

Alien Masters 61

Chapter 61

The tops of the drums were shaped like three small bongos. | tapped on them experimentally until | had a good rhythm going.

Playing these little drums was complicated, but | Loved music. The only part of high school | liked was band class. The pitch each drum made was different and that took some getting used to. | got engrossed in what | was doing. | looked up to see Fuji swiveling her hips to the beat. | spent the rest of the morning tapping out different beats on the drums while the girls danced.

Abell rang suddenly and everything stopped. Fuji started to run out. She turned around abruptly grabbing my hand and pulling me with her. "Where are we going?" | asked her trying to keep up.

"Our Masters are coming to feed us, they don't like to wait," she said.

| noticed my owner's mark on the floor in the room she took us into. A kneeling place was set up in front of it. A chair and a small table were in front of me. | followed Fuji's lead and kneeled down waiting, no one was talking.

| heard the tamping of feet as the men started to come in. A set stopped in front of me, but | kept my head down. "Hello, Ciara," | heard Christof say as he brushed my cheek. | looked up at him and smiled.

Christof was dirty, it Looked like he had had a rough morning. His hands were clean, though. He fed me from a bowl until | thought | would burst. | never refused what he gave me, | just chewed really slowly.

Unlike my other owners he stopped feeding me and didn't fuss at me. Leaning down he Laughed quietly in my ear. "Follow me," he said.

| followed his heels out into the courtyard and out the door in the wall. le're outside the Keeper's compound, Ciara. You can look around if you'd like to, none of the other Warriors come out here," he said.

"Are we allowed to be out here, Christof?" | asked curiously.

We walked into what | would have considered a forest at home, along a little path. The plants were all different and | looked at them fascinated.

ninjanovel.com

"Yes, | can take you out here. Most Warriors just come and feed their slave a mid day meal. | thought you might be curious to see outside the compound," he said watching me with interest.

"Yes, I'd love to see this," | said inspecting a bright yellow leaf growing from the ground.

"I am curious, also," he told me.

| asked simple questions at first, the names of Blane Jones around the dieh'ts m to mind toudg me, so | got bolder and asked about the planet.

"| don't know the whole planet, Ciara," he laughed. "The Administrators | \

pped Mean thfs 'i age as a child and | have never lived another place."

"Where was the slave auction? Is it on this world?" | asked hesitantly. "Do you know how | got there?"

"My brothers and | took a transport to the edge of the mountains. There is a place there our leaders allowed portals, Wefaokethe'ohe that leads to the Slave auction. It is in center space on a small neutral planet. We were told the portals can make a human sick if they are awake, so my brothers made sure you slept," he told me.

Chapter 62

He mused a bit on the second part of the question. "I have heard it is difficult to operate a portal on your home planet. They are often destroyed by Earth's natural defense. The slavers must have found a place the defense wasn't strong to take you."

Christof sat for a moment and watched me Looking around. feel as though we should not have taken you," he stated bluntly. "You should not have been made to be a slave."

ALL my resolve about just making the best of this broke and | threw my arms around his neck crying.

"Please, take me back. | don't want to be a slave. | want to be free,"

| cried brokenly.

Christof seemed stunned by the sudden contact and almost pushed me away. After a moment he wrapped me in his arms

"The kneeling is horrible," | sobbed into his neck. "I know how to feed and clean myself. It should be my choice to have sex. Please, | beg you, take me back."

Christof stayed quiet for a moment before he spoke.

"| cannot take you back. The portals do not open naturally on Earth and usually whoever is in them gets destroyed when they are forcibly opened on that planet. You must stay here with us. | will do my best to protect you. My brothers will not wish to harm you, they also wish to see you happy and well. Please understand, Ciara."

ninjanovel.com "It is all so demeaning," | told him still clinging to his frame.

"| will not demean you," he said softly stroking my back. "You do not need to kneel when it is just you and I. | will Let you feed yourself.

Sex with me will be your choice..."

We stood for a moment and I calmed down. I repeated to myself I had decided to make the best of it. At least now I had an ally. I tried to slow my breathing and focused on the joy of having someone to talk to.

