

Chapter 1

The tenth of May seemed bright and sunny without a cloud in the sky. The people of Conway didn't have a care in the world. Their world was nearly perfect and peaceful all the time. The last murder in town had happened nearly three decades earlier. Generally, the most excitement was a brawl between two neighbors. Then "the cloud" appeared and settled in the heart of the small town. Upon first seeing the cloud, everyone within it thought it was merely fog.

Police Sergeant Steve Talbot noticed the change almost immediately when his dispatch radio went silent. It wasn't the dead silence of occasional static. It was as if it wasn't turned on. When he heard the sudden silence, he also noticed that the station was becoming dark inside as the sunlight was blocked from the windows.

"Hey, Paul, you want to hit that light switch? Looks like fog rolling in outside."

Paul crossed over to the switch and flipped it several times without response. The room remained dark. "Must be a power failure," Paul said.

"Someone must have hit a transformer. You'd think that people would slow down on seeing fog," Steve said.

"Don't we have an emergency backup system?"

Steve stared at Paul for a moment as he wondered why the backup system wasn't coming on. He was about to say something when the radio came alive with static once more. "I guess the generator's on a timer. Try the lights now."

Paul flipped the switch. One light came on in the center of the room, burning dimly.

"Well, that's better than nothing," Steve said, "I'll see if I can raise someone on the radio. You try the phone. Call the power company."

Paul went over to a phone and picked it up while Steve began calling out on the radio. After trying several phones, he said, "The phones are all dead."

"I'm not getting any answer from any of our cars, either. I hope they're on top of the situation without us. I'm going to check on our prisoner. Listen for any radio calls."

Steve ambled into the back of the station where only one more light bulb burned to show the way, not that he needed it. He'd been with the force long enough to know the layout of the station even in total darkness. Steve looked at their prisoner, a vagrant who'd been caught stealing. The man seemed happy enough to be in his cell if only because it meant that he'd be fed regularly. Steve felt that was the case as the vagrant hadn't even tried to escape when he was spotted stealing eggs from a henhouse.

The prisoner asked, "Something wrong?"

"Not really. Just a power outage. Probably caused by some driver hitting a transformer in the fog. We'll just use emergency power until it's fixed."

"Oh, are you sure that's all it is?"

Steve asked, "Why?"

"I saw things that didn't look right just before you came in. Did you see anything weird?"

"I haven't seen anything weird. You on drugs?" Steve asked.

"No. I don't use them, either. Hell, I can't even afford drugs."

"Right, that's what everyone tells me."

"It's the truth! Anyway, keep your eyes and ears open. There's something strange going on around us."

Steve checked the cell door, then left to return to his desk.

George Smather glanced out at the thick, hanging fog, then said, "I don't think we should expect that shipment anytime soon if the roads are all like this."

Arnold Smather carefully came up behind George with sound as his only guide. "Awful slow morning. Sure wished the shipment would arrive before we get any customers. I hate trying to unload lumber while seeing to half a dozen customers at the same time."

"This fog will sure hold everyone back. Might as well relax. We'll have plenty to keep us busy later."

"I didn't think we had any fog predicted for this morning. Nothing's going right today."

"Welcome, Myrna. Doing your shopping early?"

"Yes, Ty. You know my schedule. I open the bridal boutique in the afternoons except on Saturday when I open all day. Anyway, it's not my busy season. Especially with this sudden fog. That won't come until school gets out and the seniors begin to get serious about each other. So, what's fresh today?" she replied.

"Well, we had one truckload of fresh fruits already delivered this morning. They looked pretty good to me," Ty answered.

"Ty, everything looks good to you. It just doesn't look good on you. You ought to put on a clean shirt."

Ty glanced down at himself and saw the stains she was talking about. "I reckon I should. Don't want to look like a slob in front of my customers. Thanks for telling me."

"If they can find you in this fog, Ty. I almost walked into you."

The gymnasium and swimming pool of Conway High went into darkness as the power went off and the fog blocked the sunlight from windows. Classrooms similarly went dark for the same reasons. So,

too, did the front office where the Principal and his administrative staff were located. For a few moments, no one was even aware that the fog swirling inside through windows opened for ventilation was changing things in a way that physics deemed nearly impossible.

Coach Victoria Larson shouted, "Okay, everyone out of the pool! I can't see where you all are. Right now! I don't want someone diving on top of someone else! No one's to use the diving board until we can all see where we're going! You heard me! Everyone out of the pool! Now!"

Victoria could only hear her students splashing about as they swam toward her voice. On the other side of the pool, she heard Coach John Weaver telling the male students the same thing. His whistle went off a couple of times and then died in mid-whistle.

John cursed, "Damn! Excuse my French, ladies. Hey, Victoria, my whistle just dissolved!"

In astonishment, Victoria asked, "It what?"

He hollered, "I said my whistle just dissolved."

"Coach! I've got a problem!"

"Hey Coach Weaver! I've got a problem, too!"

John asked, "What's your problems?"

"Coach, my swimsuit just disappeared!"

"Mine, too!"

"Same here!"

There was a scream from the women's side at the same time. "My suit! It's gone! Someone took my suit!"

Coach Larson hollered out, "Whoever took the suit is to return it immediately!"

More screams followed as more girls realized that their synthetic suits were gone from their bodies.

Victoria reached for her whistle only to discover that it wasn't hanging from the cord around her neck any longer. She hollered, "Quiet down! Ladies, just shut up and move over toward my voice! John! Keep your boys on the other side! We have a problem over here!"

John hollered, "I think we have the same problem!"

"Ladies, find your towels and wrap yourselves in them. Don't run! This area is slippery. You'll fall if you try to run! Walk! Don't run! Find a towel and wrap it around yourself. Once you do that, go to the locker room and get dressed!"

John hollered, "Guys, get your towels and head for your lockers! Now! Move it! Move it! Move it!"

Victoria followed her class into the girls' locker area and carefully made her way in the dark. Every few steps, she bumped into someone either naked or clutching a towel as cover. She could hear others bumping into each other and the walls as she made her way toward her office where she hoped to use a phone to call the office.

Victoria reached her office and entered only to find it not as she left it. Walking through the doorway,

she nearly tripped as her feet came in contact with metal rods littering the floor hindering her. When she finally reached her desk, she felt about for her phone only to find a mess of tangled wire and metal pieces in its place. Shouts and crying filtered inside her office as the girls met with frustration in finding their lockers or opening them in the dark.

Victoria opened a desk drawer to fish out her flashlight only to discover some batteries, wire, bits of metal, and a lamp bulb in its place. Unsure of what was going on, Victoria stumbled back out of her office into the general locker area. Making her way through the girls milling about, Victoria knew she needed to reach the office if only to find out what they might be able to tell her of the situation.

John discovered his flashlight was missing. In its place were batteries, wire, metal bits, and the bulb. He felt around inside his desk drawers until he found some matches he had confiscated from a young would-be smoker. He lit one and used its light to glance quickly about his office. The room seemed totally out of sorts. The photos on his desk were no longer in the plastic display he kept them in. His pens were missing except for a few metal bands and a puddle of sticky ink. Other items were missing entirely from his desk. He dropped the match before it could burn his fingers and lit another so he could continue his inspection.

"Hey, Coach! Mind if we borrow some of those matches to get into our lockers? We can't see the combinations out here."

John said, "Here's a book. Be careful with them. Find out for me how many of the boys lost their suits."

"That's easy, Coach. We all did. One moment we were standing by the pool, the next thing we knew, we were naked. I couldn't help but notice when it happened to me. What do you think happened, Coach?"

"I don't know. Look around while I light another match. Tell me if you see anything plastic...Or synthetic. Those are all missing."

"Sheesh, Coach, you're right! Almost everything plastic is missing."

John said, "From the way things are lying about, I'd say that the plastic just dissolved like your swimsuits did. Those swimsuits were all synthetic."

"I wonder if the rest of the school is like this?"

"I'm going to find out. Here, pass these matches around. Tell everyone to be careful. If anyone doesn't have anything to wear, tell them to keep their towels handy. At least most of those are all cotton."

Victoria entered the main office to find the principal was busy talking with his staff about the phones being dead. Victoria said, "Well at least you have phones. Ours just fell apart, but we've got worse problems, sir. I had the girls leave the pool when the lights went out. After they did, their swimsuits dissolved on everyone of them. They're in the locker room now trying to open their lockers to get dressed. Have you any flashlights? Mine's missing."

"Their suits dissolved? Are you serious?" he asked.

"As serious as a heart attack. It happened to Coach Weaver's class as well. Far as I know, they're in

their locker area getting dressed now, too."

"Glenda, give Coach Larson some flashlights. Be sure you return these, Coach."

Victoria said, "Sure thing, sir. I'll see to it personally."

By the time Victoria reached the gym the flashlights were falling apart and strewing batteries and parts about as they clattered on the floor. She knew then that her flashlight wasn't missing after all. What she had seen before had been the remains of her flashlight. She wondered how she would explain not returning the flashlights when Coach Weaver asked, "Who's there?"

"Me, Victoria. I just got some flashlights from the office, but they're no good anymore. They fell apart on me."

"Everything plastic and synthetic is falling apart. If you have any matches anywhere, you better find and use them since that's about all that's working right now. The power is off. That means the pumps, lights, and phones aren't working, among other things. There's no water in the showers, either. Whatever is happening to everything is kind of hard to say, but I think this fog is causing all this. Could be some kind of acid in the fog that's just eating all the synthetic stuff. Eating it fast, too."

Victoria said, "Christ! I'm glad we had on our cotton sweats. Most of the girls aren't going to have much more to wear than towels if that's the case! You have any spare clothes in your area?"

"I wish I did. I've got a few boys wearing only their towels. They had synthetic clothes before. Now they have nothing. Most of the boys couldn't even pull on their underwear because the elastic was missing. It wouldn't stay up on them," he replied.

"The front office seemed okay but their power and phones are out."

"I'm going to check around the school. I'll let you know later what I find out," John said.

"I better get back to my girls."

Victoria entered the girls' area and made her way through the mass of crying, and sometimes hysterical girls to reach her office. She rummaged through her desk until she found some confiscated matches. She lit one and looked at the office briefly before using the light to find more matches. She gathered them up and made her way out to where the girls were sitting or standing.

"Here, some of you take these matches to light up some of the locks so others can open their lockers. Use them sparingly. I don't have many," Victoria said.

"What about flashlights, Miss Larson?"

Victoria replied, "The flashlights went the same way as your swimsuits. Listen up everyone! Coach Weaver said that everything plastic and synthetic seems to be dissolving. Don't be surprised if some of your clothes are missing, especially if they're totally synthetic. So just put on what you can still find in your lockers. I can already tell you for a fact that you're not going to have any panties to wear even if they're made of cotton. Coach Weaver told me that the elastic in the boys' underwear went just like the rest of the synthetic stuff. Without the elastic, they won't stay up. You'll either have to find something to tie them in place or do without."

Moments later some of the lockers could be heard opening as girls used the light from the matches to

quickly unlock their combination locks and get to their clothes. Within moments of that more than one girl was to be heard moaning about something that was missing.

One girl cried, "Damn, I don't have a thing to wear! This time I really mean it!"

Victoria hollered, "In that case, keep your towel around you. Most likely we'll call...uh, most likely we'll send you home as soon as we can arrange some transportation for you. Just be calm and be patient."

John opened the first classroom he came to. Inside, he couldn't see much more than he could in the hall even though the windows were open and just a bit of light managed to filter through the fog that was even inside the room. He struck a match and glanced around though he couldn't see far. The teacher was speaking from the front of the classroom while the students in front were all still seated. Considering the circumstances, John felt they were handling the situation rather well. He recognized the teacher by voice and said, "Miss Haskin, may I speak to you out in the hall now, please?"

A few moments later she was standing in front of him after he closed the classroom door.

"We've got problems. Synthetic materials are dissolving. Both gym classes found themselves naked in seconds and other synthetic items are dissolving just as quickly. Your class could be next since it started just minutes ago in the gym."

Miss Haskin said, "John, whatever made you think up such a silly joke? There's...ohmigosh! Excuse me, please."

He asked, "What's wrong?"

"My underwear...I'm sorry, John. I better go to the lounge."

She began to walk away but stopped suddenly when a scream came from her classroom. Ignoring her own plight, she turned and hurriedly followed John into her classroom.

A girl cried out, "My clothes! They're gone! Who took them? I want to know who and how you did this to me!"

"My bra! My panties! Who took them?" another girl shouted.

John shouted, "Shut up everyone! No one took anyone's clothes. There's something in the air...in this fog...that's dissolving them into vapors! Just stay calm and don't start any fights! Miss Haskin, would you escort some of your young ladies to the gym where they might find a towel or something to cover up with?"

"Yes, Coach Weaver," Miss Haskin replied tremulously.

John asked, "Do any of you boys need to go with me to the other side of the gym?"

"I'd rather go with Miss Haskin!" one boy shouted, creating some laughter.

"If you're volunteering to wear a dress the rest of the day, I think it can be arranged for you to go with Miss Haskin," John said, generating some more laughter.

"Never mind, sir."

Two girls streaked past him. "Are there any boys who need something to wear? Speak up now," he asked.

Two more girls suddenly bolted through the mist to the door. Then everyone heard another girl say, "Oh god! It's happening to mine!" just before she got up from her seat and ran for the front of the room.

"I think we're doing this wrong. I want all the girls to get up now and head for the girls' locker area and for all the boys to remain here," John said.

Before he finished speaking, three more girls covering themselves with their hands suddenly bolted past him through the fog. A few more girls soon passed by him, but their outer clothing appeared intact. He waited briefly for the girls to leave.

"Okay, everyone here, remain calm and don't start anything. So far I'm proud of all of you for behaving rather well under these circumstances. Please don't disappoint me or your parents by behaving any differently. I have to check the rest of the classrooms. A teacher will get back with you in a while."

"Sir, will school be dismissed because of this?"

John stopped short of the door. He replied, "No, we'll notify the parents to bring clothes for those students whose clothing dissolved. School will continue for the rest of the day with only a few interruptions."

"Damn!"

John left the class and headed for the next classroom. He was about to open the door and enter when screams came from the next classroom beyond it. He hurried to its open door where the teacher, Miss Childer, almost ran into him as she burst from the room with nothing on.

"Excuse me! John! Thank goodness it's you! Take care of my class for me! Please?"

More screams came from inside the classroom. John stepped aside for Miss Childer and then entered the classroom where, despite the swirling fog, he was able to see two girls trying to cover themselves with open books.

John said, "Any girls in here who don't have clothes left on them are to head for the girls' locker room now."

He stepped aside as six naked girls dashed through the swirling fog for the door.

"Don't run!" he said too late.

He heard more screams from the room next door. "Boys, remain in your seats and a teacher will be back shortly."

He hurried to the room he passed before. The door to it was open and he said, "This is Coach Weaver at the door. I want all women to head for the girls' locker room now. Boys are to remain seated inside the classroom. I don't have time to explain what's happening now, but it's not anyone's fault."

He stepped out of the way just in time to let more naked girls and their teacher, Mrs. Cobb, get out of the classroom and head for the gym. Realizing that the girls' locker room would be getting crowded, he said, "Mrs. Cobb, tell Coach Larson to take over the gym as well. Post someone at the door to the boys' locker area to keep anyone from peeping in or out."

John hardly finished speaking when more screams emanated from classrooms farther down the hall toward the office. He hurried toward those classrooms. He reached one of them at the same time as the Principal. The two men just narrowly avoided colliding with each other.

"What's going on, Coach Weaver?"

"I wish I knew, Principal Bone. My best guess is that something in the fog is dissolving everything synthetic and it's been working its way forward toward the office. I'm sending all the girls and female teachers to the gym for now."

Principal Bone said, "I'll get this room and send the girls to the gym. You get the next one."

John reached the front doors just beyond the office. He could see that the fog appeared to be everywhere. He wondered just how thick it was outside. He couldn't see any of the other buildings in the town. He walked along the hall and nearly lost his step when he reached a ledge instead of more hallway and classrooms. He stared off into space with something between fear and curiosity.

"Oh god...We're in deep shit...No one's going home today...or bringing any clothes here," he muttered to himself.

John hurried away from the edge. He stopped at the office where two female administrators were busy trying to make clothing for themselves out of paper they stapled together.

"Ahem! Uh, ladies, sorry to intrude, but I need one of you to stand outside near the front doors and keep everyone away from the West Wing."

"We're busy now. Can't you tell?" Minnie replied.

"We're in worse trouble than your lack of clothes. We're in space! There is no West Wing anymore! I want you to go stand near the front doors and keep everyone away from the West Wing or they'll get hurt, I think. I've got to find the Principal again. Please, don't let anyone get by you!"

"John, you're getting upset. We're not in space," Minnie said.

John entered the office and rounded the counter. He grabbed Minnie by the arm and pulled her along with him saying, "If you won't believe me, then you're going to take a look at it yourself! I haven't got any time to waste trying to convince people that I'm not crazy!"

"Let go of me this instant, Coach Weaver! Let go or I'll have you charged with sexual harassment!"

"Shut your mouth, Minnie! Just follow along and worry about clothes later! This is more important!"

Minnie stared wide-eyed at the sudden ending of the hallway and school building, forgetting her near nudity. She finally said, "Oh god, we are in trouble. I'm sorry, Coach Weaver."

"Forget it. Just stay near the front doors and make sure no one tries to go into the West Wing without warning them. I don't want anyone to step off into nothing," he said.

"I guess I can make something to wear while I'm out in the hall."

"Right. I'll do my best later to remember your sacrifice now and see to it that you get something decent to wear," he said.

"You will? Thank you, John. Rebecca and I would have gone home except Principal Bone insisted that we make something and stay here to help out. You know something? I think he saved our lives. We could have both been out in that fog and driven off into space."

"In the meantime, go ahead and take my shirt. It's not much, but it will give you something," John said as he took it off.

"Thanks, John."

"I've got to warn everyone else. This is going to really hit everyone right between the eyes. Shit! We can't even send these kids home!"

"Hold your temper, John," Minnie said as he left her.

John found Principal Bone as he was returning to the office.

