

Alien Masters 231

Chapter 231

“Then why is the slave full of child, Damien?” Dinah growled. “Did you think if you did this we would let you keep her in the mountains?” “What did we do, Mistress?” Master Damien asked.

“We don’t understand.” The women looked livid. The men still didn’t believe them and the conversation was obviously confusing to both sides.

“Rue and his Brothers kept the slave after we brought you here, correct?” Nu-reeh asked calmly. “Yes, Mistress,” they answered in unison.

“Did you instruct them how to care for an Earth slave?”

“Yes, Mistress,” they answered again.

“How did you ensure the slave would be cared for as you requested?” Nu-reeh asked.

“We paid them with the stones you gave us, Mistress,” Master Damien told her Looking over at me.

“They kept the stones,” Nu-reeh spit out obviously grasping what had happened, “but they didn’t give the slave the tonic when they had her. It has to be given everyday. It is not effective if not taken every day.”

The woman named Dinah groused, “We should remove the Earth slaves from the compound. The men are too foolish.”

Nu-reeh didn’t seem to agree with her.

“It would upset the men, Dinah,” she addressed the other woman.

“The men like the human slaves best. Taking them away would make the men unhappy for many changes of the small moon. Just look at what these men did to keep their slave. It would create too many problems. Their mothers would be displeased.”

The two women flanking her seemed thoughtful and in agreement, so Nu-reeh continued.

“There are systems our cousins in the red mountains use to ensure all the females receive the drink regularly. The Administrators will use the same system here.”

“Now we must keep the slave in the mountains until it is ready, Nu-reeh. This is unacceptable; it is embarrassing,” Dinah said glaring at me.

| was dying to know what would happen to me and my child. They obviously weren't are. round my stomach in a useless bid to protect the unborn. There was no way | was strong enough to save this child from Nu-reeh if she didn't want it.

“What will you do with our slave and the child it carries?” Master Damien asked.

Strange he would ask that as | thought it. A they had rey believed Gul 'a thing could happen.

“That is no concern for you, Damien,” Nu-reeh snapped turning to leave. “| beg your pardon, Mistress. It is my concern,” Master Damien rejoined.

Nu-reeh took three massive strides until she rested in Ken Master Daren Bee éred him for a

and then looked at me.

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“We cannot harm the slave now, can we?” she asked softly.

“You have bonded with her.”

Master Christof pulled me on his Lap and hugged me tight to his chest.

“What will you do with the child, though?” Master Damien asked again. Nu-reeh bristled at being pushed, she didn’t like it. “If the slave gives birth to something strong enough, we will keep it,” she said.

“And if not?” Master Damien asked.

“If it will not survive here, it will not survive,” she said turning to leave the room.

“No more questions.”

| sat shivering on Master Christof's lap.

Nu-reeh strode out purposefully. The other sister hesitated and walked cautiously toward us. It wasn’t Dinah, this was Tosu. The men knew her and knew she was the calmest of the three.

“| believe it is strong enough, human,” she said in a very Low voice before she turned and left.

I sat stunned looking at the way she’d gone. How was | supposed to know if my baby was strong enough to survive? What did | need to do to be sure? In fact, what was strong enough to survive in this place?

“What does that even mean?” Master Bane asked echoing my thoughts.

“Can a slave have a child?” Master Kein asked turning to look at me.

“It is not possible,” Master Evan insisted and Master Damien agreed with him. “You just asked her about the child, you heard her,” | said to Master Damien. “You already admitted it was possible. Trust me, | know, | am carrying a child.”

He wrinkled his brow and looked at me, "You believe it is possible very strongly. Your questions were hard to ignore."

Stubborn, bull-headed...my thought was cut short as all five of them gasped and stared at me. "We could say the same about you, Ciara," Master Christof remarked chuckling at my imagery.

They didn't necessarily understand all the words I used and it made sense.

Lucky for me to be in Master Christof's lap. He found me so insignificant and amusing. The others were not as generous.

"I wish to re-establish my connection

to you, Brothers," pining the chain on

"I do not like this separation."

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Master Evan was getting upset and slightly desperate. I hadn't realized how much he depended on his Brothers to feel well. He wanted to touch and taste all of us.

I was on my feet and moving to him before I realized I'd gotten up. Before I could settle myself on his lap he was pulling me down. I found myself on my back with him between my legs pressing his body over my gravid belly.

