

FROM THE UNIVERSE OF
TALES OF THE PURRFECT EXPLORERS

BARBARIAN WAYS

CHAPTER TEN

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“What is this place?” Sanya questioned softly. She looked up at the huge, stone covered mound which filled the middle of the massive clearing. At its top was a twisted barbarian totem pole with a crudely carved snake head at its peak. Around its base stood a series of posts. Each of these heavily weathered posts had four short ropes tied around its base.

“Looks like some kind of twisted hairball ritual place,” Rylah hissed angrily, hands on her hips. Her tail quivered with barely suppressed emotion. “Now where the fuck are those three bitches? They had better be here or...”

“Or what?” Mashi snapped, glaring at the

lep'rdess menacingly.

Rylah spat at the ty'gress feet. "Shut the fuck up," she growled before turning away. "Fucking stripe-assed whore."

Mashi clenched her fist and took a step forward.

Sanya grabbed her friend by the arm. "No," she whispered, shaking her head. "Please."

Mashi was about to reply when her eyes focused on something just beyond the edge of the mound. "What's that?" she murmured.

Sanya followed the ty'gress' gaze. It looked to her like there was something tied to one of the posts. Or someone. "Let's go look," she suggested with some hesitation. She knew that it was likely that they would be confronted by yet another disturbing barbarian deathtrap. It made her feel

queasy but curiosity was starting to get the better of her.

“Yes. Let's,” Mashi agreed. She stole a furtive glance over her shoulder. Then she started to slowly lead her companion around the edge of the clearing. “Let's keep a safe distance. Who knows what this place is for.”

“What do you think it might be?” Sanya whispered as the two slowly tip-toed around the border of the clearing.

“No idea,” Mashi replied. “Could be pretty interesting, though... maybe even better than that mound of worms and goop little Astah got into.”

Sanya shook her head. She was about to reply when an angry voice called out from behind them.

“Where the fuck are you two going?” Rylah

demanded, scowling at her companions with an unmistakable look of utter contempt.

Mashi stopped and grimaced before turning to look over her shoulder. "There's something tied to one of the posts," she retorted sharply. "We're going to have a look."

"You two bitches get back here and look for footprints," Rylah snapped, waving her arms wildly as she started toward them. "That's all you're really good for, isn't it? I'm the one who actually knows about barbarian shit. I'll go see what's by the post."

"Listen you... stuck up... little... *ass fucker!*" Mashi growled. "If I wasn't..."

Sanya slapped the ty'gress across the face, much to Rylah's visible amusement. "Let her go!" she ordered, pulling Mashi back the way they had come. "If she's so intent on figuring out what

this place is for, let her. Who knows? Maybe it's for dealing with whores just like her.”

“Fine,” Mashi sighed, as the lep'rdess stormed past. “Work, work, work. I'd rather be doing some real exploring out here. I'll bet the clan has some more interesting things lurking around here. Things that won't kill you.”

Sanya shook her head. “I'm not so sure about that,” she responded softly, caution overcoming curiosity for the moment. “For now let's see if we can find out where those huntresses headed. Who knows? Maybe if we're quick we can lose that little witch and...”

A horrific shriek interrupted Sanya's plotting.

“Ry... Rylah!” Sanya stammered as the scream faded to silence. A sudden urge to help overcame her aggravation with the leo'rdess. She ran toward the mound with all the speed her tired

legs could muster.

“Sanya! No!” Mashi screeched, chasing after her friend.

Sanya didn't make it far before the much quicker feline pounced on her. They fell into a tangled ball, rolling and bumping for a dozen feet before finally coming to a stop. “Ow! What the fuck?” the ashiri hissed, trying to pull away from the ty'gress. “Let go! Something happened to Rylah! We've got to help!”

“I thought she was on her own? Whatever happens to her happens,” Mashi scolded, holding her friend down on the ground.

Sanya lay shaking as she slowly realized how stupid she had been. “You're right,” she replied, nodding as she regained her senses. The tension in her body eased and she let herself go limp. “I don't know how I could have been that dumb.

What does that bitch matter, anyway?"

Mashi stared into her companion's eyes for a few moments before releasing her iron grip.

"Right. Still... I am a bit curious to see what's over there," she said, looking toward the direction of the screech. "I think I can get a quick look without getting into trouble. You want to come with me?"

"Yeah," Sanya replied softly as she brushed the dirt off her bare chest.

"Get up and let's go then," Mashi said. "If Rylah's lucky, it's just our huntresses doing a little hunting, if you know what I mean. Lets not take any chances, though. I really don't want to get into anything without knowing what it is first."

"Right," Sanya agreed as the ty'gress helped her up.

The two women carefully skirted the clearing,

watching intently as the apparently occupied post they had seen earlier slowly came into view. There was indeed an amwbassi woman kneeling on the ground directly in front of the post. The chi'tess' arms were tied behind her back and there seemed to be something protruding from her mouth.

“What in the thirteen hells is that?” Sanya whispered as she gawked at the bound figure.

“I don't know,” Mashi replied, grasping her friend's arm tightly as they continued to move forward. “Let's go a little further and see if we can get a better look.”

As the pair moved further, another ambwassi woman came into view. The lep'rdess was sprawled out on the ground right in front of the bound chi'tess. It was hard to tell if she was dead or just unconscious.

