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See, after we dutifully packed all our gear, the troupe got to watch Rachel's team toss everything into a cargo bin set to be loaded onto a flight to - the ticket said Banjul, Gambia. Woot! My ten ton armored long coat was going to Africa without me. It would have undoubtedly have tried to kill me in this heat. I was lured into acceptance by hoping this was going to be a 'birthday suit' flight.

Yay! (Sarcasm) We got all new undies, shirts, shoes, pants, shorts, jackets, ponchos (I was beginning to suspect duplicity on that one), and a variety of other gear - including guns. They were nice enough to replace our weapons with the exact same production models. The sole exceptions were my trusty axes and I trembled at the scrutiny they must have endured.

Meanwhile, back to my archaic, misogynistic inspiration that women shouldn't be allowed to drive: after the third skirting of what must have been a ten meter drop, I realized I was looking at this journey in the wrong light. I raised my hands over my head and began screaming like a fool. I was on the best rollercoaster ride ever!!

The hobnail boot was on the other foot. My driver really wanted to know what the fuck I was up to, but couldn't take her concentration off the terrain. One massive lurch planted us in an arroyo (that's a dry riverbed for those of us who aren't freaked out every time it rains). Rachel and I were sitting in the back. Turning around in the front seat, Pamela grinned at me.

"I dare you to surf the hood," she laughed. Sweet Mother Ishara, that was the best mixing of 'you must be a redneck'/'immortal high schooler madness' I'd ever heard. I unbuckled milliseconds before Rachel could stop me. Her look said it all. 'Please, you Moron, don't do this to me. I've been a good little guardian and really don't deserve this, now do I?'

I gave her a deep French kiss. She moaned, just not in a sexual manner. One of these days Rachel was going to start running around with a needle and fast acting sedative to keep me safe from myself. Understand, my driver was racing down this dirt... well, "pathway" was being generous. Her first warning that something wasn't right was me hand-standing on the roll bar and flipping onto the dashboard.

Considering I was up against a 70 kilometer headwind, I felt I pulled off that maneuver rather well. She grabbed my closest ankle with one hand while keeping the other on the wheel. Our eyes were masked with goggles, but my smile said it all. No, I hadn't been thrown forward, and no, I wasn't running away from something in the back seat.

I shook free, stepped over the windshield, braced my right heel against its base and leaned into the torrent of air. I was surfing a jeep. Then I was flying above the jeep, but only for a second. We'd hit a rock the size of an armadillo... or maybe it was an actual armadillo. I wasn't looking back to check. Why was I doing this? It was a tad complex. I gave Psych 101 a shot.

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My life was NOT where I had envisioned it would be when I kissed Dr. Kimberly Geisler... and my last two Bolingbrook girlfriends, who had been unaware of each other until that moment, good-bye before leaving college forever. I proudly considered myself amoral. No social contract would keep me from some good pussy... and since I found all pussy to be good if you worked at it, I slept with every girl I could - married, committed, bored, desperate... I didn't care.

I held no relationship sacred. I had already proved I could do any girl's mother, daughter, aunt, roommate, childhood friend and total stranger. I hadn't cared. I knew I was going to cause multiple women emotional pain and I did it anyway. Sure, I regretted the agony I left in my wake.

I never considered myself a sadist, but I had been a pretty horrible person by ignoring the inevitable consequences of my actions. Then Havenstone. Suddenly people were doing bad stuff to people I didn't know and it mattered to me. I was talking to women without the end goal being a sexual encounter.

Hell, I had been honest to women without them using pain, or the threat of pain, on me. I didn't stop being me. I nailed four women at Loraine's, Europa's and Aya's school. I nailed Nicole while waiting for Trent to toss me his social table scraps - Libra. A whole army of women engaged in murder, slavery and infanticide on a regular basis... and I cared for them.

I cared for them in a way that confronted damnation, not sexual adventurism. I had graduated from 'Dude, don't do that to the lady' at some bar to 'do this and I'll have you killed' and meaning it... and making it happen. I hadn't learned my lesson. I'd gone on to kill Hayden and Goddess-knows how many other women who Hayden had placed on that list.