Master Evan couldn't touch enough of me. He licked and sucked wherever he could reach and I returned the favor. He focused on my breasts. That warm, wet substance that had come out of them was wonderful, he wanted more of it. Suddenly, he understood Master Kein's obsession with the large rounded orbs.

| felt the weird clench as the milk started to dribble out. Master Evan moaned low in his throat and sucked harder. It tasted of me and it was new, so he loved it.

“Share, brother,” Master Kein demanded and Master Evan allowed me to move from his pallet to Master Kein’s.

“What is this?” Master Kein murmured between deep draws.

“Milk, Master Kein, food for the baby when it is born,” | panted.

My breasts were so sensitive and the men were being so insistent with them.

“| will be jealous of this baby, then,” Master Kein said gentling his touch and kissing my breasts.

The flap opened and five armed men appeared. Their daggers looked wicked. They appeared angry and | scrambled to get behind Master Kein. My Masters all smirked at the other family. | felt this was trouble.

My thoughts were not my own anymore. A powerful bond was pulsing between me and the five Warriors chained to the wall. | was part of the collective and the collective knew these guys well.

Nu-reeh and her sisters had brought Damien and his Brothers to the mountain and left them with these men. The women expected this family to settle my owners and tend their wounds. Damien’s family didn’t want the care and it had turned into a brawl.

The battle had been wicked. Even half dead, Damien and his Brothers had not been easy to deal with. They'd fought this family with everything they had left.

My owners had embarrassed these men badly. It had taken the women to break up the scuffle and chain them to the wall.

Damien watched the men move and saw their fear. Their hands held a tremor and their eyes darted around. This family feared Damien and his Brothers. It was a fine feeling to be feared as the best.

The men should fear, Damien chuckled to himself. Even chained as he was, he could still give them a good beating. A thought darkened his mood. Ciara, however, would be in trouble. The collective in my head opted for diplomacy for the moment.

"I believe we owe your family an apology," Master Damien said politely.

"We acted badly and made you our target. We are sorry."

While giving the apology Master Damien crossed his Left arm over his chest and bowed big h@pddt@ds the appropriate Way to deliver sincere regret. I'd never seen my men do it before, but then I'd never seen them apologize either.

The men looked surprised. Evidently, Master Damien did orhay @ \v\ r utatign font ting he was

Ong to other men.

"We were told to set you free and return you to your rooms," the lead Brother announced. Master Damien sat calmly, but the men didn't come any closer.

"Send your slave for the key, we will give it to her," the manGpidiiont the other site 6F thé room.

"No," Master Damien said simply.

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"Do as you were told and release us." I stayed smartly behind Master Kein, who would have preferred I was behind Master Damien. If that wasn't an option he wanted me to move behind Master Bane. When it came to hand to hand combat Master Bane was as strong as Master Damien.

They were agreed, | would be safer to move behind Master Bane. | Slipped along the wall and moved toward Master Bane who was chained beside Master Kein. The men looked angrily at me as | settled behind him. Master Damien knew that look, they wanted to hurt me.

“Throw us the key, cousin. Don’t make any mistakes you will regret,” Master Damien said coolly as my owners threw off their blankets.

“You can’t even stand in those chains,” one of the men said as they edged toward Master Bane.

Master Damien and his brothers all kicked away the bedding and got ready for the fight. Their muscles strained as they took the best positions they could against the wall. They could not stand, so this fight would be based solely on upper body strength.

Bane took a crouching position that crushed me to the wall. He knew how to take these men down even with the constraints upon him. It wouldn’t be much of a challenge.

“Ah, so you think we are the same weak men that were brought to this room originally,” Master Damien laughed watching them close in on Master Bane, “foolish, cousins, very foolish.”

I stayed as still as | could. Master Damien didn’t want me hurt and | was safest right where | was. Master Bane would protect me.

The fight was fast and brutal. Master Bane tossed the aggressors toward his Brothers. | remembered seeing them tossing those stones, the ease he threw the men with reminded me of that.

The scuffles were over rapidly once the men were dispersed.

“Ah-hah,” Master Evan called, “I win. | got the man with the key.” Master Evan unlocked his collar as the man he had been holding slumped to the ground. He walked the key to Master Damien who congratulated him on winning that contest.

The men that had come were all unconscious and badly bruised.

“Should be show them how enjoyable these collars can be?” Master Kein asked as he stood up and stretched.

Master Kein’s Lithe form rippled with muscle as he stood proud in his nudity. | smiled at him and thought about what he’d said. It would probably anger Nu-reeh if she found out they’d chained up the men that came to set them free, | thought.

