry dance before I get what I want.

(He then tipped his head back proudly.)

WILSON: But I *always* get what I want. It's what makes me a good general. It's why the army awarded me such a high rank. I see what I want and I make it happen.

ELLIS: I see. And how do you make them... you know?

WILSON: Simple. I take what I want from them. If they won't comply then that's where you come in.

ELLIS: Me?

WILSON: Yes, you.

(He puffed out.)

WILSON: You see, that bloody Kasira, she's something of a mother hen. Fiercely protective of her subordinates. So many times she's tried to thwart me and so many times I've had to punish her.

(He exhaled.)

WILSON: It's awfully empowering to show some bitch who's boss.

ELLIS: And that's where I come in, is it?

WILSON: Correct. My old bodyguard, Jones, he'd pin her down over the table while I gave her a piece of my cock.

(Ellis looked nervous.)

ELLIS: Isn't that rape?

WILSON: Maybe, but who cares? I'm a general, I do what I like!

ELLIS: I see!

WILSON: Yes, that Kasira thinks she's so bloody righteous but one right hook and she hits the ground like a sack of potatoes. And she isn't so cocky when she's pressed against the table with me ramming my cock up her arse; that I can tell you.

(Ellis tried to hide his disdain and sat back a little.)

ELLIS: So, you beat her?

WILSON: If she tries to stop me humping one of her girls, yes. And she doesn't learn either. Every time, she gets all bitter and twisted when I want to screw the pretty retarded one. And every time, I beat her up, give her an anal seeing to then shag the retard anyway. She could save herself a lot of black eyes and sore backsides if she'd just stop being such an over-protective bitch.

(Ellis was speechless.)

ELLIS: Damn.

WILSON: I see you're impressed. You should be.

(He nestled comfortably into his seat then puffed out.)

WILSON: It's what makes a man a man. If the bitch says no, rape her. It's about getting what you want. I work hard at my job and when I'm on leave I want to enjoy the fruit of my labour, specifically, shagging the wenches I assembled.

(He shrugged.)

WILSON: The fact they resist just makes it all the sweeter.

(He beamed.)

WILSON: Nothing makes you feel more like a man than having a crying bitch at your mercy. You'll see!

(As Wilson stared upwards musing about his own perceived greatness, Ellis shuddered in his seat. The general was clearly a twisted individual and how he wished he hadn't signed up for this mission. Knowing he could be hung for treason if he didn't go along with the general's orders, he hung his head and winced, dreading what lay in store when they made landfall in the morning.)

---

Battling bravely through the rain, the six female warriors of the 123<sup>rd</sup> regiment had made it past the point where they'd been greeted by a stampede and had proceeded onwards quite a distance. Still short of making it half way up the hill, however, it felt like very heavy going. The slippery ground and poor visibility certainly wasn't helping their cause. Not about to give up any time soon, however, they fought on in a line with Ambre just behind.

KASIRA: Is it my imagination or are the wraith groups getting larger the higher we go?

CAYLEY: It does seem that way, Kasira.

KASIRA: It doesn't help that we can't see very far ahead in this bloody weather.

SIKA: You can see quite clearly when the lightning comes!

NIVEA: You can? I hadn't noticed!

SIKA: Yeah, you can... and the wraith groups *are* getting bigger!

KASIRA: Too big, you think?

SIKA: Possibly.

(Just then, lightning filled the sky once more and lit up all around them. Making the most of the opportunity, Kasira stared up the hillside, assessing wraith numbers as quickly as she could in the brief moment the sky was lit up. Behind her, Ambre screamed and dived to the ground, her natural reaction to lightning. As the trembling Ambre sheepishly climbed to her feet, Kasira laid into some wraiths with an uneasy look on her face.)

KASIRA: Looks to me like there's larger groups up there but they're pretty spread out.

SOAPY: Yeah, I saw that too. I also noticed how big the next group is!

SIKA: It's massive!

KASIRA: Yeah...

(She mused to herself as she cut her way forth.)

KASIRA: You might have to do your spinning thing for the next group, Nivea.

NIVEA: I'll try. Won't be easy though, Kasira. The ground's turning to mud and I might just end up drilling a big hole!

CAYLEY: Well if you get stuck, I'll heal you from above while you free yourself.

NIVEA: Okay... sounds like a plan.

(Just then, the sky was filled with light once more as another streak of lightning screamed down from the sky, thudding into a tree just behind the large group of wraiths they were discussing. As burning branches thudded down to the ground, the large group of wraiths, immediately panicked and charged down the hill towards them.)

KASIRA: Oh shit!!!

(With that, she instantly pulled Ambre to her feet.)

KASIRA: Run!!!

(With wide eyes, Cayley and Sika took to the skies and Kasira, Ambre, Soapy and Nivea scattered in all different directions to evade the charging wraiths. Reacting swiftly Cayley and Sika immediately started blasting the wraiths that Kasira had been fighting to stop them chasing after her. Moments later, as the rain continued to cascade down upon them, Cayley squinted towards Sika and threw her hands in the air.)



CAYLEY: This is getting ridiculous!

SIKA: I know! Every time we look like making progress, something crappy happens!

CAYLEY: Exactly.

(She groaned in despair then watched as the large group of wraiths rampaged beneath her then charged away towards the beach.)

CAYLEY: Little bum holes.

(She sneered for a moment then her face dropped.)

CAYLEY: Sika?

SIKA: Yeah?

CAYLEY: Did you see which way everyone went?

(Sika looked to her and bit her lip.)

SIKA: Um... I saw Ambre run off with Kasira!

(She pointed across the hill to the left.)

SIKA: I didn't see where they ended up!

CAYLEY: What about Soapy and Nivea?

SIKA: I didn't see!

(Cayley gritted her teeth.)

CAYLEY: Oh, that's just perfect that is.

SIKA: What are we gonna do?

CAYLEY: I don't know. I don't whether to go and look for them or wait here and hope they come back!

SIKA: How about you wait here and I'll go and find them!

CAYLEY: No. Not yet! I don't want to lose you as well.

(She bit her lip.)

CAYLEY: If they're not back in five minutes, we'll go and look for them.

SIKA: Fair enough!

(Just then, a voice rose up from beneath them.)

NIVEA: Where are the other three?

(Cayley's eyes lit up and she floated down the ground.)

CAYLEY: You're safe!

(Nivea pointed to some bushes on her right.)

NIVEA: Yeah, I just ran over there a bit... nothing chased me.

(Cayley pointed to the left.)

CAYLEY: The others went that way! Or at least Kasira and Ambre did.

(They all squinted into the rain soaked darkness.)

SIKA: No sign of them!

CAYLEY: I just hope Soapy's with them!

(They then shared a fearful glance.)

---

On a different part of the hill, a minute or so later, Kasira and Ambre peered over some tightly packed rocks then glanced at one another uneasily.)

KASIRA: I'm getting sick of this, Ambre!

AMBRE: So am I.

(Kasira placed a loving arm around her.)

KASIRA: Anyway, we're safe at least.

(She sighed.)

KASIRA: I just hope the others are okay.

(She glanced down to one side.)

KASIRA: You done yet, Soapy? We need to get going.

(Soapy's voice rose up from down below.)

SOAPY: Almost.

(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: Oh, great. Now I need to pee too!

(With that, she ducked down below the rock.)

KASIRA: Hurry up, girls, we need to...

(She rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: Now *I* need to go!

(With that, she ducked down and joined Ambre and Soapy, squatting aside the rocks.)

AMBRE: Are we gonna go and find the others once we're done?

(Kasira blushed.)

KASIRA: Don't look at me, Ambre. I don't like peeing in front of people.

SOAPY: Cayley and Sika flew upwards, they'll be okay. It's Nivea I'm worried about!

KASIRA: Less talk, Soapy, please.

SOAPY: What?

KASIRA: Just... pee in silence please.

(Soapy and Ambre looked to one another uneasily then puffed out. They then sat there in silence, innocently looking about themselves, trying to avoid eye contact as they went about their business.)

SOAPY: So, anyway...

KASIRA: Shush!

SOAPY: Right!

(She puffed out then reached for some leaves.)

SOAPY: I'm done!

KASIRA: Then wipe and make yourself scarce.

SOAPY: Okay, okay!

(Soapy finished her personal cleansing then rose to her feet and climbed up on one of the rocks.)

SOAPY: I still can't see anyone.

(She then glanced down at the top of Kasira's head.)

SOAPY: Weren't running that long were we?

KASIRA: I'm gonna punch you in a minute, Soapy!

SOAPY: Sorry, forgot.

(A minute or so later, Ambre and Kasira climbed to their feet then joined Soapy on the rock.)

SOAPY: All done?

KASIRA: No, I'm still peeing as we speak. Of course, we're done.

SOAPY: No need for sarcasm, Kasira.

(She grinned.)

SOAPY: My friend Pepsi used to get stage fright. Couldn't pee if someone was in the same building. We used to have to go outside when she wanted to go.

KASIRA: If you think we're gonna have a conversation about urinating, Soapy...

AMBRE: I can pee anywhere! I don't care if people are looking as long as they can't see my flimflam!

SOAPY: Flimflam?

AMBRE: Yeah, you know, my Lulu.

SOAPY: It's called a vagina!

AMBRE: Since when?

(Soapy rolled her eyes.)

SOAPY: Since forever!

(Kasira scowled.)

KASIRA: Will you two pack it in?  
(As Ambre and Soapy gave her a cheesy grin, Kasira rolled her eyes.)  
KASIRA: Honestly.  
(She stood tall and glanced back the way they came.)  
KASIRA: Okay, here's the problem. We can always go back the way we came, but I'm not entirely sure where it was.  
(Ambre pointed ahead.)  
AMBRE: We ran from over there somewhere.  
KASIRA: Yeah, somewhere! That's the problem.  
SOAPY: So what are we gonna do?  
KASIRA: What *can* we do? We're gonna *have* to head back that way and hope we find them.  
SOAPY: Okay!  
KASIRA: I just hope we don't get lost. We've wasted enough time as it is.  
(With that, she jumped down from the rock.)  
KASIRA: Let's go.  
(Soapy and Ambre leapt down after her.)  
AMBRE: I'm worried about Nivea.  
SOAPY: Me too!  
(Kasira looked alarmed.)  
KASIRA: Oh, crap! Nivea! Cayley and Sika took off and us three ran together... she was on her own.  
SOAPY: That's what I was trying to tell you while we were peeing!  
KASIRA: We'd better hurry!  
(With that, they broke into a run and charged across the mountainside, hoping against hope that they'd find their allies.)

---

Somewhere across the hillside in the meanwhile, Cayley, Sika and Nivea were deep in discussion beneath a small tree.  
NIVEA: That's the problem! I don't know whether we should wait here for them or go and find them!  
(Cayley mused to herself.)  
CAYLEY: Waiting here would make sense in a way, because it'll make it much easier for them to find us. That said; what if they're hurt?  
(She nodded firmly.)  
CAYLEY: We can't risk staying here doing nothing. I'd never forgive myself if they're out there desperately in need of a heal and I'm standing here with my thumb up my... nose.  
SIKA: What are we waiting for then?  
NIVEA: Guys, you don't need me slowing you down. I should wait here while you search for them by air.  
(Cayley nodded.)  
CAYLEY: Makes sense!  
SIKA: Does it? What if we find the others then can't find *you* again, Nivea? Not that we'd ever be that lucky!  
(Nivea gave her half a smile.)  
NIVEA: Those words are going to come back and haunt you when this is over, you know that, right?  
(Sika shuddered.)  
SIKA: I do! And yet I can't seem to stop.  
CAYLEY: Look, never mind that. There's an oak tree over there...

(She point to a tree just along the slope they were standing on.)

CAYLEY: That's the only oak on this part of the hill; if you climb up there then we'll know where you are.

NIVEA: Sounds good to me.

SIKA: See, Nivea? I'm not the only one trying to get rid of you!

NIVEA: Excuse me?

SIKA: We're in the middle of a ferocious thunder storm and Cayley wants you to climb a tree!

CAYLEY: Does seem a little stupid, doesn't it?

NIVEA: Yes, but then again, we're sheltering under a tree right now, so what difference does it make?

CAYLEY: Good point. Okay, Sika, let's go.

(Sika nodded then looked to Nivea urgently.)

SIKA: Be safe, Nivea.

NIVEA: Don't worry about me. Just make sure you find the others.

SIKA: Okay.

(She then gave Nivea a quick hug before stepping back and taking to the air.)

NIVEA: Good luck!

(She watched as Cayley and Sika flew away then nodded to herself.)

NIVEA: Okay... oak tree.

(Wearing a determined expression she then put her head down and charged through the rain towards the foot of the giant oak.)

NIVEA: Bloody weather!

(Extremely eager to ascend the oak and into the relative shelter of its branches, she leapt up at the base of the tree and kicked her way upwards. Grabbing a hold of a thick branch, she then pulled herself up and straddled it. Safe from wraiths and with little rain reaching her, she puffed out then made herself comfortable.)

NIVEA: I can think of worse places to be!