"Principal Bone, don't let anyone go into the West Wing! It's missing and we're in space!"

"We're what?" An incredulous look crossed his face.

John took a deep breath and explained. "I've got Minnie guarding the front doors to warn everyone away from what used to be the West Wing. Whatever is dissolving all the synthetics is probably related to what put us in space!"

He looked doubtful. "You're serious, aren't you?"

John rubbed his eyes tiredly before looking back at him. "Very serious. We're going to have to figure out what to do with all these kids. We can't send them home."

Principal Bone said, "If you're right about us being in space, I suppose I'll have to agree. We have some serious problems to figure out. Any ideas on how much area around us is with us or missing?"

"Not in the least, sir. Are you going to call a meeting to discuss this?" John replied.

"Uh, I hadn't thought of that. It looks like a meeting is needed though. This isn't going to be easy to handle. We'll have to leave someone to watch the kids while the rest of us have a meeting, and I'd hate to leave any of the teachers out."

"I'm your best choice for keeping the boys in line. Probably Coach Larson should be designated to keep the girls under control. You can brief us later."

"Yes, we'll do it that way. You tell Coach Larson."

John said, "Oh, I think some of the women teachers are in Coach Larson's area. They must've been wearing all synthetic clothing. I know I saw Miss Childer and Mrs. Cobb go that way without a stitch left between them."

"If one or both of them still haven't anything to wear, leave them in charge and send Coach Larson to attend the meeting. Oh, get a count of how many students are here."

"Right. Good luck with the meeting, sir."

Principal Bone said, "Thanks. For once I haven't the slightest idea what to say or do. This has never

happened to me before."

"Nor me, sir," John replied over his shoulder as he disappeared into the swirling mist.

John knocked loudly on the girls' locker room door. A moment later, the door just barely opened. "Tell Coach Larson, Miss Childer, and Mrs. Cobb that I need to speak with them now. Have them come here unless you all want me to come in."

"No sir. Most of the girls don't have anything to wear. You can't come in."

"Then see to it that the teachers come here. Now!" John said firmly.

"Yes sir."

He waited by the closed door for nearly two or three minutes before it opened just a crack.

"Yes Coach?" Victoria asked.

"Have you found anything for Miss Childer or Mrs. Cobb to wear?" he asked.

"No, we haven't."

"Okay, in that case you're to leave them in charge and attend a meeting at the office. Stay away from the West Wing. Principal Bone will fill you in on that. By the way, are you using the gym to keep some of the girls separated from the boys?"

"Yes, but the pool is free."

The door closed. A moment later, Victoria exited the locker room.

"Principal Bone is briefing me later, along with Miss Childer and Mrs. Cobb. I'm going to assemble all the boys in their locker area and in the pool area. Most likely I'll be in between those to keep both under control. Any problems with the girls so far?" John asked.

"A lot of crying and wailing. A couple of fights over clothing that resulting in more people staying in a towel than there should be. We ran out of matches before all the lockers got opened so there's a lot of girls with only a towel to cover themselves and some with nothing," Victoria said.

"Be prepared. It's going to get worse before it gets any better," John said as he walked alongside and stopped off at the first classroom. He stood at the doorway and said, "I want all the boys to go to the pool area and wait there for me. Do not horse around or shove anyone in the pool. You'll all learn what's happening as soon as we know more ourselves."

Within another minute, he was at the last classroom beside the office. From there, he followed the last of the boys to the physical education area.

John just barely heard the one boy shove another into the pool. He left his position at the doorway between the locker area and the pool to make his way over to where the boy was climbing out of the water with his clothes all wet. He could overhear who was involved before he even reached the boys.

"Patrick, you didn't have to shove me in!"

"That's what you get for being a four-eyes."

John reached Patrick's side, grabbed him, and tossed him into the pool. John said, "That's what you get for being an asshole and not following instructions."

"My father will hear of this!" Patrick hollered.

"A lot you know about what your father is going to hear about. Everyone listen up! We're in deep trouble here and it's not going to get any better. You're not going to believe what I have to tell you, but you will when you get to see it later for yourselves," John said.

"What's that, Coach?" one student asked.

Another asked, "Yeah, what gives?"

John said, "We're in space. Something lifted this wing of the school from the front doors to the back of the gym and..."

"Coach? What have you been smokin'?"

"Like I said, you're not going to believe this until you see it. In a little while, I'll conduct a tour to you all in small groups so you can see for yourselves. Until then, behave! I want no more horseplay! And don't let me catch any of you fighting or you'll have to deal with me!"

"Hey! It's the Principal!"

"Where's Coach Weaver?" Principal Bone asked.

"He's at the pool doorway, sir."

"Fine, then, excuse me boys so I can get through to see him," Principal Bone said.

"Lots of luck seeing anyone in this fog, sir."

"Coach Weaver?" Principal Bone called out.

"Right over here, Principal," John replied.

"Principal Bone, Mr. Weaver threw me into the pool!" Patrick hollered.

Principal Bone stopped in mid-stride before he reached Coach Weaver.

"What Patrick doesn't want to tell you is that he threw another boy into the pool and I disciplined him with a dose of his own medicine. Considering our situation, I don't think you'll have to worry about his parents," John said.

"Ah, yes, you're probably right about that. We'll talk about that later. As to the meeting, well, we discussed what you and I know. Basically, there's not much to tell, Coach Weaver. We haven't the slightest idea what to do about our, uh, situation. Have you any ideas?" Principal Bone asked.

"A few. I've been putting some thought into it while maintaining some control over some of our more rambunctious students. The first thing I want to do is give all of them a quick tour of what we're facing. Then maybe they'll behave better and we'll be able to enlist their ideas in our efforts. Like it or not,

they're in the same boat with you and I," John replied.

"Well, I guess it won't harm anything for them to make suggestions," Principal Bone said.

"Have you spoken with Miss Childer and Mrs. Cobb?"

"Not yet. Actually, I delegated Coach Larson to do that since they haven't any clothing to wear. Have you got any clothing that they can wear?"

"All we have are some towels. Too much of what we had in here was synthetic and went poof. They might try stapling some towels together. I'm taking some up front to Minnie and Rebecca. It's the best we can do right now," John replied.

"Okay, next four students step over here and take a look. Don't go near the edge. We don't want to take a chance on anyone falling into space," John said.

Four students walked through the fog and stopped when they reached Coach Weaver's outstretched arms.

"Wow! We are in space! How'd it happen!"

"Shit! My old man is gonna be pissed when he finds I'm missing!"

John took little note of what any of them said. He'd already heard the same things from almost twenty other students. Nor did he pay any attention to what they wore.

More than half the women were wearing towels stapled into makeshift skirts or sarongs. Half-a-dozen boys were similarly dressed with towels stapled around their waists in kilt-like fashion. Many of the students were barefoot because their shoes were synthetic or contained synthetic elements that disappeared leaving their shoes to fall apart. Socks were either drooping or non-existent for the same reason. John didn't know of anyone who had any underwear other than a tee-shirt. Some of the boys had donated their shirts to girls, either because they were generous or expected some recognition later. The women in the office were most appreciative of the towels John gave them since their paper creations fell apart when the fog eventually soaked them. Of course, his motives were strictly based on his concern for their well-being.

John suddenly felt someone pushing hard on him. He twisted to the side and let the person's own momentum carry him forward. John caught sight of Patrick trying to stop himself in time before he went over the edge.

"You bastard!" Patrick shouted before he went out of the foggy area and fell into space.

"Holy shit! Look at him boil!"

"He's dead!"

"Coach Weaver killed Patrick!"

It didn't take long for Principal Bone to hear of the incident. Nor did it take long for him to make his way to the viewing area. "Coach Weaver! What the hell came over you? Why'd you have to throw Patrick out there?" Principal Bone demanded.

"I didn't throw Patrick out there. He tried to shove me out there and I stepped aside. He did it to himself this time. Whether he knows it or not, he just proved to us that we can't leave this fog without dying in space," John answered.

"You didn't throw him out?"

"No, I didn't."

"And you're letting these students view him like that?" asked Principal Bone.

"Yes, I am. As a matter of fact, I consider it an important object lesson for them now. In fact, we're all learning something. We're in this together and we'll die like Patrick if we don't cooperate. So yes, I'm letting the students see Patrick that way. They need to get beyond playing games and view this as a matter of survival. We all better view our situation this way. Did your meeting discuss anything such as meals and rest room facilities?"

"Uh, no. Those didn't come up."

"Then you better reconvene your meeting and come up with some practical answers. We're all waiting on you to provide direction for our survival efforts," John said.

"Uh, yes, I guess I should. Excuse me, Coach."

Coach Larson finished with the cardboard and staples. She slipped the batteries into place and then held the flashlight lamp against one end and the wire at the other. It produced a feeble light in the fog that permitted her to see more than one or two feet in front of her.

"Hurrah! Coach Larson fixed up a flashlight!"

"Hold onto this like so and use it to get every locker open. When you get the locks off, leave them off. We can't take a chance of losing this light later and not being able to get those locks open in the dark. Now find some more wire, batteries, and bulbs We'll make more as long as we have the materials," Victoria said.

"Okay, the bathrooms seem to be safe for now, but we don't have any way of flushing them," Principal Bone said.

"We could take water from the pool to flush them with," Glenda said.

"Then we can't use them. The water in the pool is our only drinking water supply. Every drop we waste is lost and will never be recovered. Coach Larson is minding the pool for now to see that no one pollutes it. Much as I hate to say it, we're going to have to guard it day and night," John said.

"Then where are we going to relieve ourselves?" Principal Bone asked.

"Why not on the front yard of the school? We still have one of those, you know. We might not have much around us, but we have some tools in the gym to dig with. We can dig a privy and use it," John replied.

"What about privacy?" Glenda asked.

"What about it? The best I can suggest is that you go when you have to or we set up alternate half-hours for everyone. Males one-half hour, females the next half-hour. I guess we could have someone of the same gender stationed on guard to see to it that no one else bothers whoever's using it," John said.

"John's right. I guess we're going to have to use an old-fashioned privy. Coach Weaver, I'm assigning you the responsibility of constructing one," Principal Bone said.

"I'll see to it that a slit-trench is dug. That should be the best kind for our purposes," John said.

"Well, our next item on the agenda is food. Maybe we should have discussed it first. Right now, it somehow seems distasteful," Principal Bone said.

"Well, we have some matches in the office. We better save those for cooking with," Minnie said.

"And what the hell are we going to cook? The dining room and kitchen went with the West Wing," Glenda asked.

"Maybe we should send out a team to explore the town. You know? Find out how much of it came with us? We might be lucky to have a grocery store," John said.

"Yes, we better see to exploring and learning just what we do have. Glenda, you're to keep a list of what we have. An inventory. Minnie, you too. Two lists should give us some redundancy to make sure that we can keep track of things," Principal Bone said.

"Who's doing the exploring?" John asked.

"Uh, I don't know. Do you have any suggestions?" Principal Bone replied.

"Yes, I have. Put together several teams with an adult in charge of each and send them in different directions other than west. The rest of the teachers will have to maintain control over the remaining students. Some of them are beginning to get rowdy at the least. Some want to leave," John said.

"That's your fault. You decided that they should know what they're facing," Principal Bone said.

"Yes, it's my fault. Whether I told them or not, they were going to learn what the situation is anyway. Now we know how they're reacting and it's up to us to control them before we lose them. I still say that we're in this together," John replied.

"I'm leaving the boys mostly in your charge. That is, except for a few to accompany some of the teachers on exploratory trips outside. They can do the heavy lifting. Mrs. Cobb, Miss Childer, Miss Haskin, you'll select two boys and three girls to accompany each of you. If you reach the edge, then return immediately. If you find other people, make them aware of the situation and have them report here for instructions," Principal Bone said.

John laughed.

Principal Bone asked, "What's so funny?"

"They're not going to report to you for instructions. If they find anyone, they'll be adults and capable of deciding for themselves what they intend to do. They'd be better off asking them to help us, instead of ordering them to report here," John replied.

"I see. That was a bit presumptuous of me. You three ladies are to ask anyone you find to help us control the children. What's our count?" Principal Bone asked.

"Total count is one hundred and twenty-three children and twelve adults. That's excluding Patrick," Glenda said.

"Okay, make anyone you find aware of how many children are here. I think most of them will want to help," Principal Bone said.

"If you find food, you better grab all you can take and bring it back with you. A lot of the students don't have lunches with them and lunch is getting close judging by how my stomach feels," John said.

"In that case, you better consider confiscating what lunches there are and redistributing them among everyone, John," Principal Bone said.

"No way! You want that order obeyed, you do it! You don't pay my salary. In fact, none of us are likely to see another paycheck anytime soon, if ever. What I'm doing now is helping out, so don't try to push every dirty job on me," John replied indignantly.

"Will you back me up on this?" Principal Bone asked.

"And turn those children into killers? If you do this, you'll start a riot immediately between those who have and everyone else. It won't stop once it gets going, either. Not until there's only enough kids left to eat whatever food there is. No, not on this," John replied.

As Principal Bone glanced around the table, other teachers shook their heads. Some softly answered no.

"Victoria, to use it you have to straddle the trench like so. Then squat and conduct your business. It's the best we can do under the circumstances," John said.

"You're sure it's safe?" she asked.

"Well, we didn't break through to the bottom of what came along with us. We're not close to the edge, either. I think it's safe from that standpoint. As far as hygiene, it's better than doing it in the bathrooms and having it back up and breed disease among us. At least the smell out here can be covered up."

"Okay, I'll start the girls on the hour for a half-hour. You start the boys on the half-hour for their half of the hour."

"You have a watch?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered.

"Good! Mine was plastic and on my desk. It's kind of shot all to hell now. What's left won't work."

Victoria said, "I'll keep honest time."

"I wasn't doubting that you would," he said.

"Sorry. I guess I was feeling touchy. Have you given any thought to where we're going?"

"Not in the least. So long as this fog stays in place, I think we're safe. Otherwise we'd be cooked by the sun, wherever it is," John replied.

"You don't think we're being kidnapped by aliens?" she asked.

"Well, I hadn't given any thought as to how this happened. However, I guess that's as good a reason as any. We'll find out when we get wherever we're going. In the meantime, we can only hope for the best."

"Ty, you're not going to believe what happened to me."

"Earl? You have an accident with your truck?"

"Damn near! It was a good thing that I slammed on the brakes and slowed when this fog dropped on us. You're not going to believe what I almost did."

"Well, don't keep me guessing. You know I can't read minds."

"This is something that everyone is going to want to see. You want to drive me out to my truck so I can show you?"

"I can't leave the store. I've got customers."

"You better tell your customers to take a look as well. This is going to shock everyone."

"Earl, maybe you better just tell me."

"Ty! Thank goodness! You don't know how glad we are to see someone else!" Mrs. Cobb exclaimed.

Ty and Earl each did a double take on seeing Mrs. Cobb dressed in several towels.

Earl asked, "What the hell happened to you and those kids?" as they came into view.

"Earl, the fog dissolved our clothes. Half the high school is gone. We were sent out to find out who else is still around. Ty, can you spare some food?" Mrs. Cobb replied.

Ty replied, "It's for sale as always. Huh? What do you mean half the school is gone?"

"You don't understand. We're in space," Mrs. Cobb said.

"You've seen it already?" Earl asked.

"Yes, and don't try to leave the fog. Patrick is already dead. He left the fog and is floating dead in space now," Mrs. Cobb answered.

Earl whistled, then said, "Damn good thing I stopped! I knew I shouldn't try to go any farther when I couldn't see anymore road ahead. But, what's this about your clothes?"

"Something in the fog is dissolving everything synthetic. Most of the women and girls at the school don't have anymore to wear than I do. Some of the boys, too," Mrs. Cobb said.

"You all aren't making any sense," Ty said.

"That's why I wanted you to drive out to my truck. You have to see it to believe it. We're floating in space!" Earl exclaimed.

"Oh, Myrna! Can you spare some clothes from your shop?" Mrs. Cobb asked.

Myrna looked at Mrs. Cobb and the teenagers with her. "What on Earth happened to you?"

"I'm tired of trying to explain this. Whatever you do, don't leave the fog!" Mrs. Cobb answered.

"Why on Earth not?" Myrna asked.

"Because we're not on Earth anymore! She's seen it! I've seen it. I bet those kids have seen it already!" Earl said with an aggravated tone.

One teen said, "We did."

"Please leave the talking to me like we agreed. Ty, just let them do some shopping. I'll see that you're reimbursed later," Mrs. Cobb said.

"Sure. Go ahead in that case," Ty said.

"Children, get carts and fill them with luncheon stuff from the freezers and milk. Then haul them back to the school in a hurry. Send more kids here if necessary. Remember, we have 135 people to feed," Mrs. Cobb said.

The kids went into the store where a cashier looked at them, then left the register to find out from Ty what was going on.

Ty returned to the store with his face ashen and white. He said, "Rachel, forget about checking out those kids. Just let them have what they want. You better go with Earl to see what happened to us and don't leave the fog! Use my car."

"Ty, you ought to sit down," Mrs. Cobb said.

"Yes, but while he's doing that, we can take you over to my shop. We can at least get you something to wear besides those towels," Myrna said.

"You're going to have a rush today. We've got close to forty girls and one more teacher in need of something to wear," Mrs. Cobb said.

"I'll do what I can. What gets me is that what I'm wearing is totally synthetic and it hasn't dissolved yet like you said it would," Myrna said.

"It didn't happen to all of us at the same time. It seems to be spreading this way though, so it shouldn't be long before what you have on goes. You might want to change before it happens to you," Mrs. Cobb said.

"I'll take my chances for now," Myrna said.

"Children, make sure you tell Principal Bone that we found other people alive," Mrs. Cobb said.

One teen replied, "I'll see to it. Did I hear you right about the clothes?"

"Just send the women over to my shop. I'll be there in a few minutes to open it up. You coming with me, Mrs. Cobb?" Myrna said.

"Anything's got to be better than these towels," Mrs. Cobb said apprehensively.

Principal Bone looked at the grocery carts laden with food and beverages. Already, the packaging on some of them was dissolving leaving loose chips in the paper bags. He was glad that none of the beverages were in plastic bottles. The students had brought back only glass and aluminum containers of beverages. He said to a boy beside him, "Spread the word to each class that they're to come out here in an orderly manner and get their lunch."