Yep... dead, dead, dead and it was all on me. Worse, I would do it all over again because deep down, tearing up my insides, was morality. To me that boiled down to caring about someone else without reward. And all that led me to surfing the hood of a jeep on my way to meet my lodestone of this transformation, Aya.svWŴ.flœv(e)l)Ŵœm.cœm

My laughter was drowned out by the noises of the engine, tires, rocks, wind and sand. It resonated all the more. The driver didn't slow down. I sincerely doubted she understood my lunacy. That was okay. Pamela did and Aya would. She'd want to go jeep surfing too. Man, for a jackass and dastardly betrayer, I was accumulating a sizable heart-load of people I could honestly say I loved.

Kimberly had once told me that the pain of knowledge is never being able to forget it. Good, or bad, it is an affliction for which there is no cure. That was where I was, pained by the creeping advancement of my soul and unable to turn back now that the door to familial affection had been opened.

My thoughts of Dad dying and of a thunderstorm burst in my noggin weren't being terribly helpful to my mental state either. The horn blew and I snuck a quick peek back. The driver was making a sharp, forward jabbing motion with her right hand, then thrusting to the left. We were getting ready to exit the arroyo and that probably required some hellish footwork far beyond my ability.WwW.nov(e)lworm.co@

I made a hasty, less dignified, yet safer return to my seat. Rachel quickly buckled me in before a rapid turn up and over the bank of the river bed had us heading for another forested area.

"What was that all about?" Rachel asked once we were back into the tree cover. She'd have asked earlier but she was too busy clenching and unclenching her jaw in frustration.

"I am trapped in an existence that is a repudiation of what I held dear, at any moment my mind may cease to be my own, and I don't know why it hurts me so much to care about any of you," I shouted over the sounds of the jeep crashing through the brush.

"I don't understand," Rachel replied.

"I want to hold you, Rachel. I want to make love to you. I want to hold up our first daughter the moment she is born so you can see what beauty we have created... and I want to put a gun to your temple and blow your brains out because you are a cancer that feasts on sane, normal reality," I said as softly as possible into her ear. "I want it both ways and that is what is tearing my spirit apart."

Rachel had no instant comeback to that. My words ran contrary to her belief system. She was SD and leader of my personal security team. Life growing up as an Amazon had not prepared her for me. Amazons weren't robots; they were indoctrinated to a certain way of thinking. The problem at hand was whenever you put up barriers to certain ways of thinking, you limit your ability to understand and empathize with those ideas.svwww.no©êfWor@.com

Cooperation, duty and loyalty were childhood virtues Rachel was immersed in. I wasn't blathering to her about being angry, or feeling caught up in a feud. This was a fusion of what she endorsed and an alien philosophy. I wanted to cleave to her, create and raise children with her. I was also driven by a belief system that repudiated her lifestyle.

Confidence collided with adaptability. Generalization refused to conform to experience. Rachel had no doubt I would risk my life for hers. I held her as my equal and for the first time, and beyond her expectations, she was fine with that. Every aspect she expected from any of her sisters, I exhibited. All that made my mystic affliction all the more troubling.

I was not sane according to the Amazon metric, but I was utterly reliable in my bravery, honesty (when it mattered), and modesty. 'A' did not equate to 'B'. She would take me into battle. I wanted to help her bring the next generation of Amazon young into the world... and I felt letting her live was a moral failing on my part.

All of that cumulated in me beating up our driver once the jeep was safely parked in a large space carved out of the base of a mesa that sheltered the Amazon camp. See, Rachel was mentally hammering a square peg into a triangular hole at that moment. Pamela corralled her because my life path dictated Rachel's loyalty being more important than a few scratches to my flesh.

The fight was pure Amazon. I dismounted over the side of our ride. The camp counselor stepped out of the driver's side and launched a savage spinning kick at my left knee, aiming to unsettle my balance, bounce me off the jeep and result with me going to the ground - most likely on my knees.

Her motivation was my unwarranted, asinine stunt being something 'one of the girls' wouldn't do. Give me a blistering reprimand? Oh no, not in this woman's army. They went straight to the 'you are going to regret that' disciplinary stage. An Amazon-Amazon wouldn't have been treated this way, but then an A-A wouldn't have acted like a cretin either. She attacked.

Flash back four days and me being on enforced sick leave from my internship. I diluted my frustration, depression and frantic energy by working out. Sounds pretty normal until I noted how much I was exercising - twelve hours a day, counting multiple encounters on the sparring mats.