(Those sentiments, however, were about to come back and slap her in the face. As she nestled her back against where the branch met the tree, a male voice rose up from the branch just above her.)

TOWNIE 10: I don't remember ordering a wench!

TOWNIE 11: Does the brothel even *do* deliveries?

TOWNIE 10: Whether they do or not, there seems to be one in our tree!

TOWNIE 12: It's one of them army sluts!

(Staring up at the three men in consummate bewilderment, Nivea scratched her head nervously.)

NIVEA: So... nice tree!

TOWNIE 12: It was until *you* climbed up it!

TOWNIE 11: Yeah, shouldn't you be out killing wraiths?

(Nivea bit her lip.)

NIVEA: I'm waiting for...

TOWNIE 10: General Wilson was right, you girls are shit! First sign of trouble and you hide in a tree!

(Nivea gave them a condescending glance.)

NIVEA: You can talk!

TOWNIE 10: There was a wraith stampede!!!

NIVEA: That was ages ago!

TOWNIE 12: And anyway, we're retired! You're the one who's supposed to be killing the wraiths, not us!

NIVEA: And I will be, just as soon as the rest of my unit come back!

TOWNIE 10: Well until they do, get the fuck out of our tree!  
(Nivea raised an embittered eyebrow.)  
NIVEA: You don't own this tree!  
(Townie 11 sneered.)  
TOWNIE 11: Get out of the fucking tree or we'll kick you out of the fucking tree!  
TOWNIE 10: In fact, bollocks, let's just kick her out of the tree anyway.  
TOWNIE 12: Damn right! This island is in deep shit and this whore who's supposed to be sorting the mess out is skiving off in a fucking tree! You ask me, we ought to give her a right pasting!  
TOWNIE 10: I'm game!  
TOWNIE 11: Me too!  
(Realising their anger was very real and that their threats were far from empty, Nivea swiftly swung her leg over the branch then jumped down to the ground. Wearing a deeply troubled expression she then glanced up to see the three townies making their way down the branches.)  
TOWNIE 10: Come back here, bitch!  
TOWNIE 11: I'm gonna fuck you up then fuck you for real, slut!!!  
(Not about to give them the slightest opportunity to carry out their threat, Nivea gulped then raced off in the direction Cayley and Sika went.)  
NIVEA: I hate this fucking place!!!  
(Like fate wasn't already having a lend at her, a massive group of wraiths then rampaged towards her from behind a nearby bush.)  
NIVEA: Oh for the love of...  
(Yanking out her sword, she proceeded to spin extremely fast then raced off down the hill. As furious wraiths evaporated in her wake, she snarled and shook her head.)  
NIVEA: This can't be happening!!!  
(Taking a quick glance behind her at the size of the chasing pack, her heart sunk.)  
NIVEA: Fuck! I'm in trouble here!  
(Delighting in Nivea's misery, the three townies watched her from the bottom of the tree and laughed together.)  
TOWNIE 10: Well, we told her to fight some wraiths!  
TOWNIE 11: Yeah, we're quite the motivational speakers, it seems.  
TOWNIE 12: Priceless.  
(They laughed some more then Townie 10 turned away.)  
TOWNIE 10: Come on lads, let's try and get back home.  
(They then headed away, glancing back at where the fleeing Nivea struggled forth in a furious spin with a vast hoard of wraiths, hot on her heels.)

---

A minute or so later, Soapy, Kasira and Ambre arrived at the oak tree with Sika and Cayley hovering over their heads. Upon reaching the shelter of its leaves, Kasira looked up into the tree and bit her lip.

KASIRA: Are you sure this is the one?

SIKA: It's the only oak around here!

KASIRA: Well, either Nivea's invisible or she pissed off somewhere then, 'cause she aint here.

(Cayley landed upon the ground then raced to Kasira's side.)

CAYLEY: What do you mean, she isn't here?

(She glanced about the branches then bit her lip.)

CAYLEY: Where the hell is she then?

(Just then, Ambre whimpered and started to flail a pointing arm.)

AMBRE: I can see her, I can see her!!! She's in trouble!!!

(Everyone swiftly raced to Ambre's side to look where she was pointing. Sure enough, way down the hill, Nivea was still struggling forth, desperately fending off the giant hoard of wraiths on her trail.)

SIKA: How did that happen? She was supposed to be waiting safely in the tree, wraiths can't climb trees!

SOAPY: Maybe she fell out of it!

KASIRA: What does it matter? We have to save her! Come on!!!

(Cayley stood firm and raised her voice.)

CAYLEY: Wait!

KASIRA: Wait??? Nivea's in danger!

CAYLEY: Sika and I will go!

KASIRA: Yeah, but...

CAYLEY: She's almost back at the beach; we can't all go back down there again! That group is no bigger than what Sika, Nivea and I were fighting earlier. Let us three handle it and you three head on to the top of the hill. We'll meet you up there!

(Kasira looked uncertain then nodded.)

KASIRA: Makes sense. We can't keep wasting time and energy going up and down the hill. We'll keep the assault going and you catch us up when you can!

CAYLEY: Ma'am! Come on, Sika!

SIKA: On it!!!

(With that, the two of them took to the sky and flew off towards Nivea as fast possible. Left behind, Kasira bit her lip then looked to Soapy.)

KASIRA: I've had enough of pissing about. Let's kill some shit!

(Soapy's face lit up. Those words were music to her ears.)

SOAPY: Let's!

KASIRA: You too, Ambre. We're gonna make it up this hill even if it kills us!

(With that, they all raced forth and proceeded to set about the nearest band of wraiths.

Already in the middle of her own gargantuan battle for survival near the bottom of hill, Nivea was starting to tire. Knowing any let up in her efforts could well bring about her demise; however, she continued to spin with everything she had. Her tactic of spinning as fast as she could may well have come naturally to her kind, but in her current situation, keeping the wraiths at bay wasn't as simple as some might assume. With so many crowding into her, she was having to raise and lower the height of her blade to get them all while struggling to keep her balance on the boggy ground, as she bounded forth.)

NIVEA: Fucking things are relentless!!!

(Almost down at the beach, she sneered as she continued her spin.)

NIVEA: Chase me right into the sea, I fucking dare you!!!

(Just then, some of the wraiths at the front of the pack started to explode into dust. Instantly recognising the magic that was causing the explosions, a wry smile washed over her face.)

NIVEA: Thanks for coming, ladies!

(Sika yelled back as she blasted the wraiths.)

SIKA: Kasira *made* us come!

NIVEA: Yeah, right!

CAYLEY: Stop and just spin if you can, Nivea. It's easier to hit them when they're not moving!

NIVEA: Yeah, but easier for *them* to hit *me* when *I'm* not moving!

CAYLEY: True, but it's easier for *me* to medicate *you* when *you're* not moving!

NIVEA: Yup, your way is definitely better!

(With that, she came to a halt and continued to spin as fast as she could. At once, the wraiths at the front of the chasing pack evaporated into a thick cloud of dust, over twenty meeting their doom on Nivea's faithful blade in under a second.)

NIVEA: I can't see for dust!!!

CAYLEY: Just keep spinning!

SIKA: Yeah, besides, you can barely see *most* of the time!

(Nivea sneered.)

NIVEA: I really never know whether to punch you or hug you, Sika!

SIKA: Hug, obviously!

NIVEA: Don't count on it!

(Once the dust finally cleared, Nivea was delighted to see the last few wraiths peter out on her blade. With healing on tap, her confidence had lifted greatly and her spin had been ferocious. Knowing she was being adeptly backed up by her two airborne allies, she'd found renewed hope and with it came a second wind, a sudden burst of power that she'd rarely felt before. The wraiths had been despatched in no time.

With the assault at an end, she lowered her blade then gasped for breath. The whole sorry episode had taken a lot out of her, both physically and emotionally.)

NIVEA: Shit, girls... that sucked.

(Cayley and Sika both landed at her side.)

CAYLEY: Why didn't you climb up the tree?

(Sika hugged Nivea tight.)

SIKA: I bet she couldn't haul her fat arse up there.

(Nivea squeezed Sika's buttock tight and sneered.)

NIVEA: My what?

(Sika screeched.)

SIKA: Perfect arse!

NIVEA: Thank you.

SIKA: Now let go!!! This is even more disturbing than having my boobies groped!

(Nivea released Sika's backside and hung her head.)

NIVEA: There were townies in the tree.

CAYLEY: Townies?

NIVEA: Yeah, you know; townspeople!

CAYLEY: I know what townies are! What did they want?

NIVEA: They'd been hiding there after the stampede from what I can gather!

(She rolled her eyes.)

NIVEA: They insulted me at first then they decided they were going to beat me...

SIKA: And rape you?

NIVEA: Yeah, that was mentioned too.

SIKA: Shock!

NIVEA: So, I jumped down, ran towards where you guys went and all of sudden this hoard of wraiths started chasing me!

(She shook a solemn head.)

NIVEA: It was horrible.

CAYLEY: Well, you're safe now. That's the main thing!

NIVEA: Yeah!

(She looked up the hillside and bit her lip.)

NIVEA: So, you didn't find the others then?

SIKA: We did, but we had to abandon them again to rescue your sorry arse!

(Nivea glared at her angrily.)

NIVEA: My what???

SIKA: Your perfect arse!!!

(Fearing an angry molesting, Sika then placed one hand over her chest and the other over her backside before hanging her head nervously.)

SIKA: I'll be quiet.

NIVEA: Hallelujah!

(She rolled her eyes.)

NIVEA: So, we need to catch them up again, I guess.

CAYLEY: Not exactly. Time is tight so we decided they'd go on ahead. We're gonna make our own way as a three and hopefully meet them at the top.

(She shrugged.)

CAYLEY: We might even meet up with them on the way. Who knows, we just need to focus on working our way there.

(Nivea nodded.)

NIVEA: Let's do that then!

(She smiled.)

NIVEA: And thanks for saving me, girls. I owe you!

(They shared a group hug then Cayley looked towards the top of the hill and nodded firmly.)

CAYLEY: Ready?

SIKA: Yup!

NIVEA: Damn right!

CAYLEY: Then let's go!

(And with that, they all put their head downs and started to pace towards the hill with fire in their determined eyes.)

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As the night wore on and tiredness started to set in, the girls all found a renewed hatred for the wraiths that blighted this world. The longer they battled, the stronger that hatred became. Using their abhorrence of these creatures as inspiration, however, they all managed to battle through their weariness and maintain a reasonably high level of focus. It was never far from Kasira's mind, however, that one momentary loss of concentration could prove fatal. To that end, she kept the two soldiers in her presence on their toes with regular reminders about the importance of being alert at all times. Elsewhere on the hillside, Cayley was doing the same thing for Sika and Nivea. Although Nivea was a level 10 officer, she was prone to distraction, especially with Sika around and Cayley was very much aware of keeping them both in check.

Another inspiration for the girls on this bleakest of stormy nights was the fear of letting the side down. They had a strong bond as a unit and nobody wanted to be the one who made a mistake and caused them to fail. Above all, they were all fearful of making a mistake that cost a colleague her life. Should such a thing happen, they wouldn't just be losing a comrade, after all, they'd be losing a friend. This was all the inspiration they need to keep battling on bravely through the night.

For Kasira this haze break was extremely daunting. As the leader, she had to exude an air of authority and display a high level of both confidence and tactical competence. This, however, wasn't easy when she'd never faced such an almighty challenge in all her life. Haze breaks were rare and therefore weren't the kind of thing a soldier would get to rehearse for. She was having to make up the tactics as they went along and convince her subordinates to back her in whatever she decided. To that end, it wasn't easy to appear confident in what she asking of them to do, when she wasn't one hundred percent convinced herself. Luckily, the girls in her



command trusted her judgment unreservedly and followed her command to the letter. Still, the pressure on her was immense. She very much felt it was down to her alone to keep her precious squad safe. Needless to say, driven on by this responsibility, she was fighting the wraiths with speed and determination she hadn't even known she was capable of previously. As leader, she wanted to set the standard and lead by example, and she most definitely wasn't failing in doing so.

Cayley was very much feeling the same kind of pressures as Kasira. Having not been saddled with Kasira's repressive responsibility to show absolute leadership, however, she felt very much at ease about discussing things with her subordinates before making any decisions. As leader, Kasira didn't have that luxury. Being a much less authoritative person by nature however, this suited Cayley fine. As time passed by and the battle wore on, she'd discuss her options with Nivea and Sika then make her choice from what was suggested or add her own ideas. She took her role very much as a supervisory one, rather than that of a leader. Again, this was a luxury Kasira only wished she could afford. As a healer by nature, rather than a warrior, Cayley might not have had the attack speed of her two battle companions, but what she lacked in dexterity, she more than made up for in professionalism. Never missing her target and maintaining a constant attack without complaint, she was putting an end to wraiths at a tremendous rate, very much easing the workload of her two warrior subordinates.