"Principal Bone, Myrna is going to open her bridal boutique for the girls to get something to wear from what little she has in stock. She said to send them over."

The thick wheels on the carts finished dissolving. The carts clanked and rattled as they settled onto the pavement as if accenting the girl's statement to the Principal.

"Thank you, Angela. The girls can go after they get something to eat. Then I'll send them in small groups with teachers to escort them," Principal Bone replied.

John reached the principal's side and looked at the food in front of them. "Well, at least we're not going to starve immediately."

"We needed this lucky break," Principal Bone said.

Miss Haskin reached the police station. She and her five teens walked inside where Sergeant Talbot asked, "Who's there?"

"Miss Haskin from the high school and five students. Thank god, you're here and alive!"

"What's the problem? Something happen at the school?" he asked.

"You don't know yet? Sergeant, you better leave your office and look around," she replied.

One teen said, "Very carefully and very slowly or you'll fall into space."

"What's he blathering about?" Sergeant Talbot asked.

"He's not blathering, Sergeant. He's telling the truth. We are in space and that's not all. All our synthetic clothes are falling apart," Miss Haskin answered.

"Space? Now that's impossible. Who put you up to this?"

Paul entered the station and blurted out, "Sergeant, we're in space! I just saw it from the edge of the fog!"

"See? I tried to tell you," Miss Haskin said.

Miss Childer reached the filling station. She went into the work bay where Eddie was busy working on a car. "Eddie! Oh, we're glad to see you!"

Eddie lifted his head and bumped it on the hood of the car he was working on. "Ouch! Don't you know better than to sneak up on a...What the hell happened to your clothes?"

"It's a long story, but I'll tell you anyway."

Sergeant Talbot looked out from the edge of the fog at space. Beside him, the mayor stood with his arms crossed and his mouth gaping open at the sight. Steve asked, "Well, Mr. Mayor, what do you want us to do? You're still in charge."

"I don't rightly know what we should do. Right now, I wish I hadn't gotten out of bed this morning to come in to work. You have any suggestions, Sergeant?" The Mayor replied.

"We could gather everyone into the center of town so we can figure out who's here. Maybe hold a meeting to get suggestions," Steve said.

"An excellent idea, Sergeant. Go around and gather everyone. Bring them to City Hall. Uh, we'll hold the meeting in front since we don't have room inside for everyone," the Mayor said.

Chapter 2

"What did we do? That isn't supposed to happen with this weapon. It's supposed to destroy our enemy."

"Send a message to the laser guns to...We're under attack!"

"Well, I always hoped to wear something like this just once someday, but not as everyday wear," Miss Childer said.

"You look fine. Just forget that it's a wedding dress. I hear the Mayor speaking now. We better listen up," Principal Bone said.

"So far, we've been lucky that whatever is dissolving synthetic materials hasn't reached the grocery or hardware stores yet. In view of this emergency, I'm ordering Sergeant Talbot to have his department take control of the grocery store. We'll ration food to everyone so that we all have the best chances for long term survival. That goes for the truck that's near the edge, too. Have it driven back to the store and use it to keep cold goods in. We might make some of them last a bit longer that way. Sergeant, you can take whatever fuel you need from the gas station to keep that truck running," The Mayor said.

One of the teens shouted, "Why don't we get any say in all this? We're just as much at risk as anyone else!"

"Yeah, why should you make all the decisions? We didn't elect you!"

"I was elected by the voting members of this city. Most of you aren't of voting age yet," Mayor Green replied.

"Well, we ought to be considered voting age now since we have just as much at stake in what's decided. You can't do anything without us!" another teen said.

Still another teen shouted, "I'm through hauling food for you and everyone else unless I get to vote!"

"Me, too!"

"I'm not hauling anymore kerosene lamps!"

"There will not be a new election just to please you. Mr. Bone, I'm making you responsible for all these children. Mr. Bone, please see to your charges," Mayor Grean said.

"Yes, Mayor Grean. Have you any suggestions where I should keep them?" Principal Bone replied.

"Take them back to school and teach them! That shouldn't be too difficult to figure out. Try teaching them civic responsibility," Mayor Grean said.

"Yes, Mr. Mayor. Teachers, gather your students and return to the school!" Principal Bone said.

Before the kids could be guided back to the school, the fog began to finally lift. There was a murmur in the crowd of people as they suddenly realized they could see beyond the two to three feet they were limited to before except when standing near the edge.

"We're losing our atmosphere!"

"We're going to die in space!"

"What do we do?"

"Mayor! Do something!"

More and more, the fog lifted higher. Then patches of blue skies were revealed once more instead of the blackness of space they had expected.

"We're somewhere!"

"Where?"

"Hell if I know!"

"Maybe we can see from the edge!"

Many of the adults and students ran or walked at a quick pace to reach the nearest edge so they could see where they were. The students easily reached the edge first and stood near it, totally stunned by what they saw.

"Centaur! I see centaurs!"

"Hey, they don't wear any clothes!"

"Stupid! Of course not! They're centaurs!"

"Dig that sparkly babe over there!"

"Which one? They all sparkle."

"Hey, Janice, that centaur babe looks a lot like you from the front! How about taking your blouse off so we can check the comparison?"

"Up yours, Bill! How about you taking your pants off so we can compare you with one of those males?" Janice replied.

"Aren't they all beautiful? They all sparkle so magnificently!"

"Anyone know how you make it with a centaur babe?"

"From behind, Rege, but she'd never know you were there unless you told her! Yours is too small!"

"I just knew there had to be centaurs! Wouldn't it be great to be one?"

"I'd rather be a unicorn."

"And eat hay? Not me."

"What are the Lizzars up to now? Floating mountains?"

"Never mind the floating mountain. Keep up the attack. We must finish off these Lizzars and return to our lines before our coatings wear off. Third Cohort! Charge!"

"Fourth Cohort, charge!"

A student shouted, "Hey! They're fighting someone underneath us!"

"Who?"

"I don't know! I can't see them from here. We'll have to move around to a different spot on the edge."

"Move closer to the school!"

"Overrun them! Don't let any of them escape!" a centaur leader ordered.

"What about their equipment?" a centaur warrior asked.

"Destroy it! We can't take any chances on it being another weapon like their lasers!"

There was a resounding, grinding, crashing sound as the town dropped without warning to the plain below. Everyone in the town was knocked down. Bricks from buildings fell with a clatter into the broken street. Dust rose everywhere as thick as the fog they had put up with for over half the day. The sound of breaking glass tinkled through the dust. Almost immediately, groans could be heard coming from people who were injured. Others slowly recovered their senses and felt of themselves before getting back to their feet.

"Get your hands off me! Pervert!"

"Is everyone all right? Anyone hurt bad?"

"Move it or lose it!"

"Damn, I tore my dress! I'm not going to have anything to wear now."

"Everyone check yourself carefully!"

"Is everyone okay? Answer if you're not! Is anyone lying unconscious near you? Answer up if you see anyone hurt!"

"Hell! There's too much dust to see anyone!"

"There's someone over here who isn't getting up!"

"Where?"

"In front of the school! It's Principal Bone! He's hurt!"

"So's Miss Haskin!"

"I think Bill's dead!"

"Who's dead?"

Several screams and more loud moans of pain permeated the air. Students and adults nearest the school began digging through the brick rubble that had fallen on some of the townspeople. A few injured people were pulled away before more rubble could fall on them.

"Dig! Dig!"

"Get them out!"

"Hey! Watch where you toss those bricks!"

"Come on now, let's do this in an organized manner!"

"Form a line to remove the rubble!"

"Be careful when you move anyone!"

"What kind of strange creatures are those?"

"I do not know, Sub-commander. Take your unit up there and investigate."

"Second Cohort! Follow me!"

Sargeant Talbot sensed something was very wrong when he unexpectedly felt cold, sharp metal against his neck. He paused from tossing another brick behind him to turn slowly and look at the cause of his discomfort. He felt less comfortable to discover that a spear held by one of the centaurs was the cause. Dropping the brick he held, he slowly straightened up as the spear point urged him to with its own upward motion under his chin. He stood facing the centaur as he noticed that more centaurs were similarly taking captive other people around him. His and their own sudden silence caused others to stop and turn to look at their newfound trouble. Even the gentle breeze that blew away the dust and whipped some of the women's wispy wedding dresses about didn't create enough sound to disturb the ominous silence overtaking the scene. Only a few injured continued to make any sounds at all. Their moans only heightened the overall specter of suspense.

"They are not Lizzars."

"How do you know? Their tails may be hidden under whatever it is they wear, Sub-commander Theo."

"Look at the other differences! They are not the same color. Their faces are different. Even their eyes are unlike those of Lizzars. They are more like us above their legs," Sub-commander Theo replied.

"Yes, there is that I can see about some of them. They might all be like that beneath that strange armor they wear. Could they be something the Lizzars have created? Perhaps from those among us taken prisoner before?"

"Poor pitiful souls, if that is what happened to them. You there! What is your name?" Theo asked.

The girl with the spear at her throat stared in fear at the centaur speaking to her without understanding a single word. She wasn't even aware the centaur was speaking to her.

"Perhaps that one is deaf, Sub-commander."

"Can any of you hear me?" Theo asked loudly.

There was some muted murmuring among the people as they came out of their stunned state.

"They can hear and speak to each other. I don't think they understand us," Theo said.

"Then perhaps they're not our warriors taken prisoner and horribly transformed, Sub-commander?"

"Perhaps their offspring, but not anyone we lost. However, they do not sound like Lizzars, either. There is no hissing in their voices," Theo said.

"Should we kill them, Sub-commander?"

"Not without orders. Return to the commander and ask what we should do with these prisoners. Hurry!"

"What do they want with us?"

"How should I know? I can't understand anything they're saying."

"You all better be quiet before it upsets them."

"How would you know what upsets them?"

"It's common military practice to keep prisoners quiet."

"You haven't even been in the military!"

"I've seen documentaries on PBS!"

"Right, so that makes you an expert, huh?"

"Sub-commander Theo! Commander Haro wants you to bring them back as prisoners so he can see and interrogate them later!"

Theo looked at the captives his cohort held at spear point and noticed the way the stuff they wore waved about in the breeze. His first thought concerned the laser defenses he had to get them past. From the differences he discerned among them, he could readily tell that whatever it was they had on wasn't a part of them. It was more like the armor the Lizzars wore, only he felt certain that it wasn't armor. Regardless, he knew how he dealt with Lizzars taken prisoner.

"Strip them! Coat them with laser protection! We are taking them with us!" he ordered loudly.

"Take your, uh, armor off! Be quick about it!" one centaur said to his captive girl. She stood there without the least sign of understanding. He moved closer until he could reach her with his hands. He reached out and grabbed at the fabric.

"He's going to rape me!" she screamed.

The centaur hesitated, then took hold of the fabric while people around them tensed as if trying to decide whether or not to attempt to interfere. They, too, had their problems as the centaurs holding them at spear point were doing much the same. The girl tried to step away from him. The centaur held onto her and said, "Erone, give me a hand with this one."

"I'm busy. Do it yourself."

The girl continued to struggle, grasping the centaur's hands and trying to shove them away from her. The centaur refused to release his grip and the material ripped.

"It's not armor, whatever it is," the centaur said.

Another centaur took hold of a girl with towels stapled around her. When she tried to resist, the towels fell away from her in his grasp, leaving her naked. The centaur gasped at the sight of seeing a being totally unlike any he'd seen before. She tried to cover herself with her hands until she felt the spear point against her once more as the centaur recovered his composure after dropping the towels.

"Aren't you going to protect us, Sergeant?"

"Sarge, should we fight them?" Paul asked.

For a moment, Steve considered drawing his gun. He knew he could shoot and hit five or six of the centaurs easily before they could react. However, he also knew that he'd be dead before he could reload. And it wouldn't change things for the rest except that it might possibly lead to reprisals. "No, Paul, they outnumber us by too many. We better undress. I think that's what they want us to do. I'm sorry, everyone. There are just too many of them for us to fight. If we try, they might kill everyone in retaliation."

"Chicken shit!"

"Coward!"

"Are you going to fight them with your bare hands if I draw on them or are you all going to run, leaving Paul and me to fight alone?" Steve asked.

"Well, uh..."

"The Sarge is right. I'm not willing to die alone," Paul said as he unbuckled his belt and let it drop to the

ground.

Steve loosened his belt and dropped it at his feet. The spear point momentarily left his throat and hooked under the belt before lifting it to the hands of the centaur. The centaur seemed interested in the belt, not the gun holstered on it.

"Sub-commander, they have useful straps. Should we take the straps with us?"

Theo briefly studied the belt being held up by one of his warriors. "Coat it with laser protection and bring it along!"

Without any choice left, the people undressed if they weren't already being forcibly assisted by the centaurs holding them at spear point.

"I hope they don't rape us," one woman cried out.

Steve stood naked at last before his guard. He watched as a centaur with large sacks draped over his lower back walked over toward him. Steve's guard moved just slightly so the new centaur could move close to Steve. The centaur with the sacks reached into one and pulled out a glob of sparkling gel. Before Steve knew what was going to happen to him, the centaur plopped the glob of gel on Steve's head. With the spear still at his throat, Steve remained still as the centaur spread the glob through Steve's hair, over his face, down his neck, and beyond. When the centaur reached Steve's privates, Steve resisted the impulse to fight back as the gel was spread even on those and on down to his ankles and the tops of his feet. As Steve looked around, he noticed that some others were being coated in the same manner.

"Anyone know why they're doing this to us?"

"It must be important. They're wearing the same stuff or can't you tell?" Steve said.

"Don't touch me, you rapist!" a woman yelled.

"Shut up and quit making trouble! They're not going to rape you!" Paul shouted.

Steve felt the spear point tap him. He turned his attention back to his guard who now had the gun belt looped around one shoulder. The gun belt was covered in the same gel with the suspended sparkles in it. The centaur pointed toward the edge and tapped Steve with his spear once more. Steve got the point. He guessed he was to move to where the centaur was pointing. Steve walked with the centaur taking up a position behind him and the point of the centaur's spear at his back. Other people were beside Steve a moment later with more centaurs at their backsides holding spears against them.

Steve reached and looked at the edge. It was no longer a sheer drop. Much of the edge had crumbled away to make a steep but negotiable climb down. The spear prodded him into action. He worked his way down to the surface of what he knew was a new world. Steve was certain just from the striped grass ahead that it wasn't Earth. He hoped that the distance they had to walk wasn't far as he and most of the people weren't used to walking very far without shoes.

Once on the new world's surface, Steve and the others found themselves surrounded and held in a corral of circling centaurs while more people from the town climbed down. A few of the people were injured and being assisted. Others were being guided. Steve didn't understand at first until he realized that no one had their glasses any longer. It was going to be tougher on those folks as their handicaps weren't anything they could recover from, unlike the injured. He gave a shoulder to one of the injured women to lessen the load on another man who was practically carrying the naked girl by himself.

"Well, Steve, what do you think they're going to do with us, now that we're all basted?" John asked.

"That's hard to say. This stuff must be important that they slapped all over us, so we better not let anyone try to wipe it off. As to what they intend to do? Well, my guess is that we'll probably be taken to a prisoner of war camp and interrogated," Steve answered.

"Lot of good that will do them since we don't speak their language. They sure don't speak ours, either."

"I just hope they don't resort to torture when they don't understand us."

"Then we better learn their language right fast. I'm a bit adverse to torture."

"I think everyone here is that way. You better pass the word that no one is to resist or refuse to speak to them. If we cooperate, they're less likely to resort to torture," Steve said.

"Looks like this is the last of us. Here come the centaurs from above."

"I hope they didn't kill those who couldn't be moved."

"I think we got everyone down here whether they should be moved or not. As far as I know, we only left the dead behind."

"Oh god! We left a prisoner in the jail!" Steve exclaimed.

"What?" asked John.

"Yes, there's still one man up there!"

"Well, keep it to yourself. He could be our ace in the hole."

"Locked in a cell? I doubt it."

"Maybe he got lucky when we crashed. His cell might not be intact anymore. He could be free."

"Or dead. He could have been crushed by all that rubble," Steve said.

"Or that, too," John agreed.

"Move them out! Keep them in the middle for now. Don't let the pace become slow!" Commander Haro ordered.

"They want us to move. They're not circling us like before," John said.

"You're right. We might be better off placing this girl on my back. When I get tired, you can take over," Steve said.

"That might be the best way to carry most of the injured. She's slippery. You sure you can hold her without her falling?"

"No better time to find out than now. Lift her up behind me," Steve answered.

John lifted the girl onto Steve's back, but she was too out of it to hold on. John barely caught her as she slipped and fell backwards.

"No good, you'll have to carry her on your shoulders, Steve. Bend down quickly while I keep her from falling."

Steve squatted down as other people walked around him. John quickly draped the girl over Steve's shoulders. Steve took hold of the girl's wrists and ankles before standing up. He was soon moving at the same pace as the rest of the people while John looked around for others to help.

"Notice, Commander Haro, they carry their injured," Sub-commander Theo said.

"I noticed. They are not at all like Lizzars," Haro replied.

"True. We wondered before if they had tails like the Lizzars. Without their armor, now we know for certain that they are not Lizzars," Theo said.

"I thought that was clear to begin with," Haro said.

"I could sense that about the prisoners, but some of my warriors expressed skepticism at first. I'm merely informing you of what I have overheard," Theo replied.

"I'm concerned about our prisoners. They do not move as quickly as we. Give me your thoughts on that."

"Our laser protection will wear off soon and we're not past those laser positions yet. We've used up too much of our laser protection on the prisoners to cover ourselves properly again when ours wears off."

"That's precisely what I'm concerned about. What would you do in this situation?"

"Do you feel that the prisoners are that important?" Theo asked.

"Something in my gut tells me that they are very important. They might be a new weapon produced by the Lizzars, though I don't know how they could. Judging on what we saw, they can make many things which we cannot. I dread to underestimate their capabilities. Past commanders made that mistake of underestimating the Lizzars which is why we're losing the war," Haro said.