"Come, Ciara, I must walk you back to the compound. I must rejoin my brothers or they will come to look for me if I am late," Christof said pointing back the way we'd come.

As we walked I took Christof's hand in mine. His presence was a blessing and I was glad for it. "Why are you doing that?" he asked looking at our joined hands.

"Because I want to," I answered grinning.

He pushed me gently against a tree

and ran a finger over my jawline.

He asked if I was itching my eyes.

"On my planet when two people hold hands it's because they like each other," Safa said watching him.

"I like you too, Ciara," he said grinning at me. His face turned to a frown when he saw I was probably just feeding him.

"That's okay with me," I said, "I appreciate knowing someone understands."

We walked back to the Keeper's compound holding hands the whole way.

Chapter 63

The other girls were dying to know why Christof took me outside. I lied and told them he had wanted to have sex.

“He wanted sex out of doors?” Rose asked suspiciously. “They hate that. They all hate that, | thought. He really is strange,” she mused

| hadn’t known that would be a mistake and asked her why they didn’t like sex outside, normally.

“The way the women take them is not comfortable for them. They like to use us privately in their places for resting, where everything is comfortable,” she answered.

ninjanovel.com

| didn’t talk to her anymore about it. My gut instinct told me what Christof and | did at Lunch didn’t usually happen. It was best to keep it a secret.

After lunch | had to pee, really bad. Fuji told me to go tell the Keepers. | wasn’t permitted to go by myself. Much Like at my new home | was watched and cleaned, it was weird.

| was distracted from the strangeness of it all by our after Lunch activity. The Keepers took us outside the back of the compound. We walked through sand and | was thrilled to see water in front of us. The sea, much like the sky was a shade of bluish purple. The Keeper’s compound sat right on the shore.

We were in a protected alcove with rock walls almost encircling a little bay. The beach was beautiful, it was a Light coral color. The sand felt Like sand at home. Little waves broke on the beach. | almost ran into the water with my outfit still on, Fuji stopped me.

“You have to get permission from the Keepers to be in the water and they will take off your panels. Your owners will get mad if it gets dirty,” she said pulling me back.

| went and asked the Keepers and they said | was allowed to swim. My owners had permitted it. They took my little outfit off of me and placed it to the side.

When they undressed me | had tried to help them and they looked at me like | was strange. Despite my discomfort of sitting around nude with my new friends, | raged at the other women that I could take care of myself. Rose Laughed at me.

"It takes some getting used to," she said, "but this is the way they look at it. You can't do anything for yourself. It stems from the experience with their earliest slaves. They bought the ones that fought them, but broke them. They treated slaves horribly and the slaves lost the will to live. If they didn't do everything for them after they were broken they died faster."

I shuddered and she continued, "The Paterians got competitive about keeping slaves alive. Eventually they figured out the slaves that were given less pain and more pleasure did better. They also learned the better they cared for their slaves the better they did. It became a sign of the men's training and ability to keep a healthy slave. The end result is you get treated like a prized pet."

I listened with interest, but was dying to get in the water. Rose shooed me and I ran to the shore, dipping my toes in the ocean. The water was cool, but not bad. Wading out into waist deep water I swam around. The water got deeper toward where the inlet was. I dove down and inspected the rocky shelves.

All of the sudden I came across a barrier. I reached out and touched it. It was a large metal grate that covered the opening to the inlet.

It ended right at the water line. The grates weren't small, but I couldn't get through them. Little barnacle like creatures covered the metal from top to bottom.

Swimming to the other side of the inlet under water I found a place where the grate was open. It looked like it must have gotten broken by something. There was a hole large enough for me to fit through.

Surfacing, I looked back at the shore. The Keepers were busy with the other girls, no one was watching me.

Feeling wicked, I slipped through the grate and explored the ocean outside

the inlet. I made out enough faintly. Not wanting to get caught I slipped back through the grate. Making a note, I decided I'd have to do that again. I swam around until I was called in by the Keepers.