For Nivea, the night was getting more and more tense as the minutes ticked past. She was very much aware that the darkness hours were slowly running out and she'd eventually have to leave her comrades to it. This didn't sit well with her. Waiting in her darkened room, desperately praying that her friends were okay was something she couldn't even bear to think about. They were all tired and leaving them to fight without her would crush her. If anything happened to one of them, she knew she'd forever blame herself. With this in mind, she was fighting and chopping through wraiths like a woman possessed. She'd always had a lot of energy but only now were her comrades finding out just how much. Driven on by the thought of ending the wraiths before sun up, she was like a sword-wielding machine.

The one showing the greatest signs of fear on this terrible night was Ambre. Not only was the lightning a terrifying thing to battle through but she was very much aware of her fallen former comrade, Tahiti. Having witnessed her death, she was petrified of the same thing happening again, especially to Kasira whom she absolutely adored. Losing her would be like losing her parents all over again and that thought was scaring the life out of her. At the same time, however, her fears were countered by her pride. She didn't want to let Kasira down. Kasira had transformed her from a nervous wreck into a soldier and had shown faith in her that nobody else ever had. To that end, she fought on determinedly, desperate to repay Kasira's faith and make her proud. She didn't complain even once, she simply did as she told and stood resolutely alongside her two unit mates, giving her all to the war effort.

Sika, for her part, took a very simple approach to the lengthy, tiring, night's proceedings. She was uniquely herself. She kept making jokes at all the wrong times and tried to enjoy herself as much as possible. It was very much her way of coping with what the night was throwing at her. Beneath her jovial exterior she was exhausted and scared, just like the two soldiers she was fighting alongside, but she'd never let on. She very much believed that allowing herself to admit she was scared would only serve to make her even more so. Not about to do that, she continued to make light of what was going on and refused to stop smiling. Even through hours of seemingly endless fighting, her smile didn't waver and her

two comrades were grateful for it. Her humour had a calming influence on them all and her powerful magic was making their task a whole lot less daunting.

Until her near death incident, Soapy had been the only one out there that night who could have been considered fearless. Having learned how much danger she was in the hard way, however, her mindset had changed. Wraiths were no longer a toy, there for her enjoyment; they were a deadly force, there to be destroyed. A different motivation but the same solution. Now, rather than smirking and revelling in the sight of wraiths exploding, she was snarling and gaining peace of mind from it. As far as she was concerned, the only good wraith was a dead wraith and every one she killed was one less threat to her young life. This change in her attitude had undoubtedly been an extremely positive one. As if it was possible, she was now blasting them even faster than she used to and she hadn't lost any of her accuracy. Until tonight, she'd merely been a talented recruit, now she was a focussed and dedicated professional soldier.

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With only two hours left until the sun would raise its unwanted head from the night sky, the battle raged on. Wraiths were still strewn about the hill and the girls of the 123<sup>rd</sup> regiment still had a lot of work ahead of them. Very much aware that they'd lose Nivea from the fight once daylight arrived, they were all battling frantically, none more so than Nivea herself. She would become totally blind and defenceless once the sun hit her eyes and as much as her heart wanted to, she knew she wouldn't be able to fight on.

Losing Nivea from the fight was an immense concern for Kasira. She'd been fighting alongside Ambre and Soapy for over three hours now without seeing hide nor hair of the other three. Unable to stop herself worrying about their welfare, she continued to lead her two companions forth, towards the top of the hill with an aching in her heart. Right now, she had a great weight on her mind. Were the other three okay? How would they cope once Nivea had to leave the fight? How much longer could they fight before somebody collapsed from exhaustion? These were all real concerns. They hadn't taken a break in a very long time and herself and Ambre were becoming breathless. Soapy may have been battling on, looking very much like she didn't need a break yet, but she knew it couldn't be much longer before she too started to show signs of wear.

Very much aware of the importance of a break, as soon as they'd finished the large group of wraiths they'd been fighting, Kasira swiftly pulled Soapy towards her. Convinced she'd simply turn and set about another group, she was determined to stop her from doing so, and allow them all to take a quick breather.)

KASIRA: No, Soapy. Stop a second.

(Half way through raising her arm to attack, just as Kasira had suspected she might, Soapy lowered her arms.)

SOAPY: What?

KASIRA: Let's just take a moment, shall we? I'm shattered.

(Soapy nodded reluctantly.)

SOAPY: Fine.

(She smiled.)

SOAPY: I hope I don't get knackered that easily when *I'm* old!

(Receiving a clout around the head for her comment, Soapy pouted.)

SOAPY: Ouch!

KASIRA: I'm twenty five, you cheeky sod.

SOAPY: That's *kind* of old! You've got ten years on me.

AMBRE: Yeah well, I'm not twenty five and I'm knackered too.

(She pouted.)

AMBRE: Which is kinda pathetic really because I've just been using my mind.

(She bit her lip.)

AMBRE: That said, I've got a pretty feeble mind and I've been using it for several hours straight.

SOAPY: And you're *also* really old.

AMBRE: No, I'm not!

(Kasira rolled her eyes.)

KASIRA: Behave, Soapy.

(Soapy grinned.)

SOAPY: Yeah, okay. I was only joking.

(Kasira puffed out.)

KASIRA: I know.

(She looked up the hill as she panted for breath.)

KASIRA: Girls, I'm worried. We haven't seen the other three for ages.

AMBRE: Do you think they're okay?

KASIRA: Well... if anything happened I'm sure Sika or Cayley would have flown up and found us, so yeah, probably.

(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: What if they *both* got hurt?

(Soapy gave Ambre a consoling smile.)

SOAPY: That's not likely, Ambre. If there was a stampede or something there's no way they'd both have stayed on the ground.

KASIRA: Yeah, Cayley's first instinct is to fly up and heal. And I doubt they'd all have been caught in a surprise attack, the wraiths are too noisy.

(She shook her head.)

KASIRA: The only way they could *all* get caught out is if the townspeople attacked them.

AMBRE: I'm worried now.

(Kasira nodded sternly.)

KASIRA: Don't be.

AMBRE: But...

KASIRA: I mean it, Ambre. The odds of anything happening to all three of them are pretty much negligible.

AMBRE: Maybe...

(Soapy looked to Kasira uneasily.)

SOAPY: And yet you're still worried about them, aren't you?

(Kasira nodded.)

KASIRA: Yes I am. It's my duty to... no, it's not even that. I'm just as worried as you two are and for the same reasons. There's a million wraiths about and we don't know where our friends are. It's only natural to be worried. I bet they're worried about us too.

(Ambre nodded.)

AMBRE: Yeah, you're right.

SOAPY: I'm sure we'll see them once we reach the top!

(She beamed.)

SOAPY: Before they do!

KASIRA: Excuse me?

SOAPY: Look, I know it's not a contest but it'll great fun letting Sika *think* it is if *we* get there first.

(Ambre beamed.)

AMBRE: Mean, but I like it.

(Kasira gave a stifled laughed.)

KASIRA: I have to admit, that *would* be fun.

(She then stood tall.)

KASIRA: Enough about that though. We've got stuff to do.

(She nodded towards some wraiths.)

KASIRA: That group?

SOAPY: Works for me!

AMBRE: But I'm still knackered!

KASIRA: Me too, darling, but I want to kill as many as possible before Nivea has to get inside.

AMBRE: Nivea isn't even with us!

KASIRA: No, but once she goes it'll mean more work for the five of us!

AMBRE: Five?

KASIRA: Yeah, us three, Sika and Cayley! Nivea will be a big loss and we'll have to clear the rest as a single group. Without her spin attack! So, I wanna get as much done before Sika and Cayley have to give up what they're doing and re-join us.

(Ambre looked enlightened.)

AMBRE: Oh! I get it!

KASIRA: That's my girl. Now come on!

(Needing no second invitation, Soapy immediately fired her magic towards the pack of wraiths, causing them to charge towards her. Meeting them heading on, Kasira swiftly started to chop and slash through them and Ambre set one of them against the others. With determination etched across all their faces, they dispatched the group of thirty or so wraiths in a matter of seconds.)

KASIRA: That was awesome, even by our own high standards.

SOAPY: Next pack?

KASIRA: Next pack!

(She gave her a firm glance.)

KASIRA: Let me get there before you start blasting them this time though.

SOAPY: Sure okay!

KASIRA: If they get a chance to run at me, they get momentum and I might get hurt.

SOAPY: Oh, okay... my bad.

KASIRA: It would be, 'cause if I get hurt, *you'll* get hurt!

(Soapy pouted.)

SOAPY: I get it!

KASIRA: Good girl. Come on.

(With that, they raced along the hill side, across the top of a sheer drop, towards the next group of wraiths.)

AMBRE: Why is there a cliff half way up a hill?

KASIRA: It's not unusual, Ambre. You don't *just* get cliffs on the coastline.

AMBRE: You don't?

SOAPY: Of course not.

(As they raced forth, Ambre peered over the edge nervously.)

AMBRE: Looks really steep. I can't see the bottom.

SOAPY: Well, look on the bright side. After following Sika and Nivea earlier, you've probably seen enough bottoms for one day.

(Ambre giggled uncontrollably.)

AMBRE: That's funny.

KASIRA: Yeah well, never mind giggling, we've got work to do.  
(With that, she raced up to the next group of wraiths and piled into them. Backing her up immediately, Soapy fixed her stance then released a string of powerful magic blasts. Standing at Soapy's side, Ambre giggled and also set her power in motion.)  
AMBRE: Seen enough bottoms for one day... I like that.  
(Soapy spoke quietly to her from the side of her mouth.)  
SOAPY: Stop giggling, you'll get us into trouble.  
AMBRE: I can't. And anyway, if we just do our jobs, we'll be fine.  
SOAPY: I guess.  
(Very much focussed on doing *that* job, Soapy continued despatching wraiths around Kasira with extreme power and accuracy.)  
AMBRE: You're really good at that!  
SOAPY: Thanks!  
(Kasira yelled back as she continued to pile into the wraiths.)  
KASIRA: Okay, this lot are nearly done, get ready to...  
(Her voice was then drowned by a pack of howling wolf-like wraiths as they joined the fray.)  
KASIRA: Scratch that!!!  
(Stepping up her attacks, Soapy snarled and gritted her teeth. Ambre, for her part, swiftly abandoned the wraith she was possessing and started controlling a wolf instead.)  
KASIRA: As quick as you can, girls, I'm getting swamped here.  
(With the hoard swelling, Kasira leapt back to avoid being bitten and gritted her teeth.)  
KASIRA: There's too many. Back up as you fight them!  
SOAPY: Okay!  
KASIRA: Keep calm, okay?  
AMBRE: We're calm!  
KASIRA: Good girl.  
(As the hoard surged forth, Kasira swiftly paced backwards to avoid gnashing teeth and spiky horns.)  
KASIRA: Shit!  
(Releasing blasts of energy as fast as she could, Soapy bit her lip.)  
SOAPY: There doesn't actually look that many!  
KASIRA: There isn't, they're just savage, this lot! They're all trying to get me at once!  
AMBRE: That happens sometimes!  
KASIRA: Yeah, I mean wraiths aren't exactly known for being placid, but this lot are particularly brutal.  
(She gritted her teeth.)  
KASIRA: Over eager an' all!  
(Continuing to pace backwards, Kasira snarled.)  
KASIRA: We're getting there, girls. I won't be sad to see the back of this lot.  
(Noticing there were indeed no more than a dozen of the bloodthirsty, savages left, Soapy puffed out and furrowed her brow.)  
SOAPY: Almost done!  
AMBRE: Thank god for that. I hate walking backwards, I can't see wear I'm go...  
(She then screamed out in terror.)  
AMBRE: Kasira!!!  
(Hearing Ambre's word fade as she plummeted over the edge of the cliff, Kasira flew into a panic.)  
KASIRA: Ambre!!!  
(With terror in her heart, she raced backwards to where Ambre fell, leaving a desperate Soapy trying to polish off the remaining wraiths.)

SOAPY: Careful, Kasira!!!

(Caring for nothing but Ambre, Kasira screeched over the cliff edge into the darkness below.)

KASIRA: Ambre!!! Ambre!!!

(Wearing a horrified expression, Soapy fired her magic frantically, as one after another, the savage wraiths tried to pounce at the panicking Kasira.)

SOAPY: Kasira, what are you doing???

(Looking like she was trying to juggle twenty sharp knives, Soapy flailed her arms around like a maniac, whimpering fearfully as she tried to deal with the wraiths on her own.)

SOAPY: Fuck me!!! Kasira!!!

(As Kasira raced along the top of the cliff edge screaming Ambre's name, Soapy finally managed to take out the last wraith then stopped to gasp for breath.)

SOAPY: Holy shit.

(With that, she then raced up to Kasira's side.)

SOAPY: Can you see her???

(Freaking out, Kasira ran her fingers through her hair.)

KASIRA: No!!!

(With that, she took off along the top of the cliff.)

KASIRA: Gotta get down there!!!

(Soapy raced after her, her heart full of fear.)

SOAPY: Oh my god, I hope she's okay.

KASIRA: She didn't yell back!!!

(Feeling as if her heart had been torn asunder, Kasira sprinted to where the cliff edge started to lead downwards struggling to breathe. Wearing the world's most sorrowful pout, Soapy followed on, neither of them able to speak. Cutting through any straggling wraiths in their path with no thought for anything other than finding Ambre, they scrambled downwards a good thirty feet or more then sprinted into the darkened trees beneath the cliff, where Ambre had fallen.)