"If they're a new weapon, then shouldn't we destroy them?" asked Theo.

"If we find out they are a new weapon against us, then certainly we should. However, we don't know that yet. For all we know, they could become allies of ours, even if the Lizzars made them. They might not want to be slaves to the Lizzars anymore than we."

"Then, until we know, we must have them. But can we afford to lose more of our warriors after losing all of the Fourth and most of the Third Cohorts?"

"No, we cannot afford to lose more warriors. This battle was far more costly than it should have been. None of us expected that floating mountain to suddenly fall and crush many of our warriors and the Lizzars we fought," Haro answered.

"Then the only solution I see is for us to carry the prisoners."

"You confirm my own judgment. Pass on instructions for every warrior to carry one of the prisoners on his or her lower back. We appear to greatly outnumber the prisoners so it should be possible for most of our warriors to have another warrior keep watch on the prisoners from behind. That way, none of the

prisoners will attempt anything if they are our enemies."

"What of the injured?" Theo asked.

"Have the warriors hold them in place by their arms. I doubt if the injured will give much trouble," Commander Haro answered.

Steve stopped when the centaurs halted. A centaur approached him and pointed to the girl he carried.

"I'm not abandoning her! If you try to force me to leave her behind, I'll fight you!"

The centaur looked with puzzlement at Steve before he resumed making motions with his hands. Another centaur approached from behind and pulled at the girl. Steve pulled her away. He considered making a break for it to save her only he couldn't see anywhere to run. There were centaurs all around and too many people in the way. Then Steve felt the spear point at his throat.

"Go ahead, run me through! I'm not letting her die here alone!"

Another centaur approached. John was riding her. "Hey, Steve, I think they intend to give your injured girl a ride. See! They're even letting us mount them!"

Steve stared numbly at John, then around at other people who were being assisted onto the backs of the centaurs before it fully sank in that they were being offered rides. With no other recourse left, Steve squatted down and eased the girl onto her feet before he assisted one centaur in placing her on the centaur's back. The centaur took the girl's wrists and pulled her tightly against his upper back. Then Steve felt a hand on his back. Another centaur motioned for him to get on. Steve tried to grab hold only to discover that the gel on the centaur and himself made the task impossible without assistance from another centaur. He was finally seated on the back of the centaur in what he found to be a most uncomfortable position. Steve hoped that the centaurs wouldn't be running much or he'd be in sad shape. He reached around the centaur's chest and locked his fingers together to maintain his position.

"Commander, all the prisoners are now mounted on warriors," Sub-commander Theo said.

"Direct your cohort forward at a gallop. First Cohort! Forward! At the gallop!" Commander Haro ordered.

Steve groaned a few times and winced as he felt himself bounced on the back of the centaur with predictable results. Around him, he could tell that other men were in similar straits as they tried to hang on despite the agony they were put through. None of them, like himself, dared let go since other centaurs with spears were behind them. Even without the threats of spears, there were the hooves of the following centaurs who wouldn't be able to stop in time to avoid trampling them.

The lasers cut across the cohorts as they passed between two Lizzar defensive positions. The only noticeable difference in the centaur behavior was that they did their best to shield their eyes while maintaining their pace. There were commands shouted and passed on among the centaurs that weren't understood by the people.

Steve noticed the lights hitting the first centaurs and reflecting off in scattered, smaller rays of red. With sudden understanding, Steve shouted, "Lasers! Keep your eyes closed! Don't look at them or you'll go blind! Shut your eyes and hold on! Pass on the word! Lasers! Everyone shut your eyes! Pass it on!"

Even with Steve's warning, there were soon some screams followed by shouts. "I can't see! My eyes are on fire!"

More of the people shouted for the others to keep their eyes shut and not look at the lasers as the word was passed on. Most of the people weren't even aware that the centaurs were running far faster than their earlier gallop. Had they noticed the deteriorating condition of the gel on the centaurs, they might have fully understood the reason for hurrying.

Then suddenly the centaurs slowed to a gallop and then to a walk as the cohorts reached terrain that limited the lasers and favored them. Steve sighed with relief as the jouncing about ended. Then the centaurs stopped. Steve felt the centaur shove his hands apart while glancing back at him. It took Steve a moment to understand that the ride was over. He gratefully slid off the centaur's lower back onto the ground where he stood and cupped his testicles for a moment to ease the throbbing.

Before long, there were some commands spoken by the centaurs. Steve felt a spear point against his back for a moment before it withdrew when the centaur in front of him said something to the one behind him. Steve noticed that the centaurs face showed some concern upon seeing how Steve was standing in noticeable pain. The centaur shouted something that was repeated by other centaurs.

Commander Haro heard the shouts reach him. He ordered, "Sub-commander Theo, hold your warriors here to rest. The prisoners appear to need a few moments before they'll be able to walk."

John made his way to Steve who was still holding himself. "You all right, Steve?"

"I hope so. I took a couple of hard bounces on my nuts."

"Where's that girl you were carrying? I'll take her this time while you recover."

"I don't know yet. She's around here somewhere. Any ideas on casualties? I know I heard some people yelling about being blinded."

"I heard those too. I think we have maybe a dozen who will be permanently blind in one or both eyes."

"That's not good, John. Anyone get hurt worse?"

"I don't know yet. I guess this goop kept anyone from being killed."

"There's the girl I was carrying."

"Okay, give me a hand getting her on my back. I don't think they're going to let us rest much longer."

Steve released himself and assisted John with putting the girl on his shoulders. He didn't notice how John grabbed the girl, using one hand to grab one wrist and ankle and placing his other hand between her legs with his thumb stuck in her vagina. Nor did he notice her moan wasn't exactly one of pain as John pressed against her G spot.

Moments later, the centaurs began motioning. Sometimes they prodded with their spears to make their point about getting on the move once more.

"Hey! I think Jane's dead! What do we do now?"

"Hold up your hand so I can find you!" Steve hollered. He watched for the hand that was soon held up in response and made his way to the young man with tears in his eyes and a dead girl on his shoulders. Steve quickly rechecked the girl for a pulse, then shook his head. "There's no sense in carrying her anymore. She's only going to slow us down. Put her down."

"Here? I can't just leave her. Aren't we going to bury her at least?"

"I don't think the centaurs will understand our desires. Just place her down now before you become another casualty," Steve replied.

"But we were going to get married in the spring," the boy cried.

"I'm sorry, son, but she's dead. Now put her down before you get the centaurs mad. We're already at the back of the group."

The boy felt several spears prod him along. He moved a few paces before he stopped. Then, reluctantly, he took the girl off his shoulders with Steve's help and placed her on the ground.

"Commander Haro, one of the prisoners is dead."

Commander Haro raised one hand to stop his cohorts. He then galloped back with Sub-commander Theo beside him and around to the rear of the massive loose formation and made his way through to the dead body. He looked at the other prisoner kneeling beside the body in what appeared to be anguish.

"They even appear to have our emotions," Haro said.

"Do you think he'll refuse to leave her?" Theo asked.

"Bring her body along. Find someone who is willing to carry her," Haro said.

Commander Haro galloped back to the head of the loose formation with Theo beside him. Theo asked, "Why bring her body?"

"If they're not our enemies, then this might show that we're not theirs. We didn't kill her, so I feel that we shouldn't make the situation worse by showing indifference. They might not even be creatures created by the Lizzars. They could be others from outside our lands that the Lizzars are enslaving. That thought occurred to me as we passed through the lasers. Our prisoners appeared to know what the lasers are. They might be defeated adversaries of the Lizzars," Haro replied.

"If they were defeated, then how can they possibly be of help?" asked Theo.

"That's what we have to find out. It's better that we treat them with some respect, despite holding them as captives. Be sure the warriors do not abuse the prisoners. Keep reminding them to use only gentle prods, Sub-commander."

John staggered. Steve quickly grabbed him under one arm and steadied him. "Ready for me to take over?"

"I guess I better let you. I don't feel like I can take another step."

"Okay, let go of her wrist. Then turn while I pull her onto my shoulders," Steve said.

A girl stumbled beside them. She asked, "When are they going to stop again so we can rest?"

"I don't know, Jill," John said.

"Most likely just before it gets dark. I get the feeling that we're still trying to get out of enemy territory," Steve said as he took the injured girl completely from John.

"Here, put your arm on my shoulder, Jill. I'll help steady you," John said.

"Thanks, Coach," Jill said with a smile as she accepted his offer.

John followed Steve as he carried the injured girl.

"I never thought I'd ever see so many people naked at one time. It's not like the time we made out in the gym so I'd pass Phys Ed.," Jill whispered.

"Not so loud, please. Can we forget about that?" John replied.

"What's it matter now? It's not exactly a secret among some of the girls that you'd give a passing grade for some sex."

"Maybe not, but it's not exactly known by everyone else," John replied.

"We haven't said anything before about you screwing us or that Coach Larson is a Lesbian. At least we had a chance to keep good grade averages by going to one of you. I guess we got what we paid for at the time."

"That's true, in a way. None of us knew then that this would happen. Still, it wouldn't be good for knowledge of this to get out. The last thing we need is something divisive to fight about among ourselves when we're all in the same boat."

"I'll pass the word around not to let it become known. Okay?"

"Just do it quietly. Talk only to those you know are already in on our secret."

The cohorts and their prisoners stopped when the sun began to set on the horizon. Only then did the centaurs open other sacks carried on the backs of some of the warriors to take out food.

"Our sentries are posted. The camp is secure," Sub-commander Theo reported.

"We should have thought to find out what these creatures eat and bring some of it along. Now we're going to have to take a chance that they can eat what we eat. Sub-commander Theo, see to it that our food is shared with the prisoners," Commander Haro said.

John looked doubtfully at the food he was handed. The centaur took a bite of some of the same food and smiled. John hesitated for a moment before he took a bite. He was pleased a moment later to discover that the food was high in liquid content. John had been wondering about where he would get

water to quench his thirst.

Steve took a bite without caring whether he was killed by the strange food. When he found that it held lots of liquid, he thoughtfully dribbled some of it onto the lips of the unconscious injured girl he'd helped carry. He wasn't sure if it would do her any good, but he felt he had to try.

Night fell over the camp. John found himself beside Jill. "Want to fool around some? We might not live much longer considering our circumstances."

"Do you always think of sex?" Jill asked.

"No, but it's the only thing left to us now. It's a way of showing passive resistance to whatever they do to us."

"Yeah? Well, one thing's for sure, I'm not letting you do me with all that sparkly crap on you. You want a piece, you get that part of you completely clean. Then I'll think about letting you do me when it gets a bit darker and everyone else falls asleep."

John worked at wiping off the sparkly goop from his penis. He felt aroused just sliding it off and almost masturbated himself. "Okay, it's off. You want to check?"

"Damned straight, I do!" Jill whispered back before feeling of him in the ever-darkening night while glancing around to see if anyone was watching.

"Well?" he asked.

"I guess that's good enough. I'll let you know when I'm ready."

Chapter 3

"How's everyone holding up, Sergeant?" Mayor Grean asked as the people began walking once more between rows of centaurs for an unknown destination somewhere across the plain.

"Better than two days ago. They are feeding us. We're only carrying two people now, though we have eleven who have to be guided because of their blindness. I guess the centaurs aren't too bad since they let us bury Jane the first night after bringing her body along for us," Steve replied.

"Any idea when we'll get to where we're going?" Grean asked.

"Not in the least. I suspect we're holding them up and they would have reached their destination already. I noticed that the centaurs had to send out for supplies. Most likely, they had enough food before they captured us to reach where they were going without resupplying themselves."

"I've noticed some of the students are having sex."

"So? There's nothing I can do to stop them. Considering our situation, I don't blame them, either, for letting their hormones take over at night. Besides, I've noticed a few adults doing the same thing. What

would your wife think about you screwing Mrs. Cobb?"

"That's different, Sergeant. I'm an adult. I'll ask you nicely to just mind your own business concerning myself."

"Sure, Mayor. Whatever you say. I just think that it's a case of calling the kettle black. We really don't have a right to criticize how some of the teenagers are behaving without taking our own behavior into account. To tell the truth, I don't blame anyone for getting laid since none of us are sure what awaits us. We might reach our destination only to be executed. If that turns out to be the case, then I'm going to be twice as glad about these nights."

"Who are you making it with? You aren't taking advantage of Miss Dale, are you?"

"It was more the other way around after she came to. She appreciated being carried instead of being left behind to die. Sure, I accepted a blow job from her. You want to argue about that? She gave Coach Weaver one, too, because he undressed and carried her down from the town in the first place. Now ease up on everyone, Mayor. If you don't, you'll lose your constituency."

"But she's a minor! How could you?" exclaimed Grean.

"I didn't take advantage of her. She initiated the entire action on her own and woke me from my sleep doing it. Besides which, she didn't act like she was a minor any longer. If she hadn't made me come already, I think I would have accepted her invitation to mount her for half the night. Hell, I know that all of these kids are still kids when you think of them under our laws back home. But we're not back home and our laws don't apply here. Face it, I'm only considered a police sergeant still because everyone is so used to me being one even though I'm naked now without so much as a badge. That's the only reason everyone still respects me or you for that matter. If you don't get along, you'll lose any control you have left. As far as the kids are concerned, they're adults. I don't think they'll listen to anyone who treats them differently. My advice to you, Mr. Mayor, is to ignore some of what you don't like seeing happen or plan on just being ordinary civilian Mr. Grean to most of them."

"Have we lost that much control?"

"I think so. However, I'm not sure we ever had control."

"How's it going, Victoria?" John asked as he found himself beside her near the back of the group as they continued to trudge to wherever the centaurs were taking them.

"Awful. I can't do anything with everyone around. It's hard to believe some of the things I've overheard about how to deal with any Lesbians among the girls. Plus I'm constantly afraid that I'm going to be raped even though I'm a teacher. I thought I knew some of these boys better," she answered.

"Frankly, I can understand why since you have a body that every man dreams of taking someday."

"Thanks, I guess."

"I'm just stating a truism. I wish you weren't like you are because I'd love to take you myself someday."

"Keep dreaming. Just be glad that I agreed to let you have some of the girls who couldn't pass my classes," Victoria said.

"Just as glad as you should be that I gave the girls in my classroom courses the same choices when they couldn't pass. You made out fairly well that way with some of my students though you made them visit you more often."

"Well, I didn't have to worry about getting them pregnant. Besides, you got more of them than I did."

"Doesn't matter. Anyway, I wanted to let you know that the word's been quietly passed around about not revealing our secrets. I told some of the girls already that I'd side with them if any of the other adults wanted to keep treating them as kids and that I'd talk with you."

"Is this the bribe I have to pay to keep my preferences secret?" Victoria asked.

John nodded.

"Okay, then I'll side with them on treating them as adults," Victoria said.

"I'll pass that on, too. Sure you don't want to consider giving me one shot at you?"

"Is that the price I have to pay so you'll keep your mouth shut, too?"

"Well, look at it this way. If you're seen making it with me once, it will remove any suspicions about your preferences from everyone's minds. Any girls here who you've had before will then believe that you're bi."

"Just like yourself?" she asked.

"Nothing wrong with getting a blow job from a guy. I just closed my eyes and it felt just like a girl was doing me. Fact is, some of the guys knew how to do it better than girls, even if they hadn't done it before. At least they were more familiar with male erogenous zones. Anyway, I haven't taken any of the guys since leaving Earth. I've only taken women, so I'm considered completely straight except by those boys who did me. They're certainly not going to admit that they ever did. That would put their own manhood in question," John replied.

Victoria asked, "How much attention do you want?"

"I think a sensuous blow job followed by complete access to you ought to clinch the deal."

"When? Tonight?" she asked weakly.

"Sounds good to me. My appointment calendar is free tonight."

"Bastard!" she whispered while resisting the temptation to grab him where it would hurt.

"Don't be that way or it will cost you extra. I expect you to do me real good, too."

Victoria reached for him and almost lost control over her intentions. She grimaced when she felt him in her palm and gently patted him with her fingertips before releasing him. "See? I can be gentle."

"And daring as well to do that in broad daylight."

"Everyone is still out of it because they're becoming accustomed to the pace. They don't do enough exercise like we do to be up to this much activity. I could screw you right now without hardly raising any eyebrows from everyone around us."

"You probably could, but I'll wait until tonight. How about letting me put my arm around you for now

and feel your tits as a token of good faith?"

Victoria moved closer to John until their sides touched as one arm of his snaked around her back and under her arm so that his hand could cup one breast. She wanted to gag at the thought of permitting him to brazenly handle her like that in board daylight as his fingertips played with one nipple. It wasn't long before his other hand was on her other breast as he did his best to arouse fires in her that might have consumed a woman with other sexual preferences.

She did her best not to look annoyed at his handling of her lest she give her preferences away. Instead, she tried hard to make it appear that she was enjoying the attention. As he said he had done before, she tried to imagine that he was actually a different gender. She smiled as she thought of him without a penis and testicles. In their place, she imagined a beautiful snatch that she could have later. In so doing, she managed to forget herself and let one hand drop to his ass and feel him up in return.

Victoria didn't even notice, because of her daydream as they walked stoically along, that John was aroused into an erection that stuck out straight and bobbed from side to side with every step. Nor did she notice that he came at all when her fingernails gripped his ass as her daydream progressed into more and more erotic thoughts until she heard him sigh slightly. Her reverie broken, she looked down at him and saw him spurt once slightly before his penis became limp.

"I caused that?" she asked.

John answered, "You certainly did. You're going to do fine tonight."

"I hope so because I'm not looking forward to this. I'm wondering if it would be better to come out of the closet instead."

"You'd be taking an awful chance if you do that. Most likely, in addition to those boys, you might have a few men willing to rape you just to teach you a lesson."

"I know there are men who think and act like that. They figure all a Lesbian needs is a thing in her snatch to convert her. Theirs, usually. Then she'll forget all about being a Lesbian. Most of them don't realize it was some man's thing being where it didn't belong that made some women into Lesbians in the first place."

"I've tried to respect your preference before, but our situation is different now. Don't get mad at me for taking advantage of you just because I've always liked and wanted your body. You don't know what it was like to want something that you could see but not touch."