Much like kindergarden we were picked up at a specified time. A little bell rang and we alhweny into the ' courtyard Sd krieled on our pads waiting. The Warriors came in and picked up their slaves, sometimes stopping and talking to the Keepers.

No one came for me. | waited a long time after everyone else was gone, | thought | might havg keen ef.™M Perhaps chtistor had repeated what | had said and it had made them angry. | jumped when boots appeared before me

“Get up, slave,” Master Evan said towering over my kneeling frame.

| hadn’t heard his approach. Looking up all my owners were standing there glaring at me, except Christof who Looked amused.

Chapter 64

| followed them out the wall and balked when | saw the transport pad. My uncles all rode roller coasters, but | was too chicken. I’d never even been on an airplane. | hated heights. “This eve will be very difficult or very enjoyable for you, depending on how you act,” Master Damien threatened in my ear.

Gulping back my fear | followed him onto the pad. It shot up Like a rocket and | screamed, dropping to the floor. My eyes were shut tight as | begged them to please make it stop. When the thing started to move forward | grabbed onto the closest leg and cried.

| felt hands removing me from the pant leg | was clinging to and Master Damien's voice was in my ear, “You will learn to stand and act respectable during transport. We are taking a trip tonight. It will only end when you stop this ridiculous behavior.”

They had the driver swoop the pad every which way. | screamed | would fall off and die crashing to the ground. They thought that was amusing.

“Do you remember the currents that prevented you from moving at the auction?” Christof asked. “Similar barriers prevent you from falling off the sides of the pad.”

ANGELA'S LIBRARY "You should try them," Master Evan said pushing me with a quick thrust toward the edge. He was supremely annoyed.

I yelped but didn't go off the side of the platform. They were right something was stopping me. The invisible barrier swooshed against my hand when I hesitantly tried to place it outside the bounds of the pad.

Turning around I smiled at my owners. The operator of the pad acted like I wasn't present, most of the rest glowered at me.

The anger on their faces was undeniable, except for Christof, who still just seemed amused. The lines of skin color that were usually so Light seemed to darken with anger. They looked slightly feral and I made up my mind to overcome this fear immediately.

Finally, I Learned to watch the horizon and relax on the pad. It didn't matter if it went up or down, zipped left or right. I stayed in my position and kept my eyes open. The scenery was beautiful. Mountains were in the distance every which way and the ocean bordered on all other sides. In any other circumstance, I would have enjoyed the view.

The sun had set and the sky was dark by the time the man dropped us off in front of our door. I waited patiently for Master Damien to open the gate and followed him off the pad. It felt funny walking on solid ground again, Like when you get used to wearing roller skates.

The rest of the evening was quiet. The men took me down to bathhouse with them after dinner. I heard several Warriors commenting on my morning ride. Evidently, everyone had seen that little fiasco.

The comments the other men made were upsetting to my owners. In turn, my owners were colder and less interested in me than they had been the last two days. I learned the lesson quickly, a good slave does not embarrass its Masters.

Adjusting to the life of a slave was different. I would say difficult, but I guess my mind set made it easier in a way. Since I was determined to survive, I didn't concentrate on being unhappy. I made up my mind to make the best of this.

Christof made making the best of my situation easier. He came almost every day at Lunch. He kept to his word and never treated me Like a slave. We became fast friends. | felt bonded to him in a secret way.

| did have to just verify one more time that escape was not an option.

| cornered Fuji and asked about the odds of escaping. She was furious | talked to her about it, but she was informative. There wasn't a good chance of getting away.

The whole of the planet kept slaves, if | escaped here | would be taken by someone in another village. Sh didn't know how.te Mek tHe Srtals ever \f | ould get to one. Besides that, portals on Earth rarely worked and being in one that was forcibly opened would probably kill me. Her advice was like Rose's: Learn to live like this and stop thinking of escape.

I'd decided to survive and escaping home was not an option. My mind was set. Now | just needed to know what to do to make the most of this world.