KASIRA: Ambre!!! It's me, baby!!! Where are you???

SOAPY: Ambre!!!

(Immediately set upon by three wraiths, they destroyed them all with rapid violence then bound onwards again. Light was at a premium down there beneath the trees and the ground was difficult to see, making them fear Ambre would be hard to spot. For all they knew, they could be a matter of feet from her injured body and not even be able to see her.)

KASIRA: Ambre!!! Where are you, sweetheart???

SOAPY: Ambre!!!

(Soapy whimpered.)

SOAPY: I can't see a bloody thing!

KASIRA: Just keep looking!

SOAPY: I am!!!

KASIRA: Ambre!!!

(Set upon by a group of four more wraiths, they once again despatched them without a second thought then glanced hard across the ground.)

KASIRA: Where are you?

SOAPY: Ambre!!!

(Just then, Soapy spotted something upon the ground by her foot. At once, her heart sunk and she bent to pick it up. Trembling all over, she held it towards Kasira and whimpered.)

SOAPY: Kasira?

(Kasira looked to her, shuddering all over.)

KASIRA: What?

SOAPY: I've found a bit of her horn!

(Looking terrified, Kasira bound over to her and swiped the thin, cloth-wrapped cartilage from her hand. Staring at it in horror, they both felt extremely weak all of a sudden. Very much aware that packs of wraiths were more than capable of devouring a person, leaving barely a trace of them behind, Kasira's lips started to quiver. Convinced Ambre had met this very fate, she screamed out in anguish.)

KASIRA: Ambre!!!

(Sinking to her knees in the mud, she then burst into tears. Standing at her side, shaking like a leaf, Soapy also started to cry and plopped herself down on her knees. Crestfallen, she threw her arms around Kasira and they cried their hearts out for well over a minute.

Had they not been interrupted by a pair of wraiths, they might well have knelt there in tearful despair for the rest of the night. Stirred by the attack, however, they'd both jumped to their feet and leapt into action. With the wraiths dispatched, Kasira then hung her head.)

KASIRA: She was my best friend.

(Soapy whimpered and wiped her tears.)

SOAPY: I know.

KASIRA: I really loved her. She was my...

(She started to cry once more.)

KASIRA: She was my little Ambre.

(She then held up the piece of Ambre's horn.)

KASIRA: This is all that's left of her, Soapy. This is all we'll get to bury.

(Soapy's fists clenched hard and a furious look enveloped her brow.)

SOAPY: I wanna fucking kill 'em all, Kasira.

KASIRA: I...

SOAPY: They ate Ambre!!!

(Kasira glared at her then grabbed her by the back of the neck.)

SOAPY: It wasn't my fault!!!

KASIRA: I never said it was. I'm gonna help you, Soapy. They ate my little...

(Tears welled up in her eyes again and she hung her head.)

KASIRA: My Ambre.

(She then let go of Soapy and snarled upwards at the top of the cliff.)

KASIRA: I'm gonna get to the top of the hill and I'm gonna kill the fucking lot of them, Soapy.

(As Kasira raced away, back the way they'd come, Soapy growled and charged off after her. With fury in her eyes, Kasira's thoughts kept turning from those of spilling blood, to those of never seeing Ambre smile again. Looking furious one minute and heartbroken the next, she was very much on the verge of a breakdown. Ambre had meant the world to her and having her so cruelly snatched away was soul destroying. Right now, with Ambre gone, she felt as if her own life was worthless and she wasn't about to give her personal safety a second thought. The next pack of wraiths she saw, she was going to attack, regardless of how many there were. If they were to take her life as well, then so be it. In this moment, she didn't care. She was a far cry from the measured and considered leader she was known to be. Right now, the red mist had descended and she was a danger to both herself and Soapy. Also taken by rage and devastation, however, Soapy hadn't realised this and was more than willing to follow her in the next battle, no matter how many wraiths there were.

As they emerged from the slope and raced back up towards the top of the hill, Kasira and Soapy were immediately greeted by the sight of a large pack of wraiths. Without even pausing for a moment or giving it a modicum of consideration, they simply put their heads down and charged. Having only raced a few feet, however, Soapy noticed something.)

SOAPY: Nivea's already attacking them!!!

(Sure enough, the pack of wraiths they were about to attack, were already eagerly trying to get at Nivea. Spinning for all she was worth, with Sika and Cayley assisting her from above, she was making short work of the pack. Upon sighting her, Kasira relented her charge and clenched her fists. She then sunk to her knees again and covered her teary eyes. Standing aside her, Soapy helped Nivea polish the other wraiths off from a distance then called over to her.)

SOAPY: Nivea!!! Come quickly!!!

(She glanced upwards and pouted.)

SOAPY: Cayley, Sika!!!

(Spotting their two comrades, Sika and Cayley looked at one another nervously then flew over towards them. Having spotted Kasira's devastated demeanour, Nivea charged over to them fearing the worst.)

NIVEA: Guys, what's wrong?

(She placed her hand over her mouth and whimpered.)

NIVEA: Where's Ambre?

(Bursting into tears again, Kasira lifted Ambre's horn towards her. At once, Nivea, Sika and Cayley all looked utterly heartbroken. Almost passing out, Sika collapsed to the ground and screamed.)

SIKA: No!!!

(As the horrible truth hit them, nobody spoke a word. Only the sound of whimpering and crying could be heard. Their hearts were well and truly shattered. Even when the rain suddenly stopped falling and the clouds seemed to part, not a word was spoken. They didn't have a dry eye amongst them and the brightening conditions went very much unnoticed. As several minutes of sorrow and grief passed, nobody wanted to speak and silence reigned. A silence that was eventually broken by Sika. Taking the same approach that Kasira and Soapy had, she pulled herself to her feet and clenched her fists.)

SIKA: Wraiths, fucking wraiths!!!

(As she attempted to race off and attack a large pack of them by herself, Cayley pulled her back and wrestled with her.)

SIKA: Let me go!!!

CAYLEY: No, we're not gonna lose you as well!!!

SIKA: I said, let me go!!!

CAYLEY: No!!!

(Eventually managing to calm herself, Sika stopped struggling and cried in Cayley's arms.)

SIKA: I loved her, Cayley!

(Cayley whimpered.)

CAYLEY: So did I.

(Kasira looked up and climbed to her feet.)

KASIRA: We all did!

(She clenched her fists.)

KASIRA: And we're gonna finish this for her!

(She looked across at her teary eyed unit.)

KASIRA: Every single fucking wraith we see is gonna die screaming. Every single one of them!

(She then gritted her teeth.)

KASIRA: I don't care how long it takes.

NIVEA: I'm in!

(Kasira looked hard into her eyes.)



KASIRA: No you're not. I love you, Nivea and I'm not losing you too. Once the sun looks like coming up, you're out of here, that's an order.

NIVEA: But for Ambre!

KASIRA: Ambre wouldn't want you dying either.

NIVEA: Fine!

KASIRA: If you guys wanna take a break at any time, you're welcome to, okay. Me...

(She sneered.)

KASIRA: I'm not gonna stop until we're done. I don't care how many there are!

(Cayley shook a solemn head.)

CAYLEY: There's about a thousand by my reckoning. I did a fly-over about ten minutes ago.

KASIRA: Then a thousand it is. And I aint resting until they're gone.

(She puffed out.)

KASIRA: It won't be easy. We're tired, deflated... we're gonna lose Nivea... but I have to try.

SIKA: I'm with you, Kasira. I'll use whatever energy I can muster.

CAYLEY: Me too!

NIVEA: Until the sun starts to come... me too.

(Soapy looked at their worn out demeanours and bit her lip.)

SIKA: You in, Soapy?

SOAPY: Try and stop me. I was thinking, though, maybe I have an idea...

(She then looked sheepish and hung her head.)

SOAPY: No, don't worry about it. Silly idea. I was just a bit worried though, because you all look knackered.

(Very much the only one who didn't look dead on her feet, she scratched behind her ear, nervously.)

SOAPY: If you don't mind me saying.

KASIRA: No, you're right. We're all pretty shattered, but I'm past caring. We're gonna do this for Ambre.

(With that, she started to paced forth towards a large group of wraiths, the bright moonlight reflecting off the tears in her angry eyes.)

KASIRA: Let's go!

(One hundred percent behind Kasira, the determined looking Sika, Cayley, Nivea and Soapy, bounded towards their enemies. Feeling as if a part of them was very much missing they then laid into them with all they had. Kasira was screaming with every hit, the fury oozing from her every pore. Sika and Cayley were snarling with each cast of their magic and Nivea was growling with every swing. Able to see them all from where she was pitching her powerful magic, Soapy looked deeply troubled. Despite the fact they were no longer hampered by bad weather, there was no composure in their individual attacks and as a group they didn't have the cohesion they'd shown before. They hadn't spread out to cover all angles and were quite clearly fighting on an empty tank. It was plain for her to see that losing their precious Ambre had destroyed their morale entirely. They may have been fighting with anger on their faces, but she could tell they'd all rather curl up in a ball and cry.)

SOAPY: This isn't good.

(Watching on as she continued her attacks, Soapy's worries continue to increase. The furious noises and the increased aggression they were displaying couldn't hide the fact they were all exhausted. She couldn't be sure how much longer they'd last. Although, in the great scheme of things, a thousand wraiths didn't seem like an overwhelming amount, she was becoming increasingly doubtful that their energy could last until the end. And even if it could, tiredness leads to mistakes and that could prove fatal. Adding these worries together, she could see a scenario where they were charged by the last few hundred wraiths and wouldn't have the

energy left to defeat them. With the added problem of Nivea leaving soon, she could most definitely see it happening. As these thoughts went around and around in her head, she stopped fighting and bit her lip.)

SOAPY: I have to do it. I have no choice.

(With that, she raced over to Kasira and saluted her.)

SOAPY: Ma'am?

(Kasira rampaged into the wraiths before her and snarled.)

KASIRA: I'm a little busy right now, Soapy.

SOAPY: It's important, ma'am.

KASIRA: Then tell me while I fight!

(She furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: And fight while you tell me!

SOAPY: Okay!

(She opened fire on a wraith then raised her voice to be certain Kasira heard her.)

SOAPY: You guys are really shattered. And when Nivea goes... a thousand wraiths might as well be a million when you're that worn out.

(She threw her arms out to the side.)

SOAPY: It might take us so long that *today's* wraiths will spawn before we're even finished!

KASIRA: Another fifty or so won't make much difference.

SOAPY: It might if we're all dead on our feet.

KASIRA: That's a risk we have to take, Soapy. It's down to *us* to kill these wraiths!

SOAPY: I know, but seeing as everyone's shattered and Nivea hasn't got long left... four exhausted people against a thousand wraiths... don't tell me you can't see the dangers!

KASIRA: Look, I know things are getting desperate but we don't have much choice other than to keep fighting!

SOAPY: Well... actually...

(Kasira raised a suspicious eyebrow.)

KASIRA: Actually? If you have an idea, tell me. Don't be shy all of a sudden.

(Soapy nodded.)

SOAPY: I wanna try out a skill of mine. I wasn't allowed to use it at the academy because windows used to get broken, and I haven't used it for a while.

KASIRA: What does it do?

SOAPY: I think I can kill them all in one go!

(Kasira almost missed with her next swing but managed to steady herself.)

KASIRA: You what?

SOAPY: I said I think I can kill them all in one go!

KASIRA: How?

SOAPY: Like a said, I have a skill...

KASIRA: Wait a second. If you intend to kill them all in one go, you need to hit them all in one go.

SOAPY: Yeah!

KASIRA: So if they don't all die in one go, you'll have a thousand pissed off wraiths charging at you!

(Soapy gave a stunted shrug.)

SOAPY: Well...

KASIRA: That's too risky. I'm not gonna stand by and let *you* die too.

(Soapy furrowed her brow and stood to attention.)

SOAPY: Ma'am, my skill is a powerful one. I think you should let me use it.

KASIRA: I told you no!

SOAPY: I won't have a thousand of them onto me. If it goes wrong it'll at least kill most of them. Well over half, and I mean well over half. You guys will just need to help me kill the last hundred or so. I honestly believe it'll work! At least to the point where the surviving wraiths will be nothing Nivea can't handle with our help.

(Kasira glanced at her swiftly then back at the wraith she was about to kill.)

KASIRA: How can you be so sure?

SOAPY: Because I'm brilliant at magic. You'll just have to remember to duck when I'm about to cast the spell.

KASIRA: How will we know?

SOAPY: Because I have to crouch down to cast it.

(For a moment, Kasira said nothing as she continued to pulverise the wraiths before her.

Made to feel uneasy by the silence, Soapy bit her lip.)

SOAPY: Ma'am?

(Kasira replied without looking at her.)

KASIRA: Soapy?

SOAPY: Yes, ma'am?

KASIRA: Ever since that debacle on the first day, you've been an outstanding soldier. I trust you! Help us polish off this group then go and do your thing. I'll tell the others to duck when you crouch.