"Yes, I do. I went through that nearly every school day when the girls showered. Wait a minute...Have you seen me naked before?"

"Sure I have. You were never as careful as you should have been in the gym after hours. Seeing you with those girls was enough to make me hard every time. I'm not going to apologize, either, since you watched me make it at least twice that I know of. You really wanted those two girls, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did. I didn't know you saw me making love after that one time you walked in on me while I was still dressed or that you wanted me. How did you know when I was making it?"

He replied, "The same way you knew when I was. You required your girls to report to you that they were going to see me so you could ask me the next day even though I suspect you watched nearly everyone of them with me. It was just that I only twice caught a glimpse of you watching. I hope you enjoyed the show because you really aroused me as I took them. Those two were some of the best

pieces I ever had because I knew you were watching."

"I guess you're right about how we each knew when the other was making one of the girls. I'm not upset that you spied on me since I did spy on you, though I really only wanted to see the girls. You don't know what a temptation it was to give more of them lower grades so I could induce them to accept my offer."

He asked, "Did you?"

"No, I only made the offer to those who were truly failing. How about you?"

He replied, "No, but that didn't keep me from making the tests hard to pass."

"Same here. I have a question for you since we're confessing our sins to each other."

"Sure, go ahead and ask. I don't think we're ever going back home. We might as well satisfy our curiosity about each other."

"Did you ever have any students you couldn't get because their grades were always too good?" she asked.

"Sure, every year there was at least one or more girls I wanted who were too smart to fail any of the tests. How about you?"

"Yeah, there were a bunch I couldn't fail, either. God what a waste of good snatch," she said.

"That's exactly how I felt about it. I still can't believe that you got me the entire cheerleading squad two years ago. You must have wanted some of them because they were gorgeous."

"I know they were and I wanted them all, but they went in your direction as we agreed to handle them when you first found me out. I guess I sent about twenty girls to you in five years."

He replied, "Twenty-one, to be exact. Yes, I kept count. I bet you did too."

"If I didn't know, I'm sure you kept count for me," Victoria said.

"Only of the girls I sent to you. I didn't watch you every time."

"Okay, with what you sent me, I had fifteen. How many more of yours did you have, since I'm sure I didn't see you every time? I'm curious now that we're bragging about how many we each had."

"There were ten more than. Any other questions?"

"Yes, why did you always take them at first in the pool?" she asked.

"Easy question. I figured that if they were virgins, there'd be less of a mess to clean up. Once I was sure that some of them weren't, then I moved them to the edge of the pool. I think most of the other kids would have gagged had they known that they were swimming in water that was screwed in," he replied.

"It bothered me at first until I realized that the filters had all night to clean the pool. After all, there wasn't the least sign of blood in the water the next day from any of the virgins I sent you," Victoria said.

"I'm still amazed that you managed to deflower one girl on the rings. I didn't even know that a Lesbian could do that until then. You sure as hell had a lot of cleaning to do when you finished," John said.

"But she was worth every minute I spent cleaning that floor. Most of the girls I have don't possess any experience and don't know where they're turned on themselves, let alone how to turn on another woman. Most of them hadn't even masturbated. Is it like that with the boys?"

"Most of them have masturbated a couple of times by that age, though they rarely admit it."

"Did you get any of the girls pregnant?" Victoria asked.

"Well, twice that I know of for certain, but they got abortions. There might have been others, but they were already screwing their boyfriends. Most likely, they figured he was responsible. It's possible I left a few brats behind on Earth."

"What makes you think that?" she asked.

"Some of the girls I had got married after graduation and their babies were too early but not premature. There are three babies on Earth that could be mine."

"You're lucky that you weren't caught."

"You mean we're lucky that I wasn't caught. As far as I know, the only girls I got pregnant were sent to me by you. Had they confessed to everything, we'd both be in prison now."

Victoria shuddered while her hand grasped John's ass tightly once more. His organ sprang upright once more and bobbed about within her view. She couldn't help but stare at it for a few moments as they walked inside each other's arms.

"My turn to ask some questions," John said.

"Sure, you might as well."

"Did you have any boys who wouldn't take your offer to see me?"

"Yes. There was one time when I found myself with two gay boys who knew you were screwing girls. They didn't trust you and preferred to give me a demonstration on each other."

"Did you let them?" he asked.

"That and I made them mow my lawn for a month."

"Is that all?"

"No, I had others who became my home slaves for awhile. Otherwise, you would have had four times as many boys from my class. They'd come over after school and strip down naked first before putting on what I ordered them to wear. Then they had to wait on me until it was time for them to go home."

"You weren't afraid of them trying to assault you in your own home?" he asked.

"Not after I made them wear locked chastity belts. They couldn't even piss without my permission."

"There's more to you than I knew. I wondered how you kept down the number of boys who flunked."

"Did you make every boy who was failing give you a blow job?" she asked.

"No, I gave them another choice just like you did."

"What was that?" she asked.

"You can't figure that one out?"

"No, though I can guess. However, go ahead and tell me. I'm really not in the mood to guess."

"They could provide me with a girl to take their place."

"Did any of them do that?"

"Only one of them was ever able to come up with a girl willing to take his place. The rest didn't have any influence with a girl. They were all talk and little show."

Victoria said, "Well, between us, I guess we managed to get about a tenth of each senior class in the last five years."

"Yeah, it was about that many, give or take a few. Now it looks like those days are gone."

"Unfortunately, though you'll manage. My prospects aren't quite as good."

"That's all the more reason for you to display a different image. Better to be screwed once than..."

"Yeah, I know. You don't have to go into that explanation again."

"I've noticed you're watching me."

"Do you want me to stop?" she asked.

"Doesn't matter. I was just wondering why."

She replied, "Truthfully, it's kind of funny watching it bobbing from side to side like that with nowhere to go at the moment. Mostly, it's kind of like watching a pendulum. You get mesmerized by the movement especially if you don't have anything else to do at the time. I mean, aside from walking wherever these centaurs want us to go, we really have nothing to do."

"You're watching my crotch because you're bored?"

Victoria said, "Sorry, yes."

As the sun set before the three moons made their presence known with enough light to almost read by, Victoria turned toward John and edged downward until she was facing his member. It looked big, ugly, and frightening to her as she contemplated backing out on the bribe. Worse yet, she could feel his leg against her snatch. She thought briefly about not going through with it only to remember that her secret would be out in the open if she didn't. Even if John didn't tell, sooner or later someone would suspect the truth if she wasn't seen at least once with a man's thing inside her. She closed her eyes before plunging her head forward. As she administered him, she experienced some of what she hadn't admitted doing with her student slaves. She hadn't told him that she possessed an artificial dildo that she made most of her male student slaves suck on while she stood in front of their kneeling bodies. She'd done that only at home since it was too dangerous to take any of her paraphernalia with her to the school.

She'd done girls only at school since she felt sure she could explain any suspicious activity to be training of one sort or another had anyone shown up and tried to enter the gym before she unlocked the doors. Of course, she'd forgotten that John had keys to his side and could enter without her knowing. However, he already knew what was going on and wasn't to be feared then. Not after their agreement five years earlier when he first walked in on her and another girl while in a very compromising position.

Victoria hadn't undressed yet, but the girl was fully nude and involved when John padded in on bare feet on his way to the pool and stood watching for over a minute before she or the girl noticed him. That one minute was humiliating and never forgotten by her. It still came fresh to her memory and came back with John's thing in her mouth.

"Coach Weaver!" the girl exclaimed.

Victoria jerked her head up from the girl's snatch and stared in fright at the sight of Coach Weaver standing in his swimming trunks only a few feet behind the girl she was licking so intently moments earlier.

Coach Weaver said, "When you're finished here, Coach Larson, I'll see you in the pool. That's where I'll be. Swimming some laps."

Then he walked away with equally silent steps. Victoria remembered thinking then that her job was done with and gone so there wasn't any reason not to finish with the girl. As soon as Coach Weaver went through the next doorway, she hurriedly undressed and got the girl to reluctantly finish her. When the girl finished, Victoria dressed and went to the pool where Coach Weaver was swimming naked.

"I'm here, Coach Weaver."

He swam over to where she stood beside the pool and looked up at her for a few moments before he said a word. "I could tell and get you fired."

"I know. However, I couldn't resist when she offered to do anything to get a passing grade."

He thought about her words for a moment before he said, "I wondered how you got her to agree. Frankly, you're a tough and competent coach and I'm more liberal than I act. I've seen too many Lesbians go through college to become PE teachers when I got my degree to hold that against you. Anyway, getting you fired won't make either of us happy, so I've got a proposition for you."

She remembered saying, "I'm not giving you my body."

"I don't think there's any need for that since you and I have basically the same tastes for girls. What I'm suggesting is that we not compete with each other. I'm willing to bet that not every girl you make your offer to is willing to do it with you. I want you to give them a choice between the two of us. If I make out, you make out since we'll both have something on each other then."

She remembered brashly asking, "Will you make the same offer to any girls in your classes?"

"Sure, why not? Then they'll see that they don't have any choice since it won't do them any good to ask for a transfer to your class. What about the boys in your classes who might be failing?"

She was shocked, she remembered then, but said, "If you want the boys, too, I'll give them some sort of choice."

His answer was what convinced her that he was cagey and smarter than she first gave him credit for. "It wouldn't do us any good to only have male students failing. If any students would rather fail than use their bodies to their advantage, well that's their choice. If they come asking to pass like that girl out there, then we'll give them a choice of you or me."

Victoria remembered how she sweated out the next six weeks wondering if Coach Weaver was merely trapping her in deeper so there'd be more witnesses the next time she gave in and accepted a student's offer to do anything. Then the next semester grades were done and she had two girls who were outright flunking. Both of them sought her out and said they were willing to do anything to get a passing grade. She nervously gave them their choice of Coach Weaver or herself. Both chose Coach Weaver and made arrangements to see him the following two days.

Victoria remembered watching him show up after school and appear in the pool area without a stitch on where he swam until the young lady for the day showed up. He was smart even then. He required the girl to undress herself and give him a blow job before he first entered her in the shallow water. It then progressed to the side of the pool on the cold hard tiles.

After that, Victoria breathed a lot easier as she had equally incriminating knowledge against him. It wasn't until the following six-weeks grades were in, which was the middle of the school year, that she discovered he was being completely true to his word when one of his female students showed up and made arrangements with Victoria. Though she knew now, she had suspected then that he might be watching her even though she didn't ever catch sight of him. The only time she even knew that he saw her was that first time until he admitted earlier in the day to seeing her on many occasions. Now she knew without a doubt that he'd seen her naked on many occasions and had wanted her.

She felt him begin to come and released him. She said, as she edged back upward, "Sorry, but I don't feel like swallowing."

"Fine, then just lie back and accept the rest of the deal."

Victoria rolled onto her back and steeled herself for what was coming. She gasped as he entered her after checking to see if she was lubricated. Then he was thrusting from above as he satisfied himself. After awhile, he gasped, "Do like you did earlier today. Grab hold of my ass and make me come."

Wanting it over with as quickly as possible, Victoria willingly reached up with both hands, grasped his buns, and dug her nails in as she had with one hand earlier. He sank into her deeper than before and gasped without pulling back up.

She asked, "Now what?"

"Shhh, I'm coming already. You don't have to do anything more than just lie still and hold me now. This is all I really want at the moment."

"You're coming in me?" she gasped as she suddenly thought of the possibility of pregnancy on a strange world without any doctors.

"That's what we agreed on. Lie still or I'll make you go again."

Reluctantly, Victoria remained still. She wasn't even aware that, in the darkness surrounding them, a few others were doing much the same thing as quietly as possible.

The growl of a strange cat woke nearly all the people up in the middle of the night. Many of them sought shelter in the arms of someone nearby or moved closer to someone they trusted. Victoria was astonished to find herself trembling in John's arms after waking to the terrible sounds.

The three moons of their new world illuminated the landscape well enough that they could eventually

see the creature that produced the sounds just before it was challenged by several of the sentries. The sentries gave no quarter and successfully ran the creature back off into the night before resuming their vigil with routine patrols around the camp.

John asked quietly, "You okay now?"

"I will be. It looked like a cat, but it was so large. I've never seen one that big," Victoria replied.

"Neither have I. It looked almost prehistoric compared to the cats on Earth."

"Yes, that's what it reminded me of. It looked like something that ought to be a fossil by now. Those centaurs had a terrible time chasing it off."

"I felt like they might not succeed at first. Their spears didn't even hurt the cat when they poked at it to run it off. I guess that's why they have so many sentries on duty at one time. It's plain that their lives aren't exactly easy."

"Nor will ours, if we're not executed," Victoria said.

"We have to plan on that not being the case. They must want us for something. It's up to us to find out what and see if we can oblige them."

She asked, "How well are you picking up their language?"

"About the same as everyone. I've picked up a few words. I know what stop and go are. Eat and laser glop. I'm keeping my ears open."

"If they spoke more often, we might learn more."

"True," John agreed as he continued to hold her and let his hands wander to her breasts where he played with her nipples.

"You're taking advantage of me."

"I know that, but you came to my arms for comfort and shelter. I feel I have a right since you came to me. You want me to stop?"

"Yes and no. I wish you'd stop, but I'm still scared over seeing that big cat. I'll permit you to continue as I really don't want to be alone."

"You could reciprocate some by playing with mine."

Without saying a word, Victoria moved her trembling hands in response. She didn't mind that their activity remained at that level without having to give herself to him once more. Nor did she mind too much that he laid back down with her still in his arms to fall asleep. She soon fell asleep beside him with one arm still around her.

John walked beside Victoria once more as the new day beckoned. He wondered just how much farther they would have to go before they reached their ultimate destination. Just about everyone was back to being just naked as the gel had dried and flaked off without being replenished though it took some while for it to all come off. The only place where the gel was still in evidence was in their hair, so that everyone appeared to have hair that constantly sparkled like diamonds in the sunlight.

It was possible to see more of the centaurs than before. Though their upper torsos were very human, their equestrian halves were not of any one particular variety. Had those lower halves belonged to horses on Earth, John would have described them each as one variety or another, had he known all the different varieties. The one thing he did notice was that they got along seemingly well, even though some of the human halves were also of decidedly different colors, much like humans on Earth. John concluded that they had so many differences that possibly no one group of alike individuals really existed within their numbers that could dominate over everyone. Also, they were forced to live together for security. They really couldn't afford to dislike one another for reasons of race. He wondered how the centaurs viewed the rest of the town people and himself considering that most of the humans were of one race, white, with only a few blacks and a few people of other races. Would that cause the centaurs to rethink their own lives or society? John hoped not in light of the predators he knew they faced.

"John, do you want our alliance to continue in some sort of way?" Victoria asked.

"Perhaps, Victoria. It depends on what we each have to bargain with," John replied as he dismissed his thoughts on race.

"I know we don't have much to bargain with. I thought over my situation last night and it doesn't look good from the long view. Sooner or later, I'm going to be screwed again. It occurred to me that I do know where and how I stand with you. At least you've dealt honestly with me."

"I didn't see any reason not to deal honestly with you. We could both still be in trouble if any of the kids ever reveal our secrets."

"I know that. It's become even more imperative that we trust each other since we might have only each other to rely on someday. Anyway, you're not too demanding, though you do want something for your efforts. What I mean is that you're not unreasonable in your demands. I can't blame you there. I did the same thing to others before."

"I think I know what you're trying to get at. We can probably reach a deal."

"Thanks, John. I felt I could talk to you openly about this. If it comes about, I'll be ready to negotiate. Will you stand by me before that point comes?"

"That's what you paid for last night. It wasn't just to keep my mouth shut. You know that I'll stand by my word. I'll be ready to take the negotiations farther if things fall apart."

The group entered a forest. For a change, the sun didn't beat down upon them unmercifully. Instead, they felt some revival at the scent of forest odors, strange, exotic, and new to their noses. The loosely kept formation slowed down considerably as some of the centaurs worked ahead to keep the path clear. Every once in a while, a single word was shouted by one of the centaurs, though its meaning was unknown to any of the humans.

"Steve, have you noticed that we don't have the depth of centaurs on our flanks as usual?" Paul asked.

Steve glanced around, then nodded.

"I think I could get away, get back to the town, and get some weapons to you and the others," Paul said.

"No, you couldn't. You're forgetting the lasers we passed through. None of us have any of that gel on us now. You'd be cut in half before you crossed half of the distance covered by those weapons. If you

escape, your best bet is to hide out somewhere until you find out where they get the gel from."

"I guess you're right. I completely forgot about those lasers. However, I wouldn't last long with those cats around, either. I'll rethink this first. If I can get to one of our guns, then I'll consider my chances and possibly make a break."

"I think that's...oh God! Look!"

Paul turned to see what Steve was concerned with. One of the girls had suddenly bolted between two of the centaurs and ran away in the forest. Neither of the centaurs gave chase. She went only ten steps before disaster struck her.

"Oh God, what is that thing?" Paul exclaimed.

"Some sort of snake, I think," Steve said as he and Paul watched the girl stagger around a few paces while the snake constricted around her. She finally fell to the ground, convulsed, and died.

"Now we know why the centaurs aren't thick on the flanks. They don't need to be," Paul said.

"They didn't even bother chasing her. It was as if they knew what would happen," Steve said.

The centaur at the edge of the loose formation said, "Move forward."

"What is that thing?" Steve asked and pointed at the dead girl.

The centaur repeated the same strange word Steve and the others heard before without understanding.

"These woods must be full of those things from the way the centaurs in front keep shouting about it," Paul said.

Steve stepped close to the edge of the group for a closer look. Then he cried out, "It's not a snake. It's a god-damned vine!" before he moved in obedience to the centaur's instructions.

"A vine?" asked Paul.

"Yes, a vine. It didn't uncoil after killing the girl. A snake would have uncoiled by now to eat her," Steve answered.

"A coil vine? This place gets worse and worse each day. First lizard cats, now coil vines."

"See them hanging over there? And there? Just above our heads. She must have triggered it somehow to just drop over her and crush her. We better pass the word about the vines."

"Yes, it does look like a huge spring coil. You're right. It is a vine," Paul said.