Staying where | was seemed safest. Christof would defend me. Mas Damien and Unduly A my health. | had to be exactly what they wanted, so they would feel no need to be rid of me.

The duties my Masters had told me were mine were very ae Paily\ sex _ It was my duty to be ready and to provide a healthy body for them to release into.

Chapter 65

| was knew | was more than a sex toy, so | tried to be industrious.

| attempted to clean the apartment once, just out of habit. They chastised me and the posts were threatened for daring to step outside my role. There were men that cleaned the rooms during the day, my owners didn't need or want me to do that.

Instinctively, | knew they wanted more. There was some part of our relationship | was missing. Whatever that was | had to find it.

My obedience and zeal had nothing to do with a love of slavery. | hated what | had become, weak and subservient. The desire to fully please them came from a selfish place. Happy Masters would not sell their slave. The worst nightmare | could imagine involved the nameless, faceless creatures that would own me next.

I started to watch my Masters. Any time we were together | paid all of my attention to them. It became my all consuming desire to provide whatever they needed. The only way to do that was to figure out what they wanted.

ninjanovel.com Even Christof wasn't helpful. He told me the same thing the girls did. The men wanted sex; provide it, stay healthy, and they would be happy.

| don't think they realized how intently | was watching them until a chuke game one late afternoon. They were playing with a group of men that did not own slaves; | was by myself in the tent. It allowed me to really watch the game without distraction.

The men worked together, but the part they all played was different.

Master Kein darted between the larger players to move the different balls; he was difficult to catch. He tossed to Master Damien who made a giant pass to the other side of the field. Master Evan retrieved the ball and moved it with surprising accuracy to Christof. Master Bane knocked down the men in Christof's way and after a rapid sprint, they scored a point.

The other men on the field didn't seem to have the diversity of talent my men did. My owners were each very good at what they did and unbeatable together. | really got into the game, even booing loudly over what | considered unfair interference.

Master Evan loped over to me and crouched down. "Why are you making that noise?" he asked.

"That man," | said pointing, "got in Master Christof's way and tripped him. He wouldn't have been able to stop him otherwise. That wasn't fair."

Master Evan panted for a moment watching me.

“Master Christof could have run that pass across the field before anyone caught him, but that man cheated and tripped him,” | pushed.

Master Evan seemed stumped on what to say for a moment. He settled on telling me not to watch the other men and to only watch them.

“I only want to watch you all, Master Evan. You're much better than the other men,” | told him honestly. “In fact, your aim with the ball is far superior to any other man on the field. It's very impressive. | enjoy watching you play.”

He cocked his head to the side and looked at me for a moment before standing.

“Only cheer for your Masters,” he

called back as he

When the game was done | was sure my owners had won. The other men grumbled as they walked | &Y at the ground and smiled to myself. It had not looked Like it was much of a contest.

“SO you are an expert at chuke now, Ciara?” Master Damier-asked sitting O the grass Gao one and then sprawling out on his side.

“Tripping Master Christof-” | started to say and Master Bane Laughed.

Chapter 66

“You were not offended when | tripped Rue, Ciara,” Master Kein said.

“That was different,” | argued. “He wasn't going to make it past Master Bane anyhow.”

“And why was he not going to make it past me?” Master Bane asked sitting and watching the scenery absently.

"Nobody makes it past you when you have a mind to stop them, Master," | said pulling at the filmy covering over my right breast. A finger was lifting my chin and now Master Bane was watching me intently.

"Explain," he ordered simply.

Master Bane's eyes were boring into mine and | was afraid to Look away.

"You are very powerful, Master Bane. When you block the other men, they always fall before you," | stammered.

"So | am the best chuke player?" Master Bane asked grinning.

| didn't want to agree or disagree, so | went back to playing with the coverings over my breasts and made a non committal sound.

ANGELA"sLIBRARY "You didn't answer my brother, Ciara," Master Kein said crouching on my other side.

"| really don't know enough about the game to make such a judgement. It looks like you all play better than the other men," | said feeling brilliant. hat was evasive, Ciara," Master Bane said looking up at the sky.