SOAPY: Thank you!

KASIRA: Just don't fuck it up!

SOAPY: I won't.

(Looking mightily heartened by Kasira's faith in her, Soapy let rip on the wraiths before her, easing her tired comrade's workload no end. Looking forward to proving herself, she fired magic left, right and centre at great speed until the wraiths were a pile of dust and a distant memory.)

SOAPY: I need to do it at the top of the hill!!!

(With that, she took off like a rocket towards the peak.)

SIKA: Where's she going?

NIVEA: Is she mad???

KASIRA: No, she's gonna try something. Just be ready to duck when you see her crouch down.

(They all gave Kasira a baffled glance then watched as Soapy raced to the top of the hill with five wraiths in hot pursuit.)

CAYLEY: I don't like this.

KASIRA: She says she can kill them *all*!

NIVEA: And you believe her?

SIKA: You think she can?

KASIRA: Well, she said she was awesome at magic and so far she has been. I trust her!

There's substance behind *her* boasting, Sika.

(Sika whimpered.)

SIKA: Harsh!

(Watching on, Kasira bit her lip as Soapy reached the top of the hill and despatched the five chasing wraiths in the blinking of an eye.)

KASIRA: And...

(As Soapy waved down the hill at them then bent into a crouch position, Kasira yelled out.)

KASIRA: Duck!!!

(With that, they all hit the deck then looked up at Soapy atop the hill. Bouncing in a crouched position for a moment, she sprung upwards then threw herself back down towards the ground again. As she did so, a deafening boom echoed across the sky. Almost as if

they'd raced face first into a force ten gale, a powerful surge of energy then gushed their way, distorting their faces in its wake. They had no idea what kind of magic she'd cast, but all around them, every wraith in sight was blown to smithereens by the sheer power of the blast.)

KASIRA: Holy shit!!!

(Having been blown back down the hill twenty feet on their chests, Sika and Nivea looked terrified.)

NIVEA: What the hell was that???

(Having only been blown back a good ten feet or so, Kasira raised a baffled eyebrow.)

KASIRA: I have no idea!!!

SIKA: That was awesome.

(Turning to face the way the energy went, she watched on in bewilderment as trees toppled over and rocks from the cliffs were blown into the sea.)

SIKA: Outstanding.

(Listening as the sounds of breaking glass and screaming villagers rose up from the other side of the hill, she suddenly looked uncertain.)

SIKA: Oops, that can't be good!

KASIRA: Hopefully all the townspeople got blown out to sea with it!

CAYLEY: We should be so lucky.

(Staring up at the top of the hill where Soapy lay unmoving, Cayley swiftly leapt to her feet.)

CAYLEY: Oh god no!!!

(Looking tortured, the others also leapt up and joined her in racing to the top of the hill.

Upon reaching the prostrate Soapy, Cayley swiftly jumped to her knees. Soapy was staring at the sky and her breathing was extremely weak.)

CAYLEY: I've got you, babes.

(As everyone looked on nervously, she placed her hands on Soapy and concentrated hard.)

CAYLEY: What the? Heal damn it.

(Soapy managed to face her and spoke in a weak voice.)

SOAPY: You can't heal me, silly.

CAYLEY: What?

(Sika placed a horrified hand over her mouth.)

SIKA: No, please...

CAYLEY: Soapy?

SOAPY: I'm not injured.

(She looked to the sky again and forced a smile.)

SOAPY: That spell took every ounce of my energy. Magical *and* physical.

(They all looked mightily relieved.)

SIKA: Thank god!

(She then gave her a reassuring glance.)

SIKA: It worked too. From up here you can't see the whole island and there's not one single wraith left in sight.

(Kasira nodded then knelt at Soapy's side.)

KASIRA: That was amazing, Soapy. There'll be a recommendation in this for you. You've done us all proud.

(She then climbed to her feet and reached into her bag.)

KASIRA: Cayley?

CAYLEY: Ma'am?

(Kasira passed her a firework, a flint and a crude fire lighting device.)

KASIRA: Send up the all clear would you?

(Cayley nodded and took the items from her.)

CAYLEY: Of course.

KASIRA: Thank you.

(With that, Kasira turned and headed off down the hill towards the town. Watching her go, they could all tell from her demeanour that she was very much thinking about Ambre.)

NIVEA: This sucks.

(Nivea bent and picked Soapy up then headed off down the hill after her. Left behind, Sika and Cayley shared a hug then Cayley bent to dig the stick end of the firework into the ground. Releasing a heavy sigh, she then flicked several times at a flint with the fire lighter.

Moments later, a flame formed and she used it to light the firework.)

CAYLEY: Let's go, Sika.

(Sika nodded and took hold of her arm then they paced off down the hill after the others. There was no celebration of their victory, barely even an acknowledgement of it. Even as the firework launched into the sky and exploded into a sea of colour to mark the end of the haze break, they simply paced onwards without acknowledging it. For these five brave women, the siege of Capsway Island may have been over but the heartbreak it'd caused would last forever.

From this part of the island, the quickest route back to the base was through town but they usually gave it wide berth, opting to avoid the scorn that would inevitably come their way. On this most horrible of nights, however, they just wanted to get back as quickly as possible. They were willing to tolerate the townspeople's disdain on this occasion. Exhausted and utterly devastated at losing Ambre, nothing the townspeople could say could make them feel any worse anyway.)

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Heading through the last remaining trees towards the town, the teary eyed soldiers of the 123<sup>rd</sup> regiment felt nothing but numbness inside. Through the trees they could make out a large group of people in the township, which would have normally filled them with trepidation. Tonight, however, they were all too crestfallen to give the townsfolk a second thought. Let them mock, let them jeer, let them revel in their hate, they didn't care. They simply wanted to get back to their base. And so, they paced from the trees and onto the cobbled street of the main thoroughfare determined to pay no heed to those gathered there. Fully expecting the usual derisory hotchpotch of inaccurate and crude accusations, they stared straight ahead, when much to their amazement, the townsfolk erupted into a chorus of cheering and greeted them with an ovation. Thrown by it slightly, they all gave the townspeople a sideways glance as they trudged tiredly forth. This was most unexpected. Caring little for their warm greeting, however, they paced onwards thinking only of Ambre. They were in no mood to accept or even question the sudden change in attitudes towards them; they only had eyes for the way home. Much to their dismay, however, the townspeople weren't about to let them pass so easily. Having always been vehemently against them, the mayor of the town raced in front of Kasira and brought her to a stand still. As she tried to step around him, he was then joined by several more townsfolk intent on stopping her in her tracks. With no option but to stop, Kasira sighed and hung her head.)

KASIRA: What do you want?

(The mayor gushed excitedly.)

MAYOR: Sterling work!!! Outstanding!!!

(Kasira gave him an empty glance and replied in a passionless voice.)

KASIRA: Thank you.

MAYOR: That was a haze break of catastrophic proportions and you've cleared the island before sunrise. That's just... incredible.

(One of the townspeople then spoke over the mayor's shoulder.)

TOWNIE 14: We were wrong about you lot. You're *far* from incompetent!

MAYOR: Yes, we were horribly misinformed.

(He nodded proudly.)

MAYOR: What you ladies did for us tonight was heroic beyond belief and we can only apologise profusely for how we've treated you.

(He then turned to the townspeople and raised his voice.)

MAYOR: Tonight at 9 o'clock, we'll host a celebration in the these lady's honour!

Fireworks, barbeque, the whole shebang! Tonight, we celebrate!!!

(He stood tall.)

MAYOR: But first... hip, hip!!!

(The entire gathering of townsfolk cheered as one.)

TOWNSPEOPLE: Hooray!!!

(Giving them two more cheers then erupting into applause again, it was plain to see that the townspeople were very much in the mood to celebrate. The girls, however, simply didn't want to be there. They were heartbroken and exhausted and the last thing they wanted was this bewildering adulation from the people who'd made their lives so difficult for so long. Knowing it was their duty to tolerate it, however, Kasira battled against her urge to bash past them and run back to the base and cry, opting instead to thank them. As she spoke in a small voice, the only one she could muster without bursting into tears, the crowd hushed to listen.)

KASIRA: Thank you. We were only doing our jobs, but thank you.

MAYOR: No, no. Thank *you*! I think the gold dragon pendant is in order for you girls.

(Still laying in Nivea's arms, Soapy raised a baffled eyebrow and looked into her eyes.)

SOAPY: Gold dragon pendant?

NIVEA: I have no idea. I don't care either.

(The mayor then raised his voice again.)

MAYOR: For those of you who don't know, that's this island's highest award for bravery.

Only one has ever been handed out before and that was sixty years ago!

(Once again, the girls received an excited ovation. Not wanting to be rude, Kasira bowed politely to the mayor and spoke up softly.)

KASIRA: We appreciate it, but we're absolutely shattered. Can we go now?

(The mayor smiled and stepped aside.)

MAYOR: Of course. I do apologise. Of course, you must be thoroughly exhausted.

KASIRA: Thank you.

(He nodded then raised his voice again.)

MAYOR: Let the ladies through, please!!!

(As the crowd started to step aside, Kasira put her head down and started to make her way forth when suddenly, a voice called out from the back of the crowd that sent a chill down her spine.)

WILSON: What the bloody hell's going on here???

(At once the girls all froze as General Wilson barged his way to the front of the throng.)

WILSON: Move, idiot!

(Upon reaching the front of the crowd with his bodyguard, Ellis, at his side, he sneered at Kasira then glanced around at the rest of her unit bitterly. Soaked to the skin and looking in something of a foul mood, he then raised an eyebrow at Soapy.)

WILSON: That was an Aqua human skill!!! That sonic blast!!!

(He shook his fist at her.)

WILSON: Knocked my bodyguard and I right off the quayside!!!

(Soapy gave him a baffled glance.)

SOAPY: So?

(Shuddering all over, he paced towards her furiously.)

WILSON: So??? I, you little shit, am General Wilson...

(Watching him pace towards her with his fists clenched, Kasira snarled in his direction.)

KASIRA: Leave her alone!!!

(Not about to spoken to in such a manner, Wilson glared at her then bounded towards her instead.)

WILSON: You just don't fucking learn, do you???

(With that, he drew back his fist and punched her full in the face with all his might. Knocked out cold, Kasira folded to the cobbles immediately.)

SOAPY: You wanker!!!

(As Cayley bent to try and revive Kasira, Wilson stormed towards where Soapy was laying in Nivea's arms.)

WILSON: New girl, I'm gonna...

(Much to his astonishment, not to mention that of the girls, he was then restrained by a large group of townspeople.)

WILSON: Hey!!! Unhand me at once!!! I'm a general!!!

TOWNIE 02: You're a prick!

TOWNIE 14: If you think we're gonna let you harm one hair on their heads, you're fucking mistaken!

WILSON: What???

TOWNIE 15: These girls are heroes!!!

WILSON: The hell they are!!! They're just bitches, there for the fucking!!!

TOWNIE 03: Yeah, so you wanted us to believe.

TOWNIE 02: They're amazing warriors and they just saved this island.

TOWNIE 09: Thanks to you, we always thought they were just a bunch of useless bimbos, but that was just a fucking lie!

WILSON: No it wasn't! They *are* useless bimbos!!! Now unhand me at once or my bodyguard will...

(A highly effeminate voice then cut over him.)

GANISTER: Your bodyguard is unconscious already!

(Wilson stopped struggling and looked towards Ganister. Sure enough, Ellis was unconscious on the ground in front of him.)

WILSON: You bastard!!! It's against the law to assault a serving soldier!!!

GANISTER: And yet you encouraged the people of this town to rape these ones...

(He gestured to where Kasira was starting to slowly rouse.)

WILSON: I did no such thing!!!

TOWNIE 08: Yes you did. You boasted to me about raping the leader then said you highly recommend it.

(As General Wilson gaped in search of an excuse, Ganister grinned from ear to ear.)

GANISTER: Well, General, what goes around comes around. Let's see how *you* like being bent over a desk with *your* buttocks splayed!

(As Ganister started to drag him away, Wilson screamed for dear life.)

WILSON: No!!! Let me go!!! This is an outrage!!!

GANISTER: Oh, hush, you might even like it!

WILSON: Like it??? I demand you let me go immediately!!! No!!!

(As the general was dragged away screaming, Cayley healed Kasira's fractured cheekbone then helped her struggle to her feet. Watching them, the mayor shook his head then glared after the general.)

MAYOR: I can't believe we listened to that bastard!

(He then looked to Kasira.)

MAYOR: Don't worry, we'll fix him. He won't bother you again when we're done with him.

(He smiled.)

MAYOR: Now go, get some rest.

(At once, the girls started to slowly pace away towards their base. As they did so, the crowd slowly applauded them, their faces bearing looks of both pride in their unit and guilt over how they'd previously treated them. They all knew amends had to be made and in that moment, many vowed to make sure it was done as soon as possible.)