“Ry'lah! What happened to her?” Sanya

questioned as she followed the ty'gress a bit further around the edge of the clearing. She looked from the lep'rdess to the chi'tess and then beyond. Several more posts had come into view and most had kneeling women bound to them, just like the chi'tess was to her own pole.

“I don't know,” Mashi replied, straining to see what might have caused the lep'rdess to collapse. “Maybe she just ran in without looking first. Probably scared herself so hard she passed out.”

Sanya took out her camera and zoomed in on Rylah. She was still breathing, much to Sanya's unexpected relief. She truly had no love whatsoever for the irritating lep'rdess but something deep down inside her was fiercely resisting the desire to see her get hurt. “She's alive,” she sighed. “She's breathing.”

“Lovely,” Mashi muttered, shaking her head. “What about that chi'tess. She's... got something

going on there that doesn't look... normal.”

Santa looked through her camera at the kneeling figure. She gasped and her heart skipped a beat. The chi'tess was breathing but otherwise completely still. Her eyes seemed glazed over. A twisted, vine-like form was growing out of her mouth, tipped by a heavy knot. A glowing, pink orb was protruding from the knot. It seemed to throb with unfathomable power. “Oh... oh my goddess, what's happening to them?”

“What?” Mashi asked, squinting.

“Look!” Sanya whined, shoving the camera into her friend's hands. She looked from the posts to the camera screen and back.

“Fuck! There are vines growing right through them!” Mashi murmured as she used the camera to look from post to post. “All of them! Right up their asses and out their mouths!”

“Oh goddess, this is awful!” Sanya moaned, biting her lip. She began to feel very, very uncomfortable. “Who are they? Are they from school? Was Astah really telling us the truth?”

Mashi looked at the bound figures more carefully. She let out a deep sigh. “Yeah, they're from school all right,” she murmured, snapping pictures of each. “That chi'tess. It's Nyannie from B dorm. The ty'gress beyond her. That's Karra. Remember her from the dance competition last month? The rest... I just can't tell from this angle.”

“So she was telling the truth,” Sanya groaned, looking down at her feet. A harsh, fatalistic feeling overcame her. “We really are the only ones left. Just us. Just us and these... things.”

“I don't know about that,” Mashi responded, lowering the camera. “It doesn't look like there are

more than four or five here. I doubt everyone's inclined to do this sort of stuff. We can't be it."

Sanya was about to reply with an even more depressing retort when a shadowy movement beyond the mound caught her eye. "Hide! Quick!" Sanya yelled, grabbing her friend and pulling her into the undergrowth.

"What the hell?" Mashi hissed as she fell flat on her back among the thick vegetation. She scrambled up onto her knees and looked around frantically for any sign of danger. "That hurt! Why did you do that?"

"Someone's coming around the mound!" Sanya whispered, covering her friend's mouth to keep her quiet.

"Let me look," Mashi responded, wiggling around till she could see through the leaves. "You're right. It looks like a clan shaman! She's

walking right towards Rylah!”

Sanya looked through the leaves. She pulled her camera from the ty'gress' hand and zoomed in. The tall, curvy ly'ness was wearing the same, fuzzy hide loincloth that hung from her own hips. She was also wearing an ornate headdress topped with a several dozen pink and lime green feathers. A grotesque, gnarled wooden mask covered her upper face and cheeks. Brightly painted runes covered her body. She carried a staff which was shaped much like the vines which impaled the women kneeling at the posts.

“Oh goddess... what should we do?” Sanya asked, turning to her companion. Dreadful anticipation filled her heart. Her muscles tensed.

“Nothing. Just let the shaman do what she wants,” Mashi replied, shaking her head. “We're on barbarian ground. They get to do with us as they please. Those are the rules. We can't change

that, right? That is what Rylah said, isn't it?"

"I'm not sure she said exactly that... but... yeah, you're right," Sanya slowly agreed, relaxing just a tiny bit. She slid up close to the ty'gress so they could both look into the camera screen together. Unconsciously, she slid a hand over her friend's soft, fuzzy ass and up her gently curved back. "Let's just watch then."

In the screen, they companions watched the shaman as she knelt down over the prone lep'rdeess. She looked over her prize from head to toe. Then she looked up, straight at the camera.

"Does she really see us?" Mashi whispered as the barbarian stood, still looking straight at them.

"There's no way. The lens is non-glare. I doesn't reflect anything," Sanya whispered in reply. She held her breath as the shaman turned

away. “Maybe she just saw where we went through the brush.”

Mashi nodded. “That must be it.”

The shaman raised her staff in the air. Then she looked back at the hiding women. “Pretty students in huntress dress,” the harsh, guttural voice seemed to flow with the wind. “Think you hidden? Think shaman of the green not see?”

A sensation like an icy, winter breeze flowed over Sanya's body. She started to feel dizzy. Fear gripped her. She struggled to stand. To run away. Her body wouldn't move. She was frozen in place. Her head spun. She struggled to focus. All she could see was the shaman. All she could hear was the shaman's voice.

“No,” the shaman laughed, grinning at the ashiri and her companion. “No run away! Bodies mine now! Slave to tribal magics! Now! Come out!”

Come out! Shaman of the green commands it!”