“No fun, Ciara,” Master Christof complained throwing an arm around my shoulders, “but you are probably accurate.”

Master Evan passed between his Brothers. He tasted each of their shoulders, he also hugged them. | hadn’t been aware they hugged.

“We didn’t, but you do and it is a practice | enjoy,” he said pulling me tightly to his chest.

The men walked me calmly out of the room and down the hall. It seemed strange to do this nude, but the men didn’t mind. They h eg cletoirig and tp gerion ie ‘i wearing the blankets around, as ll’d thought they should. Blankets were for sleeping. | kept my head down out of habit, but tried to use my peripherals. Not that | needed to, | knew this hallway. In fact, | could have led us right to their quarters.

Many men in the hall greeted them and stared curiously at me. “They said the slave was tending you, Damien,” one man exclaimed. “We thought for sure you would kill it.”

Another man slapped Master Evan on the shoulder, “Glade sé Poul’ backs cousin.”

ALL around us the men were congratulating my Masters on their SUCCESS. They had Completely broken. It was a testament to their strength that they survived.

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No one asked what happened to break the bond in the first place. | suddenly knew great offense would be taken to that question. That would be taboo to ask and very rude.

| glanced up at Master Damien and he looked a little upset with me. That | dared to think these men were that dishonorable upset my Masters.

"| apologize, Masters," | said quietly.

That statement made the other men notice me again.

"It's been a long time since they had a problem like this," a man said pointing to my stomach.

"Last time it was men from the red mountains. The family's name was Barne."

"They didn't hurt the slave, did they?" Master Bane asked.

| couldn't tell if he was curious or if | was curious. It was all starting to blend together. We were all curious.

"No, they brought the men here to be with the slave until it removed the child from its body. Once the child was eating solid food they sent the men home with the slave," he said.

"How did that slave come to have a child inside of it?" Master Evan asked. Again, | felt it was more Master Christof and | curious about this and not Master Evan.

"The traders that sold us the health drink were cutting it so they had more to sell. We test it now before it goes to the compounds," the man said.

Master Damien and his brothers pondered the issue for a moment before Master Christof spoke.

"Are we human?" he asked.

"It seems unlikely we could make a child with a human. Ciara is so...unlike us."

He was right. I was from a different planet in a different galaxy. I was weak and small, nothing like women here.

"My Mistress told my brothers and I stories once, when she was in a good mood. It was after the last slave with a child was brought here."

ALL the men clustered around listening to this man talk. He dropped his voice low so the sound would not echo in the cavern.

"The portals used to open spontaneously on our world. The ones here lead to several planets, Earth was one of them," he said conspiratorially.

"Creatures from Earth came to this world and creatures from our world

went there. My understanding is she "expected" the connections were open or where life started originally. She thought life started here must have moved to Earth."

Or things on Earth moved here, I thought silently. The man continued to speak. "The world has since! closed the portals here and Earth's are crumbling, as the slavers know. The connection between our worlds is lost now."

I grinned and shook my head. The connection was alive and well as far as I could see.

It was interesting what the man had said. Did humans evolve from apes as we'd thought? Or did apes evolve from something other than waste? Wasn't really a Paterian relative that altered the course of history? Our planets may have been sharing genes for eons. Humans evolved to lose the fur and the Paterian women evolved to gain wings.

A funny line of thinking struck me. Were vampires a story based on seeing a Paterian male that wandered through a portal? It didn't seem impossible.

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Master Damien and his Brothers were confused by my line of thinking. They'd never heard of evolution. No one had ever talked about how creatures came to be. They just were. Master Christof found it fascinating.

Our internal musings were cut short as a man strode into the hall and broke up the men standing around. He called for the men to move to their daily jobs.

"Mistress Nu-reeh didn't leave assignments for your family, Damien," the man said. "The rest of you know where you should be." The crowd dispersed quickly. Most went toward the large exit at the end of the hall.

Master Damien led me into their rooms. They lit the smokeless torches and the central fire pit in the main room. Warmth spread out in the space as I explored their living areas.

It looked surprisingly like the compound. Large arched doorways separated the different rooms, giving the space an open feeling. There was no eating area. I poked my head from the sitting area into the bedroom and then through the doorway to the bathroom.

The cold stone floor I'd been used to walking on in the main hall was covered in here. There were animal skins over the main areas of the floor, making a soft area to step.