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As the girls staggered back into the base a short while later, the first thing that greeted them was the sight of the demolished table in the main room. At once, their hearts broke all over again. This reminder of Ambre was the last slap in the face they needed right now. To make matters worse, a pair of her shoes lay upturned beneath the cabinet just beyond the broken bits of wood. Kasira was always telling her not to leave her shoes there and seeing them was too much for her to take. Bursting into tears, she immediately raced away towards her office. Watching her go, the others all pouted and allowed their tears to fall. Seeing these things was beyond heart-breaking. They were reminders that only a short time ago Ambre was going about her life as normal and it made it a hundred times harder to accept that she was gone. Suddenly it all became way too real. Those shoes would never again be stepped in by Ambre's tiny feet. Her cup in the kitchen would never again touch her lips. She was gone and all that remained was cruel reminders of how alive she once was.

Struggling to accept Ambre's passing, Nivea set the exhausted Soapy down then threw her arms around her. Hugging a devastated Sika, Cayley wiped a tear from her eye and spoke in a saddened voice.)

CAYLEY: I'm gonna miss that girl.

(Nivea bit her lip and nodded.)

NIVEA: Me too. More than anything.

SIKA: It's so unfair. She didn't deserve to die.

(Soapy hung her head.)

SOAPY: She really didn't! She was the nicest person... I only knew her a few days and I was already starting to love her. I can't imagine how you guys feel.

(Nivea pulled her tight.)

NIVEA: It hurts... really fucking hurts.

(Cayley glanced at the door through which Kasira ran and puffed out miserably.)

CAYLEY: The gods only know how Kasira's gonna cope. She loved Ambre like she was her own.

SIKA: Poor Kasira.

NIVEA: I don't think she'll ever get over this, guys, I really don't.

CAYLEY: Yeah, we're gonna have to try and help her somehow.

SIKA: I wouldn't know where to start!

(Cayley stroked Sika's hair.)

CAYLEY: It's gonna be hard on you too, Sika. Especially at night.

SIKA: She was like a sister to me.

(As Sika pushed her head into Cayley's shoulder and cried again, Nivea clenched a fist and looked to the ceiling in despair.)

NIVEA: For fuck sake, why? I can't handle this, guys.

(Just then, a voice rose from up the entrance way that caused them all to freeze and stare dead ahead. The simple questioning "hello" had literally frozen them into catatonia. Barely able to warble her lips, Sika trembled all over then Ambre stuck her head around the door.)

AMBRE: Hello?



(Seeing four of her unit mates assembled there, she drew a sigh of relief.)

AMBRE: Ah, there you are!

(At once, the sound of crying echoed out, filling the room, and Ambre was swamped by her delirious friends.)

AMBRE: What's going on?

(Crying their hearts out, patting and stroking her as they did so, they all gushed with joy.)

SIKA: I love you, Ambre!!!

NIVEA: Ambre!!!

CAYLEY: Oh my god, oh my god, it's really you.

SOAPY: You're alive!!!

(Ambre whimpered, very much overawed by the attention.)

AMBRE: Aren't I normally then?

(Just then, they heard a bottle smash from the direction of Kasira's office. Stepping back slightly from Ambre, they all looked around and saw Kasira appear in the doorway. Silence reigned as Sika, Nivea, Cayley and Soapy stepped back, smiling the widest of smiles in anticipation of Kasira's reaction.)

AMBRE: Guys, you're freaking me out!

(Her eyes then bulged as Kasira zoomed towards her, almost as if she was on casters.)

AMBRE: Kasira?

(Bursting into tears, Kasira swiftly threw her arms around Ambre and yanked her tightly into herself. Speaking through a wail of tears, her words made the others cry tears of undiluted joy.)

KASIRA: I love you!!!

(Ambre could but pout and started to well up.)

AMBRE: I love you too!!!

(She then started to turn pale.)

AMBRE: You're squashing me.

(As the others laughed, Kasira stepped back and placed her hands on Ambre's upper arms.)

KASIRA: You scared the living shit out of me!!! We thought you were dead!

(Ambre's bottom lip quivered.)

AMBRE: I didn't mean to!

KASIRA: Don't ever scare me like that again!!!

(She then pulled her closer and hugged her again.)

AMBRE: I won't.

(As Sika, Cayley, Nivea and Soapy looked on, they all clutched their hands to their hearts, revelling in the moment.)

SIKA: We were so sad, Ambre.

NIVEA: Yeah, we really love you, you know?

CAYLEY: This place would suck without you.

SIKA: Big time.

SOAPY: I haven't cried this much since I was five.

NIVEA: I know, right? I haven't seen Sika cry this much since we measured her boobs!

(Sika scowled at her.)

SIKA: That's uncalled for.

(She then looked to Soapy.)

SIKA: But speaking of boobs, we still need to measure yours.

SOAPY: You can kiss my...

(Cayley laughed.)

CAYLEY: Didn't take long to get back to normal, did it?

(Kasira laughed and stepped back, smiling lovingly at Ambre.)

KASIRA: I can't say I'm sad about that! My Ambre's alive!

(As Ambre blushed, Soapy looked to her questioningly.)

SOAPY: Which begs the question, where the hell did you go, Ambre?

(She gave a bewildered shrug.)

SOAPY: We looked for you everywhere!

KASIRA: Yeah, we went down to where you fell and all we found was a bit of your antler.

(Ambre gave her a troubled glance then swiftly started to feel her horns. Patting the broken stump on her left horn, she screamed and made a dash towards the mirror.)

AMBRE: My antler!!!

(As the others watched, she turned her head from side to side to scrutinise herself in the mirror.)

AMBRE: No!!! I look like a freak! I've got one longer than the other now!!!

SIKA: That's okay; we'll just glue it back on!

(Ambre turned and furrowed her brow.)

AMBRE: Sika, *I'm* the stupid one! *I'll* do the silly comments.

SIKA: What?

CAYLEY: She can't glue the old bit on, her horns grow back.

KASIRA: Yeah...

(She smiled at Ambre warmly.)

KASIRA: You'll just have to wait for it to grow back, babes. It shouldn't take too long.

AMBRE: But... I don't wanna go out looking like this. I'm a freak!

(Sika grinned playfully.)

SIKA: If making them the same size means that much to you, we could always saw the other one in half.

(Much to Sika's annoyance, Ambre nodded positively.)

AMBRE: That'll work! I'll get the saw!

KASIRA: Stop right there, missy!

AMBRE: Me?

KASIRA: Yeah! Before you go anywhere I wanna know what happened!

SOAPY: Yeah, where the hell did you go?

(Ambre looked to them then shrugged.)

AMBRE: Well... I fell off the cliff. I don't remember anything after that except waking up in a strange man's house.

(She beamed.)

AMBRE: That nice man must have found me and taken me home.

(She then looked uncertain.)

AMBRE: Well... I say he was a nice man... but come to think of it, he couldn't have been that nice 'cause when I came round he was having sex with me.

(She shrugged.)

AMBRE: Then he panicked and tried to strangle me, but still, it was nice of him to take me home.

(The others all looked at one other in astonishment.)

KASIRA: Are you okay?

AMBRE: Yeah, I turned in a gazelle and ran away. Think I broke his front door with my head in my panic to get out though.

(She pouted.)

AMBRE: Gazelle's don't have fingers.

(Soapy gave her a doubtful glance.)

SOAPY: If you turned into a gazelle, how come your clothes aren't ripped? Come to think of it, they didn't rip last time either!

(Ambre pouted down at the rip in her skirt.)

AMBRE: My *skirt* got ripped! Cayley can you stitch it later, please?

CAYLEY: Of course.

SOAPY: No, wait. I mean when you become a gazelle, how come you clothes don't get ripped apart?

(Ambre shrugged.)

AMBRE: Dunno. I don't know where my clothes go when I transform but they're always back on when I change back.

SOAPY: Weird!

(She nodded thoughtfully.)

SOAPY: How does that work then? Is it some sort of swift human magic?

SIKA: I've wondered that too! I reckon she retains her human skeleton inside her when she changes.

SOAPY: That would make sense! Though surely if they were inside her body, there'd be blood on them when she changed back!

SIKA: Not if her human skeleton is concealed away from the gazelle's inner bits and bobs!

(As Soapy went to reply, Nivea laughed and spoke over her.)

NIVEA: Hark at these two! I'm off to bed.

(With that, she paced towards Ambre and gave her a kiss on the cheek.)

NIVEA: Awesome to see you're okay, darling. Goodnight.

(She then headed for her room.)

NIVEA: Night all!

(They all called a goodnight to Nivea then Kasira puffed out.)

KASIRA: Nivea's got the right idea. Fuck this; I'm going to bed too.

SIKA: Yeah, we all should really.

SOAPY: Damn right.

KASIRA: And you know what, if none of us are awake in time for the afternoon patrol, bollocks to it. We'll just do a double patrol later on. Right now, I feel like I could sleep for a week.

CAYLEY: Amen to that!

(With that, Soapy, Cayley and Kasira all hugged Ambre, making a special fuss of her before going to bed. Kasira especially took her time to give Ambre a most adoring hug and kiss goodnight. She then went to bed and cried herself to sleep, praying she'd never feel so lost ever again.

Left behind, Sika and Ambre smiled at one another.)

SIKA: Shall we?

(Ambre beamed.)

AMBRE: We shall!

(They held hands and headed for the door.)

SIKA: Anyone watching would think we were lovers.

AMBRE: Gross!

SIKA: I know, right.

AMBRE: Having said that though, don't start stroking my arms and calling me "Steve" in your sleep tonight. I hate it when you do that!

(Sika looked alarmed.)

SIKA: I do that???

AMBRE: Sometimes!

(She gave her a sideways glance.)

AMBRE: Who's Steve anyway?

(Sika looked away.)

SIKA: I don't wanna talk about it.

AMBRE: Fine. But next time you do it, I'm gonna wake you up and you can go and sleep in your own bed!

SIKA: Please do. God that's embarrassing.

(With that, they shared an uneasy smile then headed out of the room to grab themselves a well deserved and long overdue sleep.)

---

The girls slept like logs that morning, some of them snoozing right through until the evening. The first to wake, Cayley had been joined by Kasira and Soapy at roughly mid-afternoon to do the daytime wraith patrol. They'd then spent the rest of the day relaxing. Ambre had staggered out of bed, an hour or so later and joined them in the wonderful task of doing absolutely nothing. Nivea, as always, climbed out of bed at sunset and found it quite a refreshing change to not be the last one up. Had they not had the flag ceremony to perform, Sika might well have slept through until the following morning. She didn't like being woken up, one bit. Duty called, however, and she found herself there at the ceremony, struggling not to yawn all through it.

As soon as the ceremony was over, the girls all headed for the communal bath. They'd received a reminder through their letterbox of a celebration in their honour in town that evening and were only too grateful to accept. They may not have liked the townspeople much but after their ordeal they felt they deserved a night out. And so, they started to get washed, looking forward to wearing a nice dress and letting their hair down, a phrase Kasira found ridiculous. Laying on her front, propped up by her elbows in the shallow hot spring water, she looked to where Sika lounged before her and furrowed her brow.)

KASIRA: It's the dumbest phrase ever. I once spent an hour putting my hair *up* properly so I could go out, have a few drinks and "let my hair down".

SIKA: That *is* pretty silly.

(Kneeling in the shallows, brushing Kasira's hair for her, Ambre chuckled.)

AMBRE: That makes no sense at all!

KASIRA: Exactly.

(Cayley chuckled from where she sat on the side of the bath, dipping her toes in.)

CAYLEY: I think it comes from the days when women had to wear their hair up when they were on duty.

(Ambre bit her lip.)

AMBRE: That's a silly rule.

SIKA: Yeah, I look stupid with an up-do!

CAYLEY: Yeah well, they repealed that law a long, long time ago!

KASIRA: Then they should repeal the stupid phrase that went with it.

(Just then, Soapy paced into the room with Nivea behind her, both as naked as the day they were born.)

NIVEA: Haven't missed anything, have we?

SIKA: Kasira was having a rant about the phrase "letting your hair down".

(Soapy sat on the edge of the bath then slid herself in, laughing to herself.)

SOAPY: It *is* a bit stupid; I normally put mine *up* if I'm going out anywhere.

KASIRA: That was precisely my point.

(As Nivea slid herself into the bath, she sat down then winked at Cayley.)

NIVEA: There you go, toe-dunker. Sorry to keep you waiting.

(Cayley smiled.)

CAYLEY: Thanks babes.

(With that, Cayley stepped into the bath then sat down.)

CAYLEY: Ooh, that feels awesome.

(Watching her, Soapy raised a curious eyebrow.)

SOAPY: Wait... what? Who kept you waiting?

(Cayley blushed.)

CAYLEY: Don't worry about it; it's just my silly superstition.

SOAPY: What is?

NIVEA: She doesn't like getting in the bath until everyone else has.

(Soapy raised a baffled eyebrow.)

SOAPY: That's weird! Though, come to think of it, you did that last time too.

CAYLEY: I know! I do it every time! I don't why but... I just feel a bit off if I don't get in last.

SOAPY: Really? But, you're the sane one!

SIKA: Everyone has odd quirks, Soapy. I mean look at Ambre!