Chapter 4

The group emerged onto another plain where the centaurs once more were thick about them in all directions. Another cohort galloped up. From the looks of the new force, it was plain to see that it was a new unit as all the members were young and eager. Some expressed obvious disappointment about

something they were told. Steve couldn't miss seeing the tears on some of their faces. He knew for certain that it was probably news of some relative as he was sure that there were a lot more centaurs before the battle began at Conway's destination than when they were captured. Grim determination soon covered some of the teary faces as Steve recognized what he felt were vows of vengeance.

The young force soon galloped off to do what appeared like more training. Steve watched them until they were out of sight. He knew that they took a look at him and the other people, but the bad news they received was more important. As well, Steve was fairly sure that they were close to their destination after five days of walking.

Commander Haro ordered, "Halt! Sub-commander Theo! See to the prisoners. Have them guarded, get them food and drink. Let them talk and let warriors talk to them so long as neither tries to harm the other."

"Yes, Commander!" Theo replied.

"When you're finished, I'll have another unit relieve you so your warriors can rest and play if they wish."

"Would it be safe to place them near the water?" Theo asked.

"I'm not sure. They could be eaten if they go into the water. If you can secure some safe water for them, then yes," Commander Haro answered.

Theo ordered, "Keep the prisoners here! Give them food and drink. Talk to them if you want. Do not harm them or allow them to harm anyone!"

Steve wasn't sure what the ranks were, but he knew that Haro was in command and Theo was apparently second. He noticed that the command was switching to the younger officer, Theo. As well, he knew some of the words being used. He looked forward to getting more food instead of waiting until sunset which was still hours away. Even though it was still light, he saw as he glanced around the people held with him that two couples were already far beyond caring if anyone saw them make out in broad daylight as they began pleasuring themselves in case there was no tomorrow or even no next hour of life.

Unable to tear his eyes off the two couples, he watched, as did some others in the camp, as the two girls and boys did whatever the other desired as foreplay before finally getting down to the nitty gritty of just plain screwing each other's eyeballs out. He saw nothing in their technique or behavior that appeared any different from things he'd done before. Still, Steve watched as he had nothing else to do.

Even some of the centaurs were watching with great interest and talking among themselves, using some new words that evidently described what they noticed of interest about the two couples. It took some doing, listening to the centaurs carefully while watching the same couple to see what they were describing before Steve caught the meanings of a few more words.

Even the appearance of food before the two couples were finished failed to dissuade them from enjoying each other first. Only when they were sexually sated did they even consider taking any of the food. Steve continued to observe and listen as the centaurs noticed the same behavior.

"Steve, can we do that now instead of waiting for dark?"

"Are you sure you want to do that, Miss Dale?" Steve answered.

"Yes, and please stop calling me that. Can't you call me Kitten like my friends do? It is my name, after all. Now, since you just said yes, would you mind moving closer to me?"

Steve moved close enough that Kitten was able to take hold of his organ and shove it in her mouth. It didn't take long for Steve to hear nearby centaurs talking about him.

She soon laid back and said, "Now take me."

Steve went down on her, careful not to put his weight on her ribs where she still sported ugly bruises. Steve did his best to concentrate on taking Kitten and listen to the centaurs give accounts to each other about how well he did. At least, that's what he thought they were commenting on.

He was nearly finished when Theo ordered, "Everyone up! Follow me!"

Kitten pouted as Steve withdrew prematurely and then helped her to her feet. Steve offered her his shoulder to lean on so she could limp along to wherever Theo was leading them.

"I'm going to have a talk with Theo someday about his timing. I was getting an orgasm when he rudely interrupted us. Now all I can do is look at your little fella bobbing about all lonely like," Kitten said.

"How's your foot?" he asked.

"Not as good as my ribs. You could have put your weight on me earlier. I'm not going to break."

"I know, but I still feel you need some consideration."

Minutes later, Kitten exclaimed, "Water! We can take baths now!"

Steve could tell that the water they were heading toward was cheering up nearly everyone. He soon heard some of the centaurs using their words along with the human words. He guessed that the centaurs were trying to learn English. Steve felt it was a good sign since hardly anyone bothers to learn a language if they don't feel it will be of use for very long.

The centaurs opened up the front of their formation and permitted the humans to surge forward to the water. Some of them were amazed to see the people jump into the water and splash about.

"I only want to go in long enough to get all this dust off me. Then I want you back in me. Okay, Steve?" Kitten asked.

Chapter 5

"So, you are the leader of your people?" Commander Haro asked.

"What did he say?" Mayor Grean asked.

"He asked if you're our leader. You ought to learn more of their language if you expect to remain our leader. You had the same two months to learn it as the rest of us did," Steve replied.

Grean replied to Commander Haro, "Yes."

"Why were you in Lizzar territory? Are you their secret weapon?"

"Sir, our leader doesn't understand enough of your language. Would you mind if I just answer your

questions?" Steve asked.

"Answer them please," Haro said.

"We are not a secret weapon of the Lizzars. We don't even know what one looks like yet. We're from another world and would like nothing better than to be back there," Steve replied.

"I have no technology to send you back. Your being here is obviously the work of the Lizzars. They would have enslaved you," Commander Haro said.

"That doesn't sound much worse than our current situation," Steve said.

"We keep you under guard only because we don't know if you're a threat to us. We were even concerned that you might have already been defeated by the Lizzars," Haro replied.

"If we hadn't been busy digging our injured out of the rubble, you wouldn't have sneaked up on us. Then you might have learned just how well we can fight," Steve said.

"You will fight the Lizzars with us?" Haro asked.

"I didn't say that. What I did say was that we don't take kindly to anyone taking away our freedom," Steve answered.

"Then we share common interests! We only fight to remain free ourselves!" Haro exclaimed.

"Then are you going to release us?" Steve asked.

Haro replied, "I will, but I'd like to have you on our side if you're really as good at fighting as you claim."

"We didn't come here to fight. If we're free, then just have your guards move aside and permit us to return to our town. If you're really sincere, you'll give us enough of the laser gel to get us safely past the Lizzar laser outposts," Steve said.

"You'll need weapons to do that. The Lizzars will certainly come out to attack you. All their weapons are better than ours. Even if you have weapons, I fear that they will slaughter you. Certainly, you are not as fast or strong as we are," Haro said.

"Some of your warriors took some of our weapons. I'd like them returned," Steve said.

Haro looked at Steve as if uncertain. "We have some of your weapons?"

"You have two of them. We have more back at our town. Even with two of our weapons and a supply of laser gel, enough of us can get through to get more weapons for my people to defend themselves with. We don't have any lasers with us, but the Lizzars don't have any weapons that we don't have back on Earth. Some of our weapons are so devastating that even I don't like to think of using them."

"I want to see how your weapons work. We shall go find your weapons. Walk with me," Haro said.

Steve pointed at one centaur with a gun belt on. The centaur was using it to hold his knife. Upon seeing Commander Haro approach, the centaur gave him his attention.

Haro said, "Steve tells me that you have one of his weapons. I have already said he may have his

weapons back."

The centaur reluctantly unbuckled the belt and handed it over after taking his knife from the holster. Steve strapped the belt around his waist first before drawing the pistol from the holster and checking it.

"That is a very short club," Haro said.

Steve replied, "As a last resort, it could be a club. I need a target."

"Can you not practice on one of your people?" Haro asked.

Steve answered, "No. This isn't like practicing with swords and spears where you can stop before you hit the other guy. Once I use this weapon, it can't be stopped."

"This I really have to see. What kind of target do you need then? Would a Lizzar do?" Haro asked.

"We're not at war with the Lizzars yet. I'll not waste any shots on a captive Lizzar, if you have any, just to prove a point. If the Lizzars later attack us, then we'll deal with them at that time appropriately. For now, all I need is a target."

Theo stood with the Mayor behind Haro and asked, "What about a giant water snake? Ask him if he would mind getting rid of a menace."

Haro asked, "What about getting rid of a predator? We could use more of the water if the predator wasn't in it."

"Show me the way. A predator will do fine," Steve answered.

Steve briefly studied the giant water snake, close to thirty feet in length and able to swallow a man without dislocating its jaws. From the way that the centaurs gave it space, it was clear to him that even they could be taken.

Haro asked, "Will this do?"

"Sure. I'd just like to get a little closer since it's bigger than what I normally use this weapon for. We have better weapons at our town for dealing with something like that."

Steve stepped into the water. A number of centaurs gasped at his foolishness.

"Don't approach it from the front! It will suck you in. You have to attack the snake from the side or rear," Haro exclaimed.

Steve was in waist deep water before he felt the current from the giant water snake as it approached and tried to suck him into its mouth by expanding its body. He waited until he felt himself about to lose his footing before he fired. Three bullets struck the snake in the head, ripped through the flesh, and killed it. The water slowly flowed back out as the snake's muscles relaxed.

Haro gasped to see the snake suddenly dead. He collected his wits and ordered, "Bring the snake on shore for inspection!"

Several centaurs eagerly entered the water to obey his command.

Paul gratefully accepted his gun belt back and strapped it on before checking his gun. He soon took it apart and cleaned it thoroughly to rid it of as much of the sparkles that had gotten into some of the parts.

"I don't like the way you excluded me from the conversation!" Grean exclaimed.

"Then be a leader and learn their damn language! I'm not your errand boy or your personal interpreter!" Steve spat back.

"Don't get uppity with me, Sergeant. I can have you dismissed from the force."

"There is no police force. Where we are now is beyond the laws of our people. The only laws in effect here are those we choose to accept and enforce," Steve said.

"In that case, you leave me no choice. I'm removing you from office. Hand over your weapon. I'd ask for your badge except you left that behind on your shirt when you took it off," Grean said.

"This was my personal property on Earth. It still is, even here. You want a gun, go get one from the jail. For the time being, I'm glad that I'm no longer a police sergeant since I won't have to take your crazy orders any longer. I'll pass the word around for you that I've been fired as my last act of duty," Steve replied.

"No, I'll tell the citizens. I wouldn't want you looked at as my errand boy."

John stood with the rest of the people as the Mayor addressed them at the shore where he'd assembled them. Steve stood beside John while assisting Kitten to stand as her foot still wasn't fully healed. John suspected that her foot would never heal properly and she'd have a limp most of her life. He'd enjoyed taking her the first night after she initiated some action to show her gratitude for being brought along. It was then that he realized his best bet for getting laid was to always be helpful to any of the women who needed assistance as she had. He didn't really mind that she was forming an attachment with Steve.

"Steve Talbot is no longer a police sergeant. Officer Paul Dibbon is now responsible for enforcing our laws," Mayor Grean said.

"When did this come about? Why isn't Steve still on the force?" Paul asked.

Mayor Grean said, "Steve was unwilling to support me as Mayor. I had no choice but to remove him from office. From now on, all negotiations between the centaurs and ourselves will be conducted solely through me. As soon as negotiations are concluded for us to return to our town, we will leave here. When there are tasks to be done, I will assign individuals to complete them and they will report to me upon completion. As well, there will not be anymore public displays of sexual activity, especially by those of you who are underage. Just because we're on some other world doesn't mean that we're going to abandon our society's laws and standards of behavior. Anyone seen misbehaving will be dealt with severely."

Jeers and catcalls greeted his last statements.

"I didn't accept this office to be liked. I did, however, swear an oath to uphold the law. By God, I intend to do so. That's all I have to say to all of you. I want all of the adults to assemble here for a meeting," Grean said.

"I wonder what his royal highness wants now?" John mumbled.

"There's no telling. You going to assemble?" Steve asked.

"Might as well find out directly from the jackass's mouth what he's up to," John replied.

"Yeah, might as well," Steve agreed.

Mayor Grean said, "From what little we know about the centaurs and Lizzars, it's apparent that the Lizzars are technologically advanced and probably responsible for us being here. I think we should approach them in peace and find out if they're willing to send us back, even if it means trading with them from what we have in our town. Whatever we give up can be replaced when we get back home. They're not going to have much use for us since we're not a bunch of engineers who can come up with new inventions for them. As well, we're not an army for them to fear or that can help them. The centaurs want us to become another unit in their army regardless of gender. The only concessions they're willing to make on that matter are that some of the women may be left behind as prostitutes for the rest of us. That's unacceptable for more reasons than I'm going to bother explaining."

"Are you aware that many of the younger members of our community don't care about returning?" John asked.

Grean replied, "Their wishes don't enter into this discussion. They're underage and don't have a vote yet. It's our responsibility to get them back home to their parents and explain about those we can't return. Nor do I want to have to explain to some of the parents why their daughters are pregnant. If any of you are fooling around with underage girls, stop it immediately or I'll have Officer Dibbon deal with you."

"Then you better marry Miss Dale and myself because we're not going to comply with that order," Steve said.

"Not without her parents consent. Just quit screwing her, Mr. Talbot. If you don't, I'll have you placed under arrest," Grean said.

"By you and what army?" asked Steve.

"I have nothing more to say on that matter. I'm going to speak with Haro after this meeting and arrange for enough of the laser gel to see us through to our town. As soon as we have it, we're leaving. Make sure everyone gathers enough fruit to last them for five days of walking. You all have your instructions. Now see to it," Grean said.

"Do you think the Mayor's right about the Lizzars sending us back home?" Victoria asked.

"They might be able to, but I doubt they will. Once they find out about our weapons, they're more likely to take another chunk of Earth just to save time and effort. Otherwise, they'll have to invent new technology just to reproduce what we have," John answered.

"John's right. They don't have any advantage in sending us back to warn others. Not from what the centaurs have told me. Right now, I see us dividing into two camps," Steve said.

"Younger and older, right?" John asked.

"Precisely. I think my views are known though I'm not sure who I'll stand with until the chips are placed down," Steve answered.

"I'm standing with the kids. They're showing better sense than the Mayor," John said.

"So am I," Victoria said.

"I'm surprised by you both. I thought you'd both throw in with the Mayor since you've been with each other so much," Steve said.

"I owe it to the kids as one of their teachers. I can't abandon my responsibilities to them," John said.

"Nor can I," Victoria said.

"I see. Maybe I will stand with you and the kids. At least I won't be the only adult standing with them. You are aware that the kids are thinking of joining the centaurs?" Steve asked.

"I am. They still talk freely to me. I can't say that they're right, but under the circumstances, I suspect that they are. It all goes back to my first statements about how I feel the Lizzars will react. They won't want to send us back. That means they might even want to enslave us just as the centaurs believe that the Lizzars want to enslave them," John replied.

"One thing you should know is that the centaurs know they're losing. We could be joining the losing side," Steve said.

"We could also be enough to tip the scales the other direction. If we can get to enough of our weapons in town, we could swing the scales dramatically to force a truce, if not an end to their war. With this world at peace, it might not be such a bad place to live, provided we have weapons to protect ourselves from some of the predators. I've already been asked to lead our force," John said.

"You have?" Steve exclaimed.

"The kids know that John understands tactics and strategy. Any good football coach has to know those and John's definitely good," Victoria said.

"I never said he wasn't any good as a coach. Three regional titles in football alone is testament to that. I know that combat and football are based on the same principles, but combat is a lot more permanent in its results. I hope the kids understand that," Steve said.

"Most of them do. Likewise, they don't intend to fight unless we can get to our weapons. They don't want to fight with bronze spears and swords against the Lizzars with their iron weapons and lasers," John said.

"Very sensible of them," Steve replied.

"We have other things to consider as well. The Lizzars won't want to send us back if they learn that we have a library of advanced knowledge in the town. They'll seek to keep us there to interpret everything until we're no longer useful. That's why I think John and the kids are right about having to fight on the centaurs' side. At least, now that they know we don't want to harm or enslave them, they're willing to let us go our own way. Just about all the kids can see clearly now that the centaurs did only what they had to do in order to protect themselves," Victoria said.

"What about the prostitution problem?" Steve asked.

"We'll leave that up to the kids to decide. If anyone wants to be a prostitute for the army like the centaurs have for theirs, then so be it. If not, then we'll just do it differently. Anyway, they're not trying to force everyone to go along with them. That, in itself, is a major difference between them and the Mayor," John said.

Mayor Grean stood at the head of the group as it began retracing the route back to the town. He carried a pouch of laser gel over his shoulders as did a number of other people. Still other people in the group carried pouches of fruit for the journey.

Paul walked beside him ready to deal with any predators they might encounter despite Steve's warning that they should each take one flank. To balance out the limited force they had, Steve walked at the back of the group where he still assisted Kitten. Most of the adults walked near the Mayor while only John and Victoria walked with Steve.

Not far behind, a small force of centaurs followed along out of curiosity.

Mayor Grean said, "Okay, time to stop! Make camp here for the night! All adults report to me here!"

All of the adults walked over to where the Mayor sat on the grass.

Mayor Grean said, "We have to put out sentries. Paul and Steve, you have the first watch. Principal Bone, Coach Weaver, you have the second watch. George, Arnold, you have the third watch. Ty, Earl, you have the fourth watch. Paul and Steve will hand over their weapons to the next watch and those will be passed along so you'll all be armed when your turn comes."

"You're mighty generous with my personal weapon. Didn't it occur to you to ask first?" Steve asked.

"You don't own anything now. Until we get back to Earth, all property is to be considered community property. If you can't see it my way, then I'll have it taken from you now," Mayor Grean said.

"Like hell I don't!" Steve exclaimed.

"Only the men are standing watch?" Victoria asked.

Ignoring Steve, Mayor Grean said, "I expect the adult women to circulate within the camp and keep the kids under control. Do your best to keep them from screwing each other. Mrs. Cobb will give you instructions on what time to take your shift tonight."

"When's it your turn to stand watch, Mayor?" Steve asked.

"Don't question my orders or I'll have you dealt with," Mayor Grean replied.

"Sure you will. After you deal with me, I can only guess who you'll decide among us is your enemy next. You're more of an enemy to our survival than anything else. The others aren't going to stand much more of your rotten decisions and holier than thou behavior," Steve said.

"There's nothing wrong with my behavior!" Grean said angrily.

"No? Then explain to me how you have the nerve to fool around with Mrs. Cobb when both of you have spouses on Earth," Steve replied.

"The difference is that we're adults and capable of making our own decisions," Grean stated.

"No, the difference is that you're in charge for the moment and choosing what laws to have enforced. You're choosing only those that benefit you," Steve said.