"Tell me which of us is the best chuke player, in your opinion."

| panted and my gaze went from man to man. Master Bane turned his head to watch my discomfort and his grin widened. | felt like prey again.

Now they were all staring at me with those predatory faces on. This was a game and one | was sure to lose. It seemed wrong to choose one over the other. Instinctively, | knew it would get me into trouble.

"You are the perfect team. I don't know who is better," I stammered and they started to close in on me. "We said choose, Ciara," Master Kein whispered in my ear, "or we put you at the posts for your disobedience."

My eyes darted around and I found their feral smiles and narrowing eyes. Even Christof seemed to be enjoying the current fun. I hated the posts and I knew who would be the one dragging me up to them when the time came.

"Master Damien," I barked out.

He was the one who doled out the punishment for the fennily. Tr Lhadyto choose. lid. cheese Bdche that was gbirlg to be my punisher. Perhaps he would be Lenient.

The men turned to look at Master Damien who was tl eprawléd but op the grasa

"It isn't wise to lie to us, Ciara," he purred.

"I'm not lying," I squeaked. "You aren't as fast as Master war

but your arm is stronger than Master Evan's."

Chapter 67

"Although my aim is better," Master Evan said. "Well, the conversation was to strength, not aim defending my point. " I said bravely

Master Bane smirked and twirled a blade of grass in his fingers, "What about me slave? How does Damien stack up against me?" fou don't throw the ball enough for me to tell," I said desperately.

"I get the feeling you'd rather be knocking the other men down rather than fight over the balls." The men considered me quietly for several moments. They seemed Lost in their thoughts as the sky slowly darkened over us.

| started when | saw Master Damien had moved and was motioning for me to get up. Rising to my feet he bent and scooped up my kneeling place.

"You are correct, Ciara," he murmured. "We are the perfect team." The next day at the Keepers, Christof came to feed me. We walked around outside and | plopped myself down in a clearing.

"What's with your brother's obsession about me picking the better player last night?" | grouched. "I don't like being forced to pick between you all. It seems like it will just get me in trouble with the others."

ninjanovel.com

"You got their attention when you told Evan he had the best aim,"

Christof said settling beside me. "They didn't know you could tell the difference between them."

I sat and looked at Christof strangely.

"There are lots of differences between you all. How would they think | don't notice the differences between them?" | asked. Christof handed me the bowl of food and sat beside me with his hands folded over his knees.

"We are all Damien's family," he said simply taking a bite of food from the bowl.

"You are five different men. Each of you is unique. Why would they think | can't tell the difference between them?"

"We are a family, Ciara," Christof said as though that should make the entire point.

"You are five individuals in a family," | amended confused. Christof chuckled and encouraged me to eat.

"It is So Curious to me how you see things," he said brushing the hair away from my face. qam asia we are gplyParaian's lily, a single uit! } know my brothers and | know there are differences between them. No one else really notices them that way. We all play a part of the family. We are all Damien's family."

"It's hard not to see you as five m different men," L ponded

"They like you to see that. | like you to see that," he

Chapter 68

"You are very hard to confuse you for one another," | told him, "especially you."

Christof seemed pleased and our Lunch continued with quiet thoughtful conversation.

| swam out my hole in the grate that afternoon and thought about it.

That something | had been missing about my Masters. It was so obvious | had missed it. They wanted me to notice them.

My head bobbed up and | took a breath before diving again. They Liked to be appreciated for their differences. It made sense.

That single thought gave me a plan and a purpose. They liked to feel special, so | would give that to them. Their happiness was the key to my survival and | was determined to live.

In the bathhouse that night | washed Master Damien as usual. He seemed to like me to rub along his lines, so that's usually how | organized myself. | ran my hands over his chest and back softly massaging and cleaning. He was so well proportioned.

"Do you have an arm you favor, Master Damien?" | asked as | scrubbed down his left forearm.

He had been sitting with his eyes closed. Opening them, he looked quizzically at me. His expression seemed to be warring between curiosity and irritation.