(Ambre pouted at her.)

AMBRE: Excuse me?

SIKA: No offence, babes.

(She looked to Soapy and gestured to Ambre.)

SIKA: She insists on brushing Kasira's hair in the bath. Every time. Even though she knows Kasira will just get it wet again.

(Ambre hung her head, grinning innocently.)

AMBRE: I just like having something to do when I'm naked.

(At once, Kasira, Cayley and Nivea all stared upwards and exhaled romantically.)

KASIRA: Me too.

CAYLEY: Happy times.

NIVEA: Oh, yes.

SIKA: Steve!

(She turned bright red and hid her face.)

AMBRE: There you go with the "Steve" again!

SIKA: Leave me alone!

(Nivea grinned.)

NIVEA: You slut, Sika!

SIKA: Am not!!!

(She furrowed her brow.)

SIKA: Besides, we weren't talking about me, we were talking about quirks! Yours being groping other peoples boobs, you weirdo!

NIVEA: And buttocks, Sika, don't tell half a story!

SIKA: It's still weird, you freak.

(She beamed.)

SIKA: And seeing as you're banned from doing it in the bathroom...

(She then put her hands to the side of her head to make antlers and poked her tongue out at her. Much to her annoyance however, Nivea just smiled.)

NIVEA: I may be banned from doing it in here, but you can't stay in the bath forever and the things you say in here *will* count against you later on.

SIKA: Aw, crap!

(Soapy laughed.)

SOAPY: Seriously, Sika, you tease her so much, anyone would think you *like* being fondled.

NIVEA: She does. She's a secret lesbian, I reckon.

SIKA: I am not!!!

(She folded her arms across her chest and sneered.)

SIKA: You're the lesbian, you booby squeezing idiot.

(She then looked enlightened and turned to Soapy.)

SIKA: Speaking of which!

(With that, she dunked her hand beneath the water and pulled out a tape measure.)

SIKA: I brought this especially for you!

SOAPY: And you can put away again especially for me!

(Sika grinned.)

SIKA: Is that so? Get her, girls!!!

(Much to Soapy's horror, Kasira splashed up out of the water and waded swiftly towards her.)

SOAPY: What??? No!!!

(Before she could up and scramble out of the bath, Cayley grabbed her feet and Nivea dived on top of her, sending them both splashing beneath the surface. As they emerged seconds later, Kasira swiftly restrained Soapy's upper arms and Cayley pinned her legs tight to the bottom of the bath.)

SOAPY: What are you doing??? Stop it!!!

CAYLEY: Sorry, sweetheart, but Sika won't shut up until it's done.

SIKA: Damn, right!!!

(Struggling as Sika edged towards her with the tape measure, Soapy snarled.)

SOAPY: Leave me alone!!!

KASIRA: Now, Soapy. Stop struggling and this all be over a lot quicker.

(Soapy sighed then relented her struggle.)

SOAPY: Fine!

(Grinning from ear to ear, Sika placed the measure around Soapy's back then drew it together at the front of her breasts. Looking utterly devastated by what she saw, she then swiftly pulled the measure tighter in the hope nobody saw the initial measurement. Sadly for her, they were onto her in a flash.)

KASIRA: Don't squeeze them inwards, measure them properly!

CAYLEY: She's cheating.

SIKA: They're the same size as mine!

NIVEA: No they're not; you're squashing them down with the tape measure.

(Sika swiftly took the tape away.)

SIKA: Same size as mine!!!

NIVEA: You cheated, you little...

SIKA: No I didn't!

(She smirked as she dunked the tape measure under the water.)

SIKA: You can't prove it!

(Unfortunately for her, however, Ambre had been looking over her shoulder.)

AMBRE: It said 40 like mine before you pulled it tight.

(Sika glared over her shoulder.)

SIKA: Ambre, you git!!! That's a lie!

(Still restrained, Soapy furrowed her brow.)

SOAPY: Look, can you let go of me now please?

(Cayley grinned then dunked her hand beneath the water and swiped the tape from Sika's grasp.)

CAYLEY: Not yet.

(With that, Sika sighed and hung her head.)

SIKA: Fine, it was 40... almost. Just smaller than Ambre's by a tiny bit.

(As everyone released Soapy from their grasp and chuckled to themselves, Sika pouted at Ambre.)

SIKA: You large breasted sneak.

(Ambre looked most put out.)

AMBRE: I can't help having large breasts any more than you can.

(Sika swiftly cut over her.)

SIKA: Any more than I can help having small ones???

AMBRE: I wasn't gonna say that!

SIKA: Yes you were! Well forget you! My boobs are perfect for my height. I'm symmetrically perfect. I'd rather that than be a top heavy freak like you lot!

(As she folded her arms and sulked like a school girl, Nivea sat back and laughed.)

NIVEA: You're so entertaining!

(Ambre pouted.)

AMBRE: No she's not! Her jealous rants hurt my feelings.

SIKA: Jealous???

(She started to laugh then put her arm around Ambre.)

SIKA: Whatever. No shame in being second to you, Ambre. You're gorgeous!

(As Ambre blushed, Nivea glanced away innocently.)

NIVEA: No shame in coming fifth to Ambre either!

SIKA: Just stop that, you!!!

(Kasira watched them all then proceeded to chuckle heartily.)

KASIRA: You guys never fail. Always making us laugh.

(She exhaled then sat comfortably.)

KASIRA: Honestly, I love you lot to bits, I really do. The army is supposed to be a chore, a living hell...

(She grimaced.)

KASIRA: And last night it was!

(She then smiled warmly.)

KASIRA: Apart from then though... it's bloody brilliant living with you guys. It's like the army looked for the five most awesome people in the world and sent them all here to live with me.

(Everyone was visibly moved.)

CAYLEY: Such a lovely thing to say.

AMBRE: Yeah, we love you too, Kasira.

NIVEA: She was right too. You guys fucking rule.

(She smiled at Sika.)

NIVEA: Especially you, Sika. You're awesome fun.

SIKA: Aw, Nivea, you don't have to tell *me* how awesome I am.

NIVEA: See? The deluded little fuck is a laugh a minute.

SIKA: Hey!!!

(They then laughed together, forcing an even wider smile onto Kasira's face.)

KASIRA: You're all amazing. Nivea, you're so crazy you keep us *all* guessing. It's never dull with you around. Sika, that sarcasm of yours is brilliant. Just when I'm starting to get angry you'll say something and start me giggling in my head. So inappropriate but so cute, I just can't be mad at you half the time. Cayley, you're so warm and kind, you don't need me to tell you this; you're the glue that holds this unit together. So calm, so... you're just a wonderful person.

(Everyone smiled at Cayley in full agreement.)

CAYLEY: Wow, thanks, Kasira. That really moved me.

KASIRA: Just stating a fact. Ambre, you know... I can't say too much about you without wanting to cry.

SIKA: Yeah, she's rubbish!

AMBRE: What?

SIKA: I'm kidding, babes!

KASIRA: Ambre... you're an inspiration to us all. You were scared of your own shadow when I first met you, remember? You couldn't cope with the smallest task. But you fought through that. You were so determined to overcome your problems... I can't...

(A tear formed in Kasira's eyes and she felt a little choked.)

KASIRA: Give me a second.

AMBRE: No need to say anything, Kasira. I only got better because you made me believe in myself.

KASIRA: No, Ambre, I just gave you confidence. You did the rest on your own. You became someone because underneath that frightened person you used to be, there was a strong woman waiting to come out. You found her; that was you, not me.

(Sika put her arm around Ambre.)

SIKA: Told you, you were awesome.

AMBRE: You said I was rubbish.

SIKA: Yeah but I was...

AMBRE: Being an idiot! I know!

SIKA: Damn, Ambre... harshness!

(Kasira smiled then placed an arm around Soapy.)

KASIRA: As for madam, here. The new girl. Wow!

SOAPY: Wow?

KASIRA: Yes, wow! How was *that* for a baptism of fire? Third day here and you get faced with a once in a lifetime haze break. I mean, shit. Talk about getting thrown in at the deep end.

(She smiled.)

KASIRA: And yet not only did you handle yourself, you won the day! Outstanding.

(Soapy looked most conceited.)

SOAPY: Excellence is what I do. Nobody should be surprised.

KASIRA: Spoken like a true Sika but with the ability to back it up.

SIKA: Hey! What is this? Pick on Sika day?

NIVEA: That should be a national holiday!

SIKA: Shut up, you!

KASIRA: Most important thing is, Soapy, not only are you a great warrior, but you fit in here. Just now we pinned you down and measured your boobs against your will. Some people would have stormed out in a sulk, but you just took it with a roll of the eyes. You tolerate all our crap like you've known us for years and completely expect it.

(She smiled.)

KASIRA: And because of that it feels like *we've* known *you* for years. You're not the new girl, Soapy, you're one of us!

NIVEA: Agreed!

CAYLEY: Absolutely.

AMBRE: Yay! We love Soapy!

(As everyone gave her a sideways glance, Ambre hung her head.)

AMBRE: Well, I do anyway.

SIKA: Now who's an idiot?

AMBRE: Still you!!!

KASIRA: Anyway, I've said my bit. I just want you all to know how proud I am of you.

(She then grinned knowingly.)



KASIRA: Now let's hurry up and get ready. I wanna get my glad rags on and get out there. We deserve a party and we aint coming back until at least one of us is so drunk she can barely stand up!

(They all then looked at Sika.)

SIKA: Hey!!!

(She laughed to herself and shook her head.)

SIKA: I hate you lot, sometimes.

---

Just after 9pm that evening, the girls all headed for town in their nicest dresses where they were awarded gold dragon pendants on a stage purposefully built for the occasion. Having made a concerted effort for the evening, they all looked extremely beautiful and were greeted by a mix of cheering, wolf whistles and lusting howls. Having accepted their awards, Kasira made a brief speech to the people about her pride in the unit then a large fireworks display began.

As everyone looked up to the sky to enjoy the glorious sight, the girls made their way from the stage and headed for the bar to grab themselves a drink. Upon hearing the drinks were free of charge for the six of them, Nivea ordered two and Sika and Soapy received a lengthy lecture from Kasira on the dangers of alcohol.

Once the firework display ended, a band struck up on the stage and the barbequed buffet which the people had made was opened for all to enjoy. Sadly, the girls missed the beginning of the buffet having opted to head to the beach to blow their wraith whistle, thus getting their night patrol out of the way. Free to enjoy their night, they then headed back into town and grabbed themselves a snack. Having eaten together as a unit, Nivea then wandered off, as did Sika, making sure she took Soapy off with her. Watching them, Kasira and Cayley shared a smile then glanced around to see Ambre. Much to their surprise, she'd wandered off to their left and was deep in a conversation with a townsman. Kasira, of course, was naturally suspicious.)

KASIRA: What does *he* want?

CAYLEY: What do *all* men want?

KASIRA: Not with my Ambre he's not!

(Before Kasira could pace over and interfere, Cayley took her arm.)

CAYLEY: Let her have her fun, Kasira.

KASIRA: I will! It's *his* fun I'm worried about!

CAYLEY: She's twenty three, you can't protect her forever, babes. She needs to learn about men on her own.

(Kasira sighed.)

KASIRA: Yeah... you're right of course... it's just not easy to stand by and...

CAYLEY: I know, babes.

KASIRA: He'd better keep his hands where I can see them, that's all I'm saying.

(As Kasira stood scowling at the man in Ambre's company, Cayley allowed herself a grin then glanced across the town square. Spotting Sika and Soapy, she rolled her eyes then took a sip of her drink.)

CAYLEY: Teenagers!

(Blissfully unaware that Cayley was watching her, Sika was trying to drag Soapy towards of a group of boys, roughly their age. Getting somewhat peeved by Soapy's reluctance to go with her, she let go of her arm and scowled at her indignantly.)

SIKA: Stop being boring!!!

SOAPY: I'm not being boring! I just don't wanna look desperate!

SIKA: Desperate?

SOAPY: Yeah! I'm not gonna go chasing boys, Sika. If they want me, *they* can do the chasing!

(Sika gave her a condescending glance.)

SIKA: Sure, that way's perfect if you wanna be chatted up by the ugly ones.

SOAPY: Sika, the ugly ones aint even gonna bother with us, they know we're out of their league!

SIKA: Look, whatever... at least my way *we* get to do the choosing!

SOAPY: No, *your* way, we come over as desperate!

(She rolled her eyes.)

SOAPY: And what's the rush anyway? We've got all night!

SIKA: Soapy...

(She puffed out in frustration.)

SIKA: I spent nearly all my wages on paying fines to my academy for all the stuff I broke when I was there. Because of that, I couldn't afford to go home on my leave. I've been on this island for a whole year! It's been a whole year since I even looked at a boy, never mind kissing one. And during that time I forcefully lost my cherry to a nine hundred year old man! So forgive me for wanting something to take the taste away.

(She pouted.)

SIKA: I wanna remember what it feels like to have some romance in my life.

(Soapy looked terrified.)

SOAPY: Take the taste away? Are you saying you want to... rid yourself of the memory... like lose your cherry to someone else?