"Paul, place Steve under arrest and take his weapon," Grean ordered.

Steve stared at Paul for a moment before turning back to Grean. "Since when it is unlawful to exercise freedom of speech and demand accountability of one's leaders?"

"Seems to me that hasn't been repealed yet. I haven't heard anything that demands an arrest," John said.

"Thanks, John," Steve said.

"No thanks are necessary. It's something we teach the students about civic responsibility. If you're trying to set good examples for them to follow, then you have to play by all the rules, not just the ones you conveniently like," John said.

"Well, Mayor? Are you going to set up a dictatorship or are you going to enforce all the laws as we remember them?" Steve asked.

"Never mind, Paul. There's no sense in destroying any unity we now have. Steve, I'd appreciate it if you'd lend your personal weapon to the others so they can be armed while they stand guard," the Mayor said after quickly calculating his support over a Constitutional issue.

Reluctantly, Steve replied, "Yeah, sure. I'll let others borrow my pistol tonight. I just hope they have the sense not to fire off all the rounds at shadows."

In the morning, Steve walked over to the nearby centaur camp. His disgust was barely under control as he was permitted to enter their camp. "Sub-commander Frea, I think we're going to need your assistance tonight," Steve said.

"How so?" asked Frea.

"I presume you heard all the shots we fired last night?"

"I did," Frea replied.

"We didn't have much ammunition to begin with. Most of it's back in the town. Some of our people fired at shadows last night. I doubt if we have enough to last until we reach the town. Mayor Grean isn't going to change how he's running things, so I expect us to run out of ammunition tonight if anyone gets edgy again. I'd appreciate it if you moved your camp closer to ours during the nights, even if the Mayor doesn't like this idea or ask you himself. At least that will protect one side of our camp and yours."

"How is the situation in your camp? Is it still divided?" Frea asked.

"It's getting worse, Frea."

"We can spare some spears if that will help," she said.

"I'm sure once we run out of bullets that Mayor Grean will have no choice but to permit us to use your weapons. I'd accept one now, but I'm trying to avoid further division in our group."

"I'm surprised at how your people can be so divided. We don't have that kind of self-destructive behavior."

"It comes with advanced technology and the need to specialize tasks. Someday your people might yet have to suffer such behavior among you. Just hope that you don't have any enemies around when that time comes."

"I hope I never live to see that time come. For now, we will move closer each night."

"Thank you, Frea," Steve said before turning away to return to his camp where only a few people were awake after their most disturbing night in two months.

By the end of the second day of walking, it was clear to John that the guard shifts pulled by the adults were taking their toll. The other adults, except for Victoria, Paul, and Steve, looked haggard. Then he noticed that the Mayor wasn't really too beaten down, either. If anything, the Mayor was probably in better shape than he'd been in since he was thirty. Though the other adults who used to be overweight were considerably slimmer than before and some quite sexy looking again, they still weren't used to walking so much. They hadn't kept in shape while in the centaur's base camp for two months as a few people had.

John hadn't failed to notice the same changes in the teens. There wasn't an overweight teen to be seen anymore, though many of them could have stood a bit more exercise. Still, most of them had spent a great deal of time playing in the safe water or playing other games. They weren't nearly as out of shape as most of the adults. A number of them had more self-confidence about themselves simply because their bodies were in better shape than before they left Earth.

As well, the teens seemed to have adjusted far better to being nude than the adults. Some of the adults still tried to be modest about themselves even though it was a useless effort. The teens either ignored their nudity or joked about it. Strangely, most of them used less gutter language than before. John wasn't sure why that was, but it did go toward keeping the camp less divided.

His most astonishing discovery was that the others weren't divided by race. He wasn't sure if it was because there were so few non-whites or what. He wondered if it was because of how the centaurs were observed to behave without isolating themselves into racial categories. John's only question was how the other races would react when the chips fell as to what the group's ultimate goal would be. Would they side with those intent on staying and fighting for freedom or side with those wanting to return to Earth, a choice he felt sure wouldn't ever be available. His own feelings were that the other races would side with the kids since most of them were kids. They might even view their new world as an opportunity to achieve true equality or at least a new start.

"I'd offer you a penny for your thoughts, John, but I don't have any pockets to keep change in. No change, either. Whatcha thinking about?" Victoria asked.

"The group's future," he replied.

"Understandable. How soon do you think things are going to boil over?"

"I'd rather not guess about that. One moment, it appears like we're already at that stage, then the next...someone's compromised or calmed down enough to defuse the situation."

Victoria glanced over her shoulder at Steve and asked, "How many bullets were you left with, Steve?"

"Three. I could have understood someone firing while the moons weren't out, but they shot at shadows when it was easy to see things. Besides myself, John was the only person I know of who didn't fire my gun," Steve replied.

"Any idea how many bullets Paul has left?" Victoria asked.

Steve thought for a moment before answering. "Probably five. He wasn't too happy last night, either."

"Are we going to make it back to town?" Victoria asked.

Steve answered, "Some of us will. It just all depends on how His Honor runs the show. If he uses some common sense and sends just a few of us ahead to get more weapons, then most of us will survive. If not, we're going to suffer heavy casualties before we get there."

"I was afraid of that," she replied.

"Well, I think we're in a better position here at the rear of the mob. John, you ever study military tactics?"

"Yes, some. I know most of the formations that were used from my research on them to devise football formations," John answered.

"Then you better remain close to me. We don't want to lose your knowledge. If anything happens to me, take my pistol as my inheritance to you," Steve said.

"Thanks, Steve," John replied.

"Don't thank me yet. There's one condition. You have to take care of Kitten. See to it that she survives if it's at all possible," Steve said.

"Steve! Nothing's going to happen to you!" Kitten exclaimed.

"I'd like to think so, but I've got too many enemies right now to feel very comfortable about my long term prospects. If something does happen to me, I want you to stick like glue to John and Victoria. Do whatever they tell you since it's for your own good and survival. Promise me that you will," Steve replied.

Kitten looked at Steve with a tear in each eye threatening to fall down her cheeks. "If it will please you, then I promise."

"John, will you promise as well?" Steve asked.

Victoria said, "I'll promise to care for her."

"Sure, count on me," John replied.

Steve watched the shadows carefully. From what the centaurs had told him, he knew they were in lizard cat country. He couldn't help but remember how it took half-a-dozen centaurs with their spears to drive off one cat before. Though he had more firepower than them, he still felt uneasy about having to face one of those large beasts by himself. For the first time since leaving the town, he felt helpless and naked despite the presence of his pistol.

On the other side of the camp, Paul patrolled. Steve still felt alone since Paul would have to cross the camp just to support him if Steve encountered one of those lizard cats, just as he would have to cross

over the tangle of legs and arms to give his support to Paul. He was only grateful that most of the people no longer stayed up very long. There was less movement at night which meant fewer disturbances of people tripping and falling onto others. Still, there was enough movement at night when some of the people got up to move to the edge where they could relieve themselves if the urge struck them.

Steve suspected that much of the tripping and falling wasn't accidental. Quite often it was a girl who squealed out at having some boy fall onto her. He really believed that it was just a way for the boys who weren't getting anything yet to cop free feels, judging by some of the muttered comments the girls made about where the boys' hands were. Rarely did a girl trip though he similarly suspected that those who did were deliberately tripped so they would fall on a boy.

Still, despite the occasional sounds from inside the camp, Steve managed to maintain his concentration on what was outside the camp. He was glad that the centaur camp was within yards of their own as it gave them, Paul, and himself less ground to cover. He noticed that several of the centaurs remained near his camp while on guard. He hoped they wouldn't hesitate to lend a hand if a predator threatened his camp. He was certainly willing to run to their assistance since he knew their spears were woefully inadequate to deal with lizard cats.

The stench reached Steve well before he heard the growl. Steve looked in the dark in the wrong direction first before he realized his mistake as the sounds of large feet upon the grass finally reached him. With his gun already drawn, he whirled in time to stare at the monstrous appearance of a lizard cat almost upon him. He fired.

The cat screamed in pain and sprang at him. Steve fired twice more while feeling the sting from another bullet fired from behind him as it entered his back. The cat fell at his feet before he collapsed upon it.

John rushed over to Steve. He was barely aware of Paul screaming at the Mayor. "Damn it! You spoiled my aim! Now I've shot Steve! You're an idiot, Mr. Mayor!"

"I couldn't see you! I'm sorry I bumped into you!" Grean replied.

"Like hell you couldn't see me!"

John felt for a pulse and found none. He slumped down beside Steve as he realized that Steve was right about fearing for his life.

Paul hollered, "Is Steve all right?"

John replied, "Steve's dead," as he remembered that Steve had willed his last possessions to him. With trembling fingers, John removed the belt from Steve's bare waist and strapped it around his own before he took the gun from Steve's limp fingers.

Paul reached Steve's side and cradled the man's head in his arms. "I'm sorry, Steve. I wasn't trying to shoot you."

Mayor Grean walked over and looked contemptuously at John with Steve's belt and gun. "You want to hand that over to me?"

"Screw you, Mr. Mayor! Steve told me that he wanted me to have it if anything happened to him. It's mine now and I'm not surrendering it."

"You will for guard duty," Grean replied.

"No, I won't. This gun is empty and it won't do anyone any good. I suggest that you ask the centaurs if they'll lend us some spears and increase the number of sentries on duty," John said.

"Empty? Prove it!" Grean exclaimed.

John replied, "Screw you, Grean. I'm not going to prove a damn thing to you. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going over to the other camp and borrow a spear. Then I'm coming back, burying Steve, and taking his place on guard duty. Don't get in my way."

"John, would you mind if I help bury Steve?" Paul asked.

John replied, "You can help. I can see that you didn't mean to hit him."

"Well, I mind!" Kitten cried.

"Easy, Kitten. Paul's aim was thrown off by the Mayor. Paul wouldn't have ever hurt Steve. They were friends," John said soothingly.

"That's true. He and I were long time friends. Please don't hold it against me," Paul said.

Victoria took hold of Kitten and hugged her to her. "Just remove your anger from Paul. He's not the one to hate if you have to hate anyone. Steve wasn't counting Paul as one of his enemies. I'm sure he doesn't want you to do that, either. Now just let it all out now. Cry if you have to and get it over with."

John returned with two spears. Already, Paul had organized some of the students to drag the lizard cat carcass away from the camp in the hopes that other predators would go for it instead. John handed one to Paul. Together they dug a shallow grave for Steve.

In the morning, it was clear to John that the Mayor wasn't in the least upset over Steve's death as he held a brief ceremony over the grave. Grean still showed as little concern as he did when Steve was killed. As well, he still eyed John's belt and weapon. John concluded then that he shouldn't ever turn his back on the Mayor or he might wind up occupying the next grave.

Chapter 6

The group stopped as the laser towers came in sight. From what the centaurs told them, it was best to travel directly between the two. John wondered if the entire group could get through on foot as they had ridden through the last time. He wasn't at all surprised when the Mayor called for all the adults to report for a meeting. He and Victoria made their way through the teens to find out what the Mayor had in mind.

"Good, I'm glad we're all here now. I've given a lot of thought to our situation. I believe our best course of action is to approach one of the Lizzar posts and negotiate with them. Once we all coat ourselves with laser gel, I intend to lead us directly to the nearer laser position where I'll speak with the Lizzars and arrange for our return to Earth. Otherwise, we'll have to travel over twice as much ground while under their fire. I'm sure once they understand that we don't represent a threat to them then they'll be willing to negotiate, especially once they find out that we can help them technologically. I want all of

you to instruct the students in your groups to cover themselves in gel so we can get going without any delays."

"You're willing to help arm the Lizzars even better against the centaurs?" John asked.

Grean answered, "Yes, I am. It's politically expedient. When you choose allies, you have to choose those who can benefit you. The centaurs don't have a prayer of winning this war. Even the technology they possess is limited and probably stolen from the Lizzars. On the other hand, the Lizzars can send us home. If not, at least we'll be on the winning side. We all stand a better chance to survive with the Lizzars instead of aligning ourselves with the centaurs."

"You expect us to align ourselves with those lizard people? You're crazy!" Victoria exclaimed.

"And I'm still in charge. I've made my decision. Now tell the others and get ready to cross to that laser tower," Mayor Grean said angrily.

"Screw you! You're not the mayor of anything. I saw enough of what the Lizzars did to some of the centaurs to know that I don't want anything to do with them. I don't want anything to do with the Lizzars and I'm not going with you," Victoria said.

"Anyone else want to remain behind?" Mayor Grean asked.

"I'm staying with Victoria," John answered.

"In that case, Principal Bone, see to John's group. Mrs. Cobb, see to Victoria's. John, I'd like your gun," Mayor Grean said.

"Forget it, Mayor. Even though it's empty, I'm not handing it over to you," John replied.

Grean pulled Paul's gun and pointed it at John. "I said, hand it over. Now!"

"Are you really going to shoot me if I don't?" John asked.

Paul stepped over and drew John's gun. He checked it and said, "It's really empty."

"I ought to shoot you. I don't understand why you'd carry an empty gun or refuse to prove it, you hard-headed bastard," Grean said.

"Because I think you're an asshole and I don't prove myself to assholes," John said.

"Since you feel that way, it's just as good that you don't want to come along. I'd rather present a solid, unified group to the Lizzars than one that can't take a stand together. Everyone else get around to what you have to do. We're leaving as soon as everyone is covered in gel. You can forget about giving any to John and Victoria since they're not going. I don't want them following and spoiling negotiations," Grean said.

"In that case, you shouldn't mind if we start walking the other way," John said.

"No, I don't mind. Just don't stop to talk to the kids," Grean said.

"Then you better be prepared to shoot me in the back since I still believe in free speech. Mind if I have my gun back, Paul?"

Paul slipped the empty gun back into John's holster before John walked away. John looked at the kids covering themselves with laser gel. He got to the back of the group before anyone asked if he was going.

"No, Kitten. We're not going with the Mayor. He wants to change sides," John answered.

"You mean we're not heading for the town?" Kitten asked.

"No, the Mayor intends to lead you to one of the laser towers," Victoria said.

"Then I'm not going, either. You guys hear what Coach Weaver just said?" Kitten asked.

It didn't take long for Kitten to spread the word to others. Before a minute passed, Mayor Grean was walking about threatening to shoot anyone who didn't follow him.

Paul said, "Sir, you can only shoot four of them and then the rest will tear you apart. Why not just leave them behind? It's not going to make any difference whether we have to explain twenty missing kids or all of them when we get back. They'll only slow us down now if we don't get going before long."

"Huh?"

"The gel, sir. Remember, it loses effectiveness the longer it's worn. We have to hurry up and leave now. You have the only gun, so they're not going to follow or try to scuttle your plans," Paul reminded him.

Grean exclaimed, "The little bastards don't know what's good for them. Radical idealists! That's what they are! All right! We'll leave them! Everyone else follow me!"

John watched as the Mayor led the other adults away, leaving just Victoria and himself with the kids. He waited until he felt the Mayor was out of effective pistol range before he hurried over to speak to Frea.

"What happened? Your group is now two," Frea asked.

"I haven't much time to explain this. The Mayor intends to change sides in order to get the Lizzars to send him and the others home to Earth," John said.

"That isn't good," Frea said.

"No, but what's worse is that they'll trade whatever's in the town to get themselves sent back to Earth. There are more guns and bullets in the town. We can't afford to let them reach it first. I need your help. If some of your warriors can carry a few of us to the town quickly, we'll take control of the weapons and prevent them from giving the weapons to the Lizzars."

"How do I know I can trust you?" Frea asked.

"You'll have the lives of those we leave behind in your care. I don't know how otherwise. What do you want to show trust?"

"Will you fight on our side?" she asked.

"I think we've already decided to fight on your side. I will, anyway," John said.

"Find out how many of your people will fight on our side. Then I will answer you."

John hurried to the edge of his group and hollered, "How many of you are willing to fight for the centaurs? Raise your hands!"

As the hands went up, Frea said from behind him, "That's sufficient. How many people do you need

carried?"

"Ten should be enough to hold off the other group and any Lizzars with them," John answered.

"Select your ten. I'll send thirty warriors with you. When you get the weapons, send some of them back with my warriors. Show your trust in us."

"You'll protect the rest of my people?" asked John.

"Yes. I swear it."

"Then we're allies. I need nine volunteers to go with me to the town! The rest of you will remain here with the centaur cohort to protect you!" John said.

Eager hands once more went up all among the group. John thought for a moment about selecting only boys, then decided that if anything went wrong, it would be nice to have some girls along. He didn't admit to anyone why he felt that way as he selected nine students.

"Victoria, keep the rest of our people in line. I doubt if we'll see each other for a day or two," John said as he coated himself with laser gel while other hands eagerly assisted him from behind.

John mounted one of the fastest, strongest centaurs as his volunteers were similarly helped to mount other strong, fast centaurs for what they knew would be a long, painful ride to town. As John remembered how his balls ached from the last time he rode on the back of a centaur, he felt glad that he had selected some girls to go on the mission. To John it seemed that they generally handled the last ride better than any of the men. He wondered how the centaurs might feel about using saddles later since they were now allies.

With ten centaurs on each flank, they approached the laser zone at a gallop and broke into a run just as the first rays of a laser touched upon them. John, like the volunteers, held on dearly as the centaurs threw all their efforts into running as fast as possible to cross the level ground the lasers covered with their fire. Each of them kept their eyes tightly closed to prevent being blinded as happened the last time to eleven of their friends. The centaurs shielded their eyes with their hands and squinted through their fingers to see where they were going.

The centaurs slowed to a gallop and then to a walk as they left the deadly laser zone with one centaur missing.

"What happened to one of your warriors?" John asked.

"He probably caught a laser hit on one of his feet and fell. We all know the risks when we enter."

"But none of you stopped to help him?" asked John.

"If he was hurt, there was nothing we could do for him except delay others to where they might die. If he wasn't hurt, then he would have regained his feet and caught up. We can't carry our own as we can you and your people."

"I'm sorry you lost one of your friends. I guess we should get down and walk now," John said.

"We will carry you some more. We still have much ground to cover and we can go faster carrying you and your people."