Their colors were spread generously through the rooms. Everything was draped in the shade of blue they considered their color. I touched the various items and wandered through their suite as they watched.

I poked around and found the cleaning supplies in a small closet off the main room. Just like at the compound, I thought. The men gasped and I turned to face them.

"why were you doing that?" Master Damien growled.

I'd been thinking about cleaning for my fake Masters.

"They left me at home when I bled," I started to say and the men surrounded me.

They couldn't understand why I'd bled, they couldn't understand why I'd been left alone, and they were furious I was used to clean for the men they paid.

"I like to clean," I stammered. "It gave me something to do. The bleeding is normal. I think it started because they stopped the drink."

The men relented. I really did like to clean. It made me happy to see things neater once I was done. I had been content, so that pleased them.

The bleeding concept they struggled with. If it was related to stopping the drink, they would make Rue and his Brothers pay for that.

"Perhaps she will let us lay the whip to them," Master Bane growled referring to Nu-reeh.

"They are masters of the whip, Brothers," Master Christof assured everyone.

I felt Master Christof's memories of being whipped, but a new sensation was clawing for my attention. "Masters, I have to-" I started but Master Bane was pulling me through the arched doorway into the bathroom already. I sat on the lacquered pot and relaxed. It had been hours since I had gone.

The bathing room we were in was spacious. The ceilings were high. A sunken, stone lined pit at the center of the room, I was sitting off to the side to take care of my business. Even with all six of us in here it didn't feel cramped.

Master Christof turned a knob on the wall and the huge sunken tubbing the room's right to till I saw the rising from it. That would feel wonderful on my sore back.

| started when Master Bane ran a wet towel between my Legs to clean me. The big man roughed BefSrême and glintiled Ye sat the rag aside and ran his fingers through my lower lips a second time.

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“| have missed this, Ciara,” he said softly. “I’m on the pot, Master Bane,” | told him shyly.

Master Evan pulled me to stand and led me to their bath. “And in a moment you will be in the bath, Ciara. We are aware of where you are,” he said Laughing.

They didn’t understand my self-consciousness about my bodily functions. They always used the bathroom as a group. Removal of waste was just a process like eating, there was nothing to be ashamed of.

| stepped into the water feeling much less uncomfortable as they used the latrines. They were right, it was just a function. If they were so unconcerned about it, | shouldn’t worry either.

The water in the pool came to the edge of my ass. | stood in the middle scooping up handfuls of the warm water and pouring it over my back. It felt so good and relaxing.

Master Damien was the first to notice me. | was beautiful. He Liked the exaggerated dip my low back was making as my belly grew. Through his eyes | saw myself and | was Lovely. Something was missing, though.

“What’s missing, Master Damien?” | asked, turning slightly to look at him. “We were farther gone than we’d thought. We should have noticed, Brother,” Master Evan laughed leaving the room.

My neck was bare. Their symbol was on my stomach and nowhere else. Master Evan returned with the collar and motioned me over as he sat with his legs hanging in the pool.

| felt unsure for a moment. My neck was Larger and the old collar had been replaced, it had been too tight. The cuffs on my ankles were also slightly larger. If these were the old size they would not fit.

Damien scoffed at my concern, he and his Brothers had never stopped watching out for me. Fredrick had sent notice through traveling men that | had changed. They had sent back stones and bought everything in the right size Less than a moon ago.

“We thought you were merely gaining weight,” Master Christof said. “We assumed that you were just very healthy.”

Master Kein bounded in beside Master Evan and took the tiny nipple rings from him. They put all of my metal ornamentation on me.

I'd never thought of the collar and cuffs as jewelry. They were a sign of enslavement, but not anymore. The insignia was beautiful and | was overjoyed to wear it.

| shook my head trying to clear it, as the men stepped into the warm water. My opinions were all over the place. It wasn't clear where | ended and they began.

The sensation of not being the one to direct my own thoughts was nerve wracking. It was far more intrusive than the occasional feelings that had assaulted me before. | wanted to feel anxiety, but | couldn't; it wasn't the predominant theme.

Master Damien lowered himself onto the bench in the sunken tub. The water swirled a Ritp and he' | ae at ér several knife

Ounds. | felt them on my own unscarred abdomen. He sighed and stretched out in the tub grinning at Master Evan.

The pain was inconsequential. The Brothers had been pulled from the edge again. We were Lucky to be alive and unbroken.