"There is no end to your questions," he commented, "and no, I do not prefer either of my arms. They work equally well." ANGELA'S LIBRARY

That explained why he was built so equally. He didn't preferentially use one arm when he trained and fought. My attention moved to his fingers and I cleaned each one.

"The callouses are thicker on this side," I said running my thumbs over his left palm and fingers.

"Yes," Master Damien said looking slightly uncomfortable, "but I am trained to use both hands," he insisted. "But you prefer to use this one," I whispered watching his face carefully.

His features hardened slightly and I looked away. I hadn't meant to anger him.

"Wash me, Ciara," he said, "and no more questions."

Well, I had tried and I made up my mind I would try again. Evidently some things they didn't want me to notice.

It was still on my mind when they put me to bed that night. I curled up on my side between Master Damien and Master Evan. There would be mistakes, I soothed myself, but they wanted me to notice them, so I should continue.

I started when I felt Master Damien wrap around my back. He pulled me flush against him (as breathing in for my ear. When he spoke his breath tickled.

"My brothers know I prefer my left arm to hold my sword" he whispered into my ear "No-one else has ever seen that."

"Yes, Master Damien, I apologize," I said softly.

It wasn't really the appropriate response, but I wasn't sure what was. The thought is on

He was silent behind me for a short while, but he didn't release me.

Chapter 69

The arm across my middle shifted and he started to lightly pluck at my nipples. | bit back the moan in my throat as he fondled my chest.

"| find," he said low into my ear, "my left hand to be more accurate for detailed work...like this. Other men have no such preference. My brothers have no preference."

Squirming under his ministrations | grasped at his arm and felt the play of muscle beneath my hands "You are very talented with both of your hands, Master Damien," | whispered.

The chuckle rumbled from his chest and into mine and that tormenting hand thankfully ceased it's chore. "Go to sleep, Ciara," he said tucking the blankets around us.

| sighed and settled down quite satisfied with myself. Master Damien wasn't angry | had noticed, perhaps it would even make him happy | paid them that much attention. Tomorrow | would continue at the task | had set myself. It was a plan.

ninjanovel.com

It was strange, but it was the Little things they Liked me to see. They wanted me to notice the details of their lives and personalities. It was like they wanted me to read their minds and react to whatever they were feeling.

| understood why the girl in the restaurant had been staring at her owners. It was the only way to keep up with them. With five to Look after, their changing moods and desires, absolute attention was necessary.

Once | learned what the men needed to be happy with me, life settled into a rhythm. Being at my new home in the compound was consuming, but | enjoyed my time at the Keepers. It was my time to relax. Most days were like that: relax at the Keepers during the day and please my owners at night.

My musical talents made me very popular when I was at the Keepers because the other girls really liked to dance. Fuji told me we would probably end up entertaining our men together. Her men Loved to see her dance and she wanted to make them happy.

Fuji said I should dance, too. She started helping me practice while someone plucked at a stringed instrument. It seemed the right thing to do, although dancing embarrassed me.

I did have some experience. Mom and I had taken a belly dancing class for exercise one year. It was one of those New Year's Resolutions about losing weight. I'd never been particularly good, the teacher said I was too shy. I loved the feel of the moves, though.

When I showed Fuji belly dancing I thought she'd hit the roof she was so excited. We worked on it every day, since I started to practice I got a lot better. I wasn't as shy about my body and that made a difference, too.

Still I preferred to dance with just Rose and Fuji. They thought my modesty was kind of silly. Considering what was expected regularly of me when I was home, I knew they were right. Modesty was something I no longer had the Luxury of.

At home, I was the embodiment of sex. For the men that owned me, I was a living, breathing sex doll. It was obvious I was their favorite toy.

My owners were meticulous in caring for me. I had my daily vitamin drink, which I had heard them say was expensive. They washed me with the finest soaps and rubbed my body with creams, so my skin was soft and pliant.

Thanks to their care I looked like a different girl. My hair was healthy and shone in the light. Even my palms, which had stared out looking so bad, were now satiny to the touch. They spent money and time on me the way no one ever had.