SIKA: What?

(Soapy gathered herself then gave Sika a belittling glance.)

SOAPY: Sika? Are you trying to get laid?

(Sika placed her hands on her hips and scowled at her.)

SIKA: Of course I am, dumb arse!

(Soapy whimpered and paced backwards from her.)

SOAPY: Count me out! I've still got my virginity and I'm keeping it!

(Trembling all over she then backed into two seventeen year old boys.)

BOY 01: Careful, gorgeous.

BOY 02: Nearly spilled my drink there, love.

(As if by magic, Sika appeared before them before Soapy could even turn round.)

SIKA: I'm Sika!

BOY 01: I'm Dan!

BOY 02: I'm Rob!

SOAPY: I'm going!

(As she attempted to pace away, Sika grabbed the back of her dress, preventing her from going anywhere.)

SIKA: This is Soapy, by the way. She's a little shy.

BOY 01: She shouldn't be, she's gorgeous. Soapy, is it?

(Boy 02 looked peeved and gestured towards Soapy.)

BOY 02: Piss off, Dan. Why do *you* always have to have the hot one?

(Having heard enough, Sika let go of Soapy's dress and pushed her away with both hands flat on her back.)

SIKA: On second thoughts, you can go!

(With that, she about turned and paced away into the crowd, mumbling under her breath.)

SIKA: The hot one indeed, bloody cheek.

(Just then, a young man stepped in her path and nodded with approval.)

BOY 03: A hot one you are too.

(Sika looked peeved for a moment then swiftly turned to yell at Soapy as she headed away.)

SIKA: See? I told you! Leave it to *them* and all you get is the ugly ones chatting you up!

BOY 03: I'll take that as a no then!

(As the boy sauntered away in defeat, Sika sighed then headed for the buffet.

Having no such problem attracting male attention, Nivea leant against the stage with three men hanging on her every seductively spoken word.)

NIVEA: So yeah, I really *hate* losers. And the good news is, nobody has to be one. I'm not gonna make you fight over me; you just have to decide which one of you wants to try me first.

(All three of them puffed out in awe.)

MAN 01: Well, I think it should be me.

(The man at his side furrowed his brow.)

MAN 02: Fine. You are the boss, I suppose.

MAN 03: He's not *my* boss. I wanna go first.

(He then bit his lip.)

MAN 03: I do owe him money though... fine, you go!

(Man 01 clenched a triumphant fist.)

MAN 01: Yes! Let's do it then, beautiful!

(Nivea beamed.)

NIVEA: Let's! Give it to me hard and fast.

(Man 01 nodded then stood tall.)

MAN 01: Okay then... are you a mineral?

NIVEA: Nope!

MAN 01: Animal?

NIVEA: Yes!

MAN 01: Four legs?

NIVEA: No!

(Man 01 looked somewhat disappointed.)

MAN 01: Are you a human?

(Nivea pouted.)

NIVEA: I might have made that a little too easy for you!

(Man 02 looked delighted.)

MAN 02: Sweet. My turn!

(Nivea however, looked far from enthused.)

NIVEA: Nah, that's actually kinda boring. What say we go somewhere and you can all have sex with me?

MAN 01: Outstanding idea!

MAN 02: That is why we're chatting to you after all!

MAN 03: That's disgusting and I want no part of it!

(As man 03 wandered off, Nivea bit her lip.)

NIVEA: So... he actually *wanted* to play 20 questions?

MAN 01: Looks that way!

MAN 02: He always was a little weird.

(They watched him a little longer then Nivea shrugged.)

NIVEA: Spit roast on the beach?

MAN 02: Sounds good to me!

MAN 01: Don't mind if I do!

(Watching as Nivea crossed the square with a man on each arm, Kasira and Cayley gave each other a sideways glance.)

KASIRA: You're right; she *isn't* a lesbian after all!

CAYLEY: Told you!

(With that, Cayley held out her palm and Kasira reluctantly planted some coins on it.)

CAYLEY: Pleasure doing business with you.

KASIRA: Yeah, yeah, it was a fair bet. Nice call by the way. All the evidence suggested...

CAYLEY: I know.

(Just then, General Wilson limped towards them from across the square with his bodyguard nowhere to be seen. Kasira and Cayley immediately stood on the defensive.)

KASIRA: What do *you* want?

(Wilson stepped before them and gave Kasira a disdainful glance.)

WILSON: Well played, slut. You won.

KASIRA: Won what?

CAYLEY: Yeah, were we playing some kind of game we didn't know about?

(Wilson scoffed and forced a smile.)

WILSON: Look, let's not talk bollocks now, you won.

KASIRA: Did I?

WILSON: Yes. My days of defiling you sluts is over, it seems. You bested me. I hope you're proud.

KASIRA: We didn't *do* anything. All we wanted was to be left in peace to do our jobs.

CAYLEY: Yeah, you know, *without* being raped!

(Wilson sneered.)

WILSON: If you didn't want to be raped, you could have just put out when I told you to!

CAYLEY: I did, eventually. Didn't make a difference, did it?

KASIRA: No. Even when everyone complied you still...

(She gritted her teeth.)

KASIRA: Raped me.

WILSON: Well... I didn't like the way you looked at me.

(Cayley looked dumbfounded.)

CAYLEY: Are you seriously trying to justify your actions with *that* excuse?

(Wilson scoffed.)

WILSON: Like I have to justify myself to mere soldiers. I'm a general.

KASIRA: Unrepentant to the end, huh?

WILSON: Damn right.

(He stood tall and nodded to affirm his words.)

WILSON: You bitches might not have to suck my cock anymore, something you did especially well, Kasira, but I'll still end up looking awesome. You see, in return for leaving you alone, the townsfolk have agreed not to destroy my home or belongings, so I've lost nothing there. I will however be getting a medal most likely. I assembled your unit, you see, and you all just won an award for bravery. That reflects well on me.

(He nodded unrepentantly.)

WILSON: As for the sex, I'll just have to start a new unit of sluts with big tits in one of my other regular haunts. As always, I'll get what I want. My only regret is agreeing not to split you bitches you up, I know how close you all are... but what can I say?

(He shrugged.)

WILSON: So all in all you might have bested me, but you haven't defeated me. And no bitch ever will.

(Cayley looked to Kasira.)

CAYLEY: Wow, he's even got a big mouth *without* his boyfriend to back him up.

KASIRA: Told you!  
(Cayley handed back Kasira her coins.)  
CAYLEY: Didn't see that one coming.  
KASIRA: Where is your boyfriend anyway?  
(Wilson furrowed his brow.)  
WILSON: You mean that Ganister? That raping bastard is *not* my boyfriend!  
KASIRA: I meant your bodyguard, but okay.  
WILSON: He's around somewhere! Like I need protecting from *you* bitches or any other bugger here come to that!  
CAYLEY: Feeling safe then, are you?  
(She smirked.)  
CAYLEY: I guess that means that in agreement for leaving *us* alone, Ganister agreed to leave you alone, didn't he?  
KASIRA: No more butt rape for you if you behave.  
(Wilson looked distinctly peeved.)  
WILSON: That's...  
KASIRA: Not nice being raped, is it?  
WILSON: He didn't...  
CAYLEY: Yes he did. That's why you're limping!  
(Wilson flapped furiously.)  
WILSON: Bitches!!!  
(With that, he stormed off into the crowd.)  
KASIRA: Cayley?  
CAYLEY: Yeah?  
KASIRA: Did you enjoy that as much I did?  
CAYLEY: Oh, absolutely.  
(As they stood there giggling, Ambre paced back to them.)  
AMBRE: Hiya!!!  
(Kasira and Cayley both looked at Ambre then leant forward to peer around her.)  
KASIRA: Where did that guy go?  
(Kasira and Cayley erected themselves then stared at Ambre questioningly.)  
AMBRE: I don't know. Why?  
KASIRA: I thought you and he were... you know?  
(Ambre looked blank.)  
AMBRE: No!  
CAYLEY: You looked like you were getting on really well.  
AMBRE: We were!  
CAYLEY: Then... what happened?  
(Ambre looked utterly stumped.)  
AMBRE: Nothing!  
KASIRA: So... that's it then, you just talked?  
AMBRE: Yeah, why?  
CAYLEY: He didn't want to take you back to his place or anything?  
AMBRE: He mentioned it.  
(Kasira smiled.)  
KASIRA: You turned him down?  
AMBRE: I said we could talk just as well out here and he seemed to lose interest in our conversation.  
KASIRA: So he *was* just after sex!  
(Ambre looked devastated.)

KASIRA: What's up, Ambre?

AMBRE: He wanted sex?

KASIRA: Yeah, that's why he wanted to take you home.

AMBRE: Really? That's annoying. I'd have gone if I'd known!

(Kasira looked horrified.)

KASIRA: Ambre!!!

AMBRE: I can't help it. I want some!

(She puffed out.)

AMBRE: You're right though, I guess. I know it's wrong. I *already* had some sex today with that nice man who tried to strangle me.

KASIRA: That's not why it's wrong.

CAYLEY: It's not wrong at all!

KASIRA: Yeah but no... because, you know...

AMBRE: What?

KASIRA: I don't know!

CAYLEY: If you want sex with a guy, Ambre, then go ahead, you're an adult. Just be careful to pick a nice guy.

(Kasira pouted.)

KASIRA: Cayley's right. I hate Cayley!

(Cayley put an arm round Kasira and laughed.)

CAYLEY: Of course you do!

(Just then, the townie who'd made such an exhibition of raping Kasira, the night before the haze break, stepped up to her nervously then saluted.)

TOWNIE 01: Ma'am... I'd like to apologise for my conduct the other night.

(Buoyed by putting General Wilson in his place earlier, Kasira snarled.)

KASIRA: Denied!

(She then kicked him as hard as she could between the legs. As he crumped to the ground, she smiled warmly down at him.)

KASIRA: You can crawl away now.

(As the townie did just that, Kasira exhaled.)

KASIRA: Best party ever!

CAYLEY: By a long shot!

(Ambre looked astonished.)

AMBRE: I can't believe you did that!

KASIRA: He raped me!

AMBRE: Oh, is that him?

(With that, Ambre furrowed her brow, stomped over to the man as he crawled away then kicked him between the legs again.)

AMBRE: That's for being a meany to Kasira!

(With that, she stomped back over to Kasira and Cayley.)

AMBRE: That was fun! I'm gonna do it again!

(As she went to turn, Kasira grabbed her arm.)

KASIRA: Don't! It's Cayley's turn!

AMBRE: Oh, okay!

CAYLEY: I'll give it a miss I think, guys!

KASIRA: Suit yourself.

(Ambre sighed and hung her head.)

AMBRE: I'll never get any sex unless someone rapes me. I'm useless. How did I not know he wanted some? You two did and you weren't even talking to him!

CAYLEY: It's easy, Ambre. When a guy is nice to you like that, he wants sex.

KASIRA: Carved in stone. Guaranteed.

AMBRE: Really?

KASIRA: Yeah. So be careful. Only accept their friendliness if *you* want some too.

AMBRE: Which I do!

(She beamed.)

AMBRE: We should all get some!

(Kasira shook her head.)

KASIRA: I don't want anything from the men of this island, thanks. They make me sick.

CAYLEY: That's how I feel too. I'll get some on leave, not here.

KASIRA: Exactly.

(She then looked to Ambre.)

KASIRA: I tell you what Ambre, I'll do a deal with you. Shun the men of this island and in return, when we leave the army next year, I'll show you how to meet nice guys.

AMBRE: But I want sex right now!

KASIRA: So do I, I want it all the time, but I can wait.

(Ambre exhaled and shrugged her shoulders.)

AMBRE: Okay.

KASIRA: That's my girl. And cheer up, okay? Next year, you and I will paint my hometown red, Ambre. The guys won't know what hit them!

AMBRE: Why red?

(Kasira slumped in defeat.)

KASIRA: I give up!

(As Cayley patted Kasira on the back and explained the phrase to Ambre, all around the square the celebrations continued. People danced to the music, gobbled down the food and made merry with one another. The drink flowed and laughter filled the air. In the middle of it all, Townie 01 stood there being mocked by his friends for expecting Kasira to react any differently. With the exception of him, a wonderful time was being had by all.

If somebody had told the girls twenty four hours earlier that they'd be partying with the townsfolk at a ceremony being held in their honour, they'd have laughed at them then had them certified insane. All females units had to tolerate disdain but thanks to General Wilson, their unit was hated beyond compare. Now, General Wilson had been found out and the people had got to witness first hand how exceptionally talented the girls were. Everything had changed. The haze break had brought about a new reality. One in which the girls received the recognition and respect they deserved. They couldn't have asked for more.

As she stood in the centre of town being chatted up by a very boring youth, Soapy couldn't help but smile and stare into space, thinking about how well things had turned out. Just a few days into what her captain had described as the job from hell, she was blissfully happy. Her talents were appreciated by all and she was in the only female unit in the world who were loved by the local population. After the awful start she'd made to her army life, things couldn't have turned out better for her. As her captain always maintained, she was a "jammy little bugger."

THE END.

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