When Master Christof had separated from them, it had not been complete. This time they lost all connection to one another. They never thought they would see happiness again.

| automatically started to soap Master Damien, because | knew {i was what he wants beaSure radiate from him as my hands ran over his skin. He had Loved this part of having me from the first day.

| continued to wash him in comfortable silence. As they always did, the enjoyed. Yiaste? pantien's bath.\|-enjoyed it, too, using my new knowledge about him to guide my hands where he wanted them.

“Wonder what our schedule is now?” Master Christof asked. “Will we continue to train?”

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Master Kein Lounged along a bench and answered.

“They cannot separate us from Ciara. What will they do with us?”

“And what will we do with you?” Master Evan growled pulling me toward him. | stumbled and Landed on his Lap.

“So many questions,” | grunted trying to stand and failing.

“Yes,” Master Damien said watching us, “so many questions...Perhaps you could enlighten us. How is it that we share our bond with a human? How did you do that Ciara and from so far away? The mountains usually disrupt our bond.”

The men sat unmoving in the water. Their eyes bored into me and | didn’t know what to say. “| didn’t do anything, Master Damien, it just happened.”

They didn’t need to watch my eyes to know | was telling the truth. | couldn’t explain how | connected to them. It was pretty obvious from the jumble in my head that we were.

“Females cannot bond with us,” Master Evan said holding me tight.

Some part of him knew | was female. There was a hint of fear there and it was completely unnecessary.

"I've seen your women here, Master Evan," | reasoned, "I'm not really a woman compared to them."

Master Christof snorted, "You bear young ones, Ciara. You are female. You've always thought you were female." "I'm not Like the women here, though," | stressed and Master Evans arms loosened around me.

Perhaps | wasn't a female, he was still torn on the issue. The men's opinion clashed violently with my own and it was uncomfortable. Only in one mind did | find similar ideas. There was comfort in agreement there.

"I know, Ciara," Master Christof soothed. Master Christof had always believed | was female. It wasn't the prevailing opinion, so he'd never pushed it.

"You don't agree on everything?" | asked. Master Evan dragged a wet cloth up my arms and answered, "Mostly, some opinions we do not share, but those thoughts make us uncomfortable."

Their minds hummed along with mine as Evan bathed me completely.

In return for the care, | started to wash Evan's hair once it was wet. The shock | got when ery pry fingersiran

tyoush eas Locks startled me. His hair was sensitive, not just his scalp. | twisted a lock around my fingers and | felt the weird pleasure that caused him.

"Wash it, please," he requested softly, "and then twist it."

The other men were used to this. They all knew Evan's hair wasn't Like theirs. The sensitivity was a secret they hid. It could be dangerous if others knew.

| gently cleaned Evan's hair and scalp how he Liked. Once | was done | sat behind him on the ieecep gepf thestdhe What te wafiel wisting, | called braiding. Working slowly | braided and unbraided his hair. The sensations put him in a near Zen state of relaxation.

Still, Evan's intense pleasure could not take away the questions. He shook himself out of his tr: °F and pulled packénto'h ater. There were mysteries that needed to be explored. They were curious about my stomach. It wasn't clear to them what was inside of it that made it larger.

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| remembered going to one of my cousins' birth. There were also several shows | had seen on childbirth. The men saw through my memories. Cringing, | realized | would have to go through this without any pain medicine.

"This will not cause you pain see to it."

" Master Damien said stoically. "We will

"It's not something you get to choose," | told him shaking my head. "It always hurts."

Damien was getting irritated with my irrational persistence on the matter. Apologizing softly, | relented; perhaps they did have something to use. As soon as | agreed, | felt better.

Master Christof was curious, so Master Evan handed me to him. Long fingers cleaned me intimately as Master Christof explored my folds. He Slipped his longest finger inside of me and pressed. It twinged when he hit my cervix.

"The way is blocked," he stated simply. "Nothing can come out there."

| remembered my fake Masters and how angry they got when | couldn't explain something. The discomfort | felt about not being able to explain made Master Damien angry. Rue and his Brothers had not treated me the way he wanted me cared for.

"The way opens when the baby comes," | explained as Master Christof withdrew his fingers.

Master Christof watched my face and smiled. He believed me. When we laid in the bed he had felt the child's movement, something was definitely inside of me. I kissed his chin and thanked him.

Once we crawled out of the tub, I was dried and fussed over. My knees were scraped from hard floor of the sick room and they were treated. My lower back was sore so it was rubbed with the cream before I was treated with the moisturizer. They cared for me as only my true owners did.