My care did not stop with that. Although my outfits were mostly

gauze and see thru, | tes supply them theo | they storelit eir clothes was now packed with my flimsy ornamentation. Every day | was dressed up in a different outfit and paraded around like a prize.

They took good care of me and were proud | belonged to them.

They shared in all my care and my use, except Christof. He seeme keep to fit in with the Other rien. The difference was most apparent during sex. He didn't use me with them.

Christof never took part in the wild group sex | was ef. hey!

quietly, deferring when they asked him to join in.

It upset my other owners, but they couldn't seem to talk to him about it.

Chapter 70

Instead, Christof would awaken with me in the middle of the night and "take his time" as he said. He was so sweet and gentle; it was like he was my boyfriend. We spent hours on the chaise cuddling, talking, and sometimes making love. What we did was always my choice and | loved Christof deeply for giving me that. My time with him at night was my favorite time.

Lunch was my second favorite time of the day. Most afternoons Christof came to feed me. We had completely given up eating in the Lunchroom and instead walked in the forest. It had become so common the Keepers left my Kneeling pad in the courtyard and | waited for him just inside the wall.

Just like at home, Christof didn't treat me Like a slave, but like an equal he could talk to. When we were alone together, we were just friends. | fed myself from the bowl and usually chose what direction to walk in. He just accompanied me as | explored different places in the forest. Christof just seemed to need someone he could relax around.

| got comfortable with Christof. He encouraged me to talk about home and listened curiously to all of it. Stories about my prior Life intrigued him. How humans lived together, males and females in the same place, it amazed him.

Christof never minded my questions and told me all about this world.

One day he showed me how to hold a sword. | had to use a branch, | couldn't even lift his sword off the ground. We played 'warrior' with the branches frequently.

"Who do you fight with?" | asked swinging my branch the way he had taught me to.

"Lighten your grip," he instructed before answering. "Too tight a hold and you lose maneuverability." Once | had fixed my hands and released my death grip he answered my question. ANGELA's LIBRARY

"Men from the other villages close by. Sometimes there are raids and men come to take things from the shopkeepers. It is our job to protect them," he told me. "We patrol around the surrounding area to keep the raiders out."

"Sounds stressful," | commented wrinkling my nose.

"It's fun!" Christof laughed. "I love it when the other men come. We train hard to best them. The skirmishes are exciting. My brothers also look forward to them." His face darkened and he looked different suddenly, "We enjoy fair battles we can win with skill and strength.

'They' are not all like that."

| tried to ask about the last comment, but Christof distracted me. It was an odd comment and | wasn't sure who 'they' were. He didn't want to talk about it, though. Instead, Christof asked about my mother. He knew he could distract me by asking about her

| rarely spoke to him long about my mom. The subject made me too sad and | would cry. | could never resist talking about her, so despite the tears that came, | spoke freely.

As | talked, | remembered the good and the bad times. That still confused Christof greatly. He had never understood family the way | described it.

His family was his brothers and they got along perfectly. | told him how my family kicked me out of my bed and sometimes ate all the food. | explained the unkind remarks and the many beatings they had given me.

The idea of having a family that hurt you or couldn't be trusted baffled Christof.

| talked a lot about my mother and her struggles with alcohol. He didn't really understand that either, Guthe listened Even' with all her failings she was still my mother. The more | talked about mom, the more | missed her.

Christof didn't understand missing a mother, the mothers here dropped the sons off after they were VEFYT) small. there were local Child Keepers. He did say he knew what it was like to miss someone. He often spent so long consoling me we were late back to the compound.

We agreed about other things and that was kind of cool. When it was

just us he was that | wasn't an it. If my sex didn't matter they would have bought a male earthling.

"| have female parts," | said stubbornly making him laugh. "Your inability to put a child in me doesn't mean I'm not female."

He said he didn't care if | said that around him, but it would make his brothers upset. | grumbled a little, but agreed with him. It would have to be our little secret.