ALL of us were hungry after the bath. We had to go somewhere to get food. No one delivered food like at the compound. "We are very wise, Brothers," Master Bane said as they pulled out clothes to wear. Yes, they were. I couldn't help but agree. They had thought ahead.

I shook my head to clear it. What in the world was wrong with me? I didn't know what they were so happy about and I didn't know what decision they were preening over

"Ciara, stop being obstinate," Master Damien ordered. "It is unbecoming and distracts us."

Master Kein rustled to the back of their wardrobe and pulled out several bags. I took a deep breath and relaxed. In my mind's eye, I saw what was in the bags.

Everything back there was for me. They had Little pots of creams and cleaners. When they went to the cabin they had to be prepared.

The thing that had them so happy was something Fredrick had designed and made for them tifyad long sleş and: Wot go to my foet! JM Hood could be lifted over my head. Their symbol was stitched artfully into the front and back of the gown. The high collar would protect my neck from the chill.

They had bought it to bring to the cabin when it got colder there.

During the cooler time the brown outfit would not be enough ify m wanted,t be outsid' é brown ousfit was not pleasing anyway, it was the wrong color.

"How can it be warm?" I asked as Master Kein pulled it out.

The outfit appeared to be made of something flowing and blue. It was thicker than what | usually wore, but Fredrick had assured dnt Would net shied Me from their gaze completely. It still appeared to be ornamentation. The way it shimmered it looked like water. | fought against the idea it would be warm.

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Master Damien took my hand and guided me to feel the strange fabric. It was thick like wool, but soft as silk. They were right, it would probably be warm.

“The weather here is colder than even the cabin, Ciara,” Master Damien told me. “Now stop disagreeing with us. It serves no purpose,” he scolded. “Yes, Master Damien,” | answered.

The overwhelming desire was to go with the prevailing opinion anyway. Holding my own differing opinion was uncomfortable. It was easier to relax and be like them.

| did get one piece of clothing that looked like clothes. Soft boots were produced and slipped onto my feet. They went up to my knees. Even if a breeze got underneath my dress, | would still be warm.

After dressing me in my outfit and brushing my hair, we stepped back into the hall. | didn’t hear voices, so | glanced around. The act infuriated Master Damien.

| wasn’t to look at other men. The same rules applied as at the compound. They would find a way to punish me here if | did not follow the rules.

Master Christof encouraged forgiveness for speaking with their Keepers earlier. They saw my memories and knew | didn’t want to break their rules. My thoughts had been desperate and scared. It would be considered a warning, my owners decided.

The opaque blue fabric swished around my legs as | walked. It was remarkable how it kept the chill from my body. This had been a very wise purchase.

| was so glad | agreed with them. Disagreeing felt wrong and brought discomfort. My instinct was to go with the communal flow. “You understand, Ciara,” Master Bane said reaching out and taking my hand, “good.”

We walked briskly to the eating area, which was a moderate distance away. There was a large central fire inside and tables set around the large room. We were either late or early, because the place was largely unoccupied.

"We are late," Master Damien assured me as he put my kneeling place by a table. I held onto the furniture and managed to get myself down to my kneeling place.

Food in the mountains was different from the compound. Much of it would be inedible for me, luckily my owners knew that. They had trained themselves to care for me well. They were certain they would find something I could eat.

Master Kein and Master Christof went to gather the food while the other men sat with me. My owners irritated the cooks serving the food they were so particular. One of the cooks snapped at Master Kein because he was being too demanding.

It felt like I was standing with Master Kein talking to the cook about what I needed. The experience was confusing, because that wasn't what I was doing. My mind couldn't seem to decide if I was talking to a cook about food or kneeling on a kneeling place at the table. It seemed I was doing both at once and that wasn't possible.

Master Evan's hand wrapped into the hair at the back of my head and he tugged on it until I looked up at him. "We will guide you," he said. "There is no reason for all this concern you have. We find it unpleasant."

The men didn't find it distracting to be in two places at once, or even five places. They referred to He together, but they could function independently also. I assumed it would be a skill I would have to learn.

The food was brought back to us and the men dug in. It was surprising to

realize how new to me the food was. I also knew where it came from.

| had a comparison suddenly. The meat the cooks prepared here was not the ayy We ciked Pris type of miedt we Liked to roast over an open tire.

| had never seen my Masters cook. It had not been apparent to me they knew how.