John said, "Okay, whatever you wish."

"Hold up for a moment! Something's wrong!" John ordered.

The centaur stopped and asked, "What's wrong?"

"Listen and look at the town. There's gray smoke coming from it and popping sounds like gunshots," John answered.

"Then there's someone in the town already?"

"It seems so. We better be careful making our entry," replied John.

John slipped down from the centaur's back and moved to the scree from the crumbled sides of the land stolen from Earth that the town still rested on. He gripped his spear and hoped that he wouldn't have to use it. He knew of only two reasons for anyone to be using weapons inside the town. Either someone left behind was still alive or the Lizzars already had the town and were playing with the weapons to discover their usefulness.

"Jill, you and Harry take a position near the school front. We'll move in the other direction. If you spot any people, shout to them who you are. They probably won't recognize us with this gel on."

"What if it's a Lizzar?" Jill asked.

"In that case, keep your head down so you don't get it shot off. The rest of us will spread out in pairs. Stay with your partner and watch everywhere. Remember, if there are any Lizzars up there, they wear armor on their fronts. You have to go for their faces, arms and lower legs if you have to fight them. Don't let them get their guard up. Their iron weapons will tear ours apart. Everyone ready? Move out."

John scaled the dirt from Earth to reach the top nearly thirty feet up. Alongside of him, the others did their best to climb without making any noise. Unlike their climb down months earlier, they were soon covered in dust that clung to the gel covering them. John sighed with some relief when he noticed that they wouldn't be sparkling all over like they did before they began climbing. He knew it might be possible to sneak up on the enemy after all if they could cover themselves thoroughly.

He called out softly, "Stop and sprinkle some dust over your heads. Cover the sparkles! Let's not let them spot us too easily!"

John took a handful of dusty dirt and poured it on his head while keeping his eyes closed. He held his breath and splattered his face with another handful, then poured more down his back. He looked at Melanie and tossed some dirt onto her back and said nothing when she did the same to him. John glanced at some of the others, then nodded when he felt they were sufficiently covered. He resumed climbing, leading his small force up the rest of the incline.

He peeked over the edge into the town he hadn't seen in two months, then nodded when he saw nothing moving after watching for over a minute. Simultaneously with his sudden spurt of movement to complete the climb, the others crossed up onto the long-missed grass from Earth and then spread out while crawling to keep themselves from being larger targets. John and Melanie crawled the farthest before finding some cover in the broken asphalt that was once a street.

Jill looked around the rubble of the school and noticed where more digging had gone on. She hollered softly, "Someone's been digging here after we left!"

John received her message when it was passed along. He nodded, then looked around some more before he and Melanie crawled to more broken asphalt to use as cover.

Melanie gripped his arm and pointed to the side. John looked quickly and almost threw his spear before he realized he was staring at a dead Lizzar. He crawled over to the body and inspected it briefly, using it to shield himself.

"He's been shot!" John said.

"Is that good?" asked Melanie.

John answered, "I think it is. I'm going to find out now. The rest of you stay down. I'm going to stick my neck out farther than I'd like."

John stood up while holding his spear by his side in a non-threatening manner. He hollered, "Hello! This is Coach John Weaver! Is anyone from Earth still alive here? Hello! I'm John Weaver! Is anyone here? Hello!"

"Coach Weaver?" the female voice called out.

"Yes! I'm Coach Weaver! Who is that?" he hollered.

"Cynthia! Cynthia Spelcost! Be careful! We're under attack by lizards!"

"Who else is with you?" asked John.

"Ben Trout! He was in jail when you all left us behind!" she hollered.

John shouted, "We didn't leave you behind! We were taken captive and carried off! You must have still been in the rubble or you would have been taken prisoner, too!"

"Did you escape?" she shouted.

"They released us! There are more of us here! They're keeping their heads down because of the shooting!" he hollered in reply.

She shouted, "Let me see more of you then!"

Melanie stood up and shouted, "Hi Cyn, it's me, Melanie!"

Cynthia shouted, "Be back with you in a moment! They're getting through!"

John shouted, "We're coming in to help! Be careful who you shoot!"

Cynthia shouted, "Then hurry! We're about to be overrun!"

John shouted, "Okay, you heard her. They need help!" as he began running toward the building where Cynthia was calling from.

Several gunshots sounded, but none of the bullets came John's way. He ran as quickly as he could over the broken asphalt to the grass that was more settled and easier on his feet. He hadn't noticed that all the clothing stripped from them two months earlier, aside from a few tatters, was missing from where it

was dropped and left. Even without clothes, John soon felt overheated as he ran toward the building as the gel held in his perspiration and body heat. Where he could perspire, his body was pumping out fluids as quickly as possible to cool him down.

Then John saw his first Lizzars as they approached the building to attack from what they believed was now a blind side. Without a word, John drew back his spear carrying arm and launched his spear with as much force as he could muster at the back of the Lizzar about to enter the building. It was just enough to gain the Lizzar's attention to the threat approaching him from behind as he paused from entering and turned to face the new menace. John saw that the Lizzar wasn't exactly happy about having to deal with more than the two people inside the building as he and his comrades arranged themselves in a quick semi-circle to defend themselves.

Without anything more to fight with than his empty gun, John drew it to use as a club. He stopped short of the Lizzars facing them while wondering if the people inside could free themselves soon enough to come back to their assistance. The teenagers arranged themselves on both sides of John and faced the four Lizzars.

"What now?" Jill asked.

"Just keep them from getting to any of us. If we can hold them off awhile, Cynthia or Ben will be able to hold off the others and get back to us," John replied.

The Lizzars stared at the people facing them and moved their swords about as if to keep them from knowing which one they might attack or to let it be known that they were ready for whoever charged in at them.

John wiped at his forehead to remove some of the sweat coming from beneath his matted hair. He shook the gel and sweat from his free hand. Almost at once, he knew he had a risky solution to their stalemate.

"Everyone get a good handful of gel from your bodies and be ready to toss it at their faces! Get your handful, get ready, one, two, three, throw!"

Ten handfuls of gel crossed over the few feet separating the two sides. Some of it hit the Lizzars in the face. Some missed. John saw that his Lizzar was temporarily blinded.

He leaped in at the Lizzar, grabbed the Lizzar by the wrist and hit him on the back of the hand with his pistol. The sword fell from the Lizzar's hand. Before it reached the ground, John backhanded his pistol at the Lizzar's face as hard as he could. The Lizzar staggered back against the wall and down to a sitting position.

Even as his victim fell back, John was swinging madly again at the next nearest Lizzar before it could react to the sudden assault. John's pistol clubbed the new victim on the side of the head, sending him reeling into another Lizzar who was being speared in the face by two students.

John turned to face the other Lizzar only to see that four teens were stabbing the Lizzar in every vulnerable place they could reach. John shouted, "I'm going in to help! Follow me!"

He dashed into the opening and looked around in the dim interior for a moment before he saw Ben struggling in hand-to-hand combat with a Lizzar. Ben was bleeding from one arm and sported numerous bandages on both legs and arms, clear evidence that it wasn't his first entanglement. John spotted Cynthia lying on the floor with a Lizzar about to stab her.

John threw his pistol at the Lizzar's face in time to knock him away. Before the Lizzar could recover, John threw a body block on the Lizzar, carrying him backwards into a wall. Punching madly at the Lizzar's face, John threw all his weight into each punch while the teens entered the room to deal with other Lizzars who were coming in from the other side.

In no time at all, John lost track of how many Lizzars he fought with as the building was cleared of them. When at last he stood with one of their swords in his hand while the last few Lizzars retreated hurriedly, he finally looked around to see what the situation was.

Ben came over, panting heavily, saying, "Thanks. If you hadn't shown up now, we'd be dead."

"John Weaver. Pleased to meet you."

"Under other circumstances, I wouldn't say the same about you. However, seeing as you just saved my life, I reckon what I know about you doesn't matter and won't be brought up by me. I'm Ben Trout," Ben replied.

"Cynthia?" John asked.

Ben answered, "Yeah, she told me about you. Where is she now?"

"Let me see that arm first. You've got a severe wound there," John said.

"Ain't no worse than the other ones I got from these damn lizards in the past two months. We've had a few others just wander in to kill and steal stuff that's lying around. I gotta find Cynthia. I promised I'd protect her," Ben replied.

Harry said, "Cynthia's over here. She's hurt."

Ben rushed over to Cynthia and took her in his arms. "Don't die on me, child!"

John glanced around, found the rags that Ben had used to make other bandages and cut off strips with the iron sword he held. John bandaged Ben's arm quickly before he was able to get to Cynthia. He tore away part of the wedding dress that he didn't remember her wearing months ago, and wrapped a bandage around her to protect the wound.

"We better find some antiseptics. Do you have any in here?" John asked.

"No, I was stupid. I only grabbed some guns, ammo, food, and water after I was first attacked. I tried to surrender to the lizard man when he spotted me. Instead, he tried to shish-kabob me. Got me on the arm. I ran like hell back to the jail, found a gun, and shot the bastard before he could finish me. Then I holed up with the supplies I'd gathered. I wasn't planning on going back out until I ran out of something I needed, but that night I heard sounds, so I took a chance and went outside. Took me awhile to locate where the sounds were coming from. That's when I found Cynthia. I carried her back and nursed her back to health while keeping under cover," Ben answered.

"I don't remember her wearing a wedding dress before we were captured," John said.

"That's her wedding dress now. She and I married each other in the sight of god. I'll kill the first man who messes with her, too," Ben said.

"You won't have any trouble from any of us. If you say you're both married to each other, we'll all respect that. Right now we have an alliance with the centaurs. They need some weapons to fight back with against the Lizzars. We promised them some weapons if they'd help us get back here," John said.

"Well, there's plenty around unless the lizzards carried them off. I couldn't keep them out of everything. Why didn't they come up here with you?" Ben asked.

"I told them to remain below and guard our backs after hearing shooting as we approached. I didn't know if people or Lizzards had our guns. If it was people, I didn't want them, you that is, becoming excited and shooting at them without knowing that they're allies," John answered.

"Seems reasonable enough to me. I guess you might as well tell them to come on up then seeing as they're on our side," Ben remarked as he comforted Cynthia in his arms.

"Jill, Harry, go tell our allies that they can come up here now. Melanie, go with them in case there are more Lizzards around. They might not all have retreated. You two stay with Ben and Cynthia. See that no one sneaks up on them. The rest of us are going shopping. Get yourself some iron swords and spears until we find better weapons." John spotted his pistol on the floor and picked it up to holster it. He hoped that he could find the proper ammunition for it.

"Hey, Coach! I found some hunting arrows!"

"Good, drag them all out of there. Any bows?" John asked as he looked into the opening they'd dug into the collapsed hardware store where one of the boys crawled in.

"I'm still hunting around in here. A few of the arrows are broken. You want them anyway?"

"Yes, we'll use the heads from those to make new arrows. Bring out anything you think might be useful," John replied.

"Coach! I found the rope!" a girl called out from another crawl hole dug into the rubble.

"Good gal! Start hauling it out!" John shouted.

"Ouch! Shit! I should have listened to you, Coach!"

"About what, Harry?" John asked.

"I just jabbed myself on some splinters when I backed up. God, it hurts!" Harry replied.

"Okay, you learned a lesson. Now be more careful," John said.

"I will, damn it! Ouch! That sure smarts!"

"Coach! I found scopes! Rifle scopes!" another girl shouted from inside the rubble.

"All right! Drag those babies out here, Michele!" John replied excitedly.

"I found the knives, too! Lots of them! I'm going to need help getting to all of these," Michele said.

"Okay, I'll send in another woman! Melanie, go on in to help Michele." John watched as Melanie crawled into the small opening. He couldn't avoid looking at her as she disappeared into the opening. He wished that he could take advantage of her as she possessed a dynamite figure and the looks of a fresh flower just blooming. He ignored his own sudden arousal as he watched her disappear as the work needed to be completed first. He glanced around to see that the other boys were standing their watch properly and not looking into the rubble where there weren't any Lizzards to threaten them.

Harry crawled out with a box of arrows he shoved in front of him. He stared at the coach for a moment before he grinned. "Must have been some view to cause that, Coach."

John replied, "She certainly was. You find any bows?"

Harry answered, "I think I'm going to need some help getting to the bows if they're not all broken by the crap on them. Give me a moment to pull out some splinters before I go back in."

"Sure, Harry. Take a few moments. Jill, you go with Harry when he's ready. We need those bows. They're the only long range weapon we can make replacement ammunition for."

Some shots came from the direction of the jail. John glanced around to see what was happening. He soon caught sight of Ben firing at Lizzars. Several centaurs circled around as others protected his back and flanks. Then it was over again as the last of the Lizzars fell in the dust. The Lizzars' iron weapons were soon passed out to more of the centaurs who relished the thought of having any weapon superior to their bronze weapons. It was evident by their smiles and the way they swung the new weapons about to get the feel that they already felt good about their mission.

Harry soon disappeared back into the crawl space, followed by Jill, whose firm ass captured John's attention momentarily before he went over to assist Angela who was shoving out coils of rope.

"Well, they're synthetic. I don't know how they survived when our clothes didn't before," Angela said.

"I think whatever it was in the fog had to be reacting with something in the school since it was spreading outward from there. If our trip had taken longer than it had, most likely everything synthetic would be shot to hell. Try to find some natural fiber ropes as a precaution. Also, cord to make bow strings with. Once the centaurs see how bows work, I think they'll want to make their own," John said.

"Why didn't they make any themselves by now?" she asked.

"Frankly, I don't know why. Perhaps it was because the vines on this world are so dangerous to mess with. It's a miracle that they figured out any uses for those vines at all since they never invented bows," John answered.

"It gives me the creeps thinking about how they make a spear, then get one of their bronze spear heads, put it in place, and then lift it up into a small coil vine and trigger it so that the spear head is secured in place. They take an awful risk doing that," she said.

"You can't accuse them of being cowards. That's for sure. Okay, off you go. Back into the hole to search for more rope. We need all you can find, Angela."

"You just want to see my ass wiggle when I crawl in."

"Maybe I do. You'll never know," John replied.

"Wrong. I can look back between my legs to see part of your reaction. You're lucky that you have a magnificent body or you wouldn't have been so successful back on Earth."

John winced at hearing her talk about what he'd done.

She noticed his reaction. "It's not really that much of a secret anymore. Almost all the girls know now. Some of them had to know why you were taking our side. Anyway, we can't go back home so it doesn't really matter who knows. Does it?"

"I'd rather it wasn't talked about so openly that I gave in to a weakness for girls on Earth."

"That's not any worse than some of us wanting an Adonis instead of pimples. A well-hung Adonis when you get down to it. Otherwise you wouldn't have gotten any," Angela said with her eyes on his sex to see if he reacted. She smiled as he reacted, then turned and crawled into the crevice she'd come out of moments earlier. Before Angela disappeared completely into it, she wiggled her ass provocatively at him while she stared back at him between her opened legs giving John an even better view of her snatch. Then she crawled into the opening and disappeared from sight.

John thought briefly about her statements to him. He hadn't considered before that he had any sex appeal. Now it was clear to him that he did possess some. It was at least enough that teenage girls were willing before to give him their bodies in order to receive passing grades. He wondered if his sex appeal could be used to gain more of what he liked now that he couldn't offer those grades.

"Hatchets! We found hatchets!"

John hollered, "Bring them out! I know some centaurs who will be happy to have some of those. Anyone find the hammers yet?"

"God damn! I just...ouch! Ouch!...found the ammunition! Be careful, Jill. There's lots of broken glass here. Move slowly and don't put your weight down too quickly until you're sure where you are. Has anyone found any flashlights yet? We sure could use them in here!" Harry called out.

John looked at the teens who finished crawling from under the collapsed hardware store. He felt lucky that their town wasn't larger or it would have possessed more specialized stores. He didn't know of many hardware stores in large cities that still carried guns and ammunition. Anywhere other than a small town like Conway, where the students came from three surrounding counties to attend school, would have been without hope in his situation.

"Okay, you all did good today. We're going to carry this stuff to the boutique where Ben's been holding out. At least it's still standing for the most part. We'll resume digging out stuff tomorrow. The centaurs are going to post guards tonight while we sleep. They want a chance to use some of their new toys before they return to the main group tomorrow. Hopefully, we'll see some more of our friends the day after they return. Maybe as soon as tomorrow night. Then we'll have help getting to more of the stuff that's buried. We're going to empty this town so completely that the Lizzars get nothing from it."

"Coach, are you going to enforce any of those silly rules the Mayor wanted to keep?" Jill asked.

John answered, "If you're asking whether I care if you fool around or not, the answer is go ahead. You did the work. You deserve the chance to play. The only rule I'm making as far as that goes is that it has to be consensual. If one of you doesn't want to fool around, then the other one better find someone else or jerk off in a corner. I will not cotton with anyone forcing someone to have sex. Either mutually agree or negotiate, but no physical force. If any of you young men get your balls shot off by a lady who doesn't want your attention, then it's your own damned fault. You certainly won't get any sympathy from me."

He received four male answers of, "Yes, Coach," and a tug on his arm by the girl who'd wiggled her ass at him earlier.

"Yes?" he asked.

"You want me or not, Adonis? I'm available and this time it isn't for grades," Angela asked.

"You going to do it my way, Angela?" he asked.

Just getting past undressing herself in his presence that first time had required a lot of nerve and courage as he wouldn't touch her first. Nor was Angela afraid afterwards as she was when her lips first touched him that day while following his instructions. Afterwards, she was more excited about being considered a woman and experiencing her first minor orgasm than she was with her passing grade. She'd even given him a second blow job afterwards because she was so happy, and he'd accepted like a gentleman.

Angela wouldn't admit it, but she wasn't even trying to pass the next semester in Coach Larson's class since she knew she could have her cake and eat it too, so to speak. Now she was glad to find that he was still available, especially after learning how many other girls admired his physique after they saw him naked and their immediate danger was over. She was only grateful that most of the girls admiring his physique didn't also know how good he was as a partner, even if he was demanding about how he would do it. Until any of them got their courage up, Angela knew she had only a couple of girls to compete with. She was very happy to have him right then as Jill was a rival who could have asked him first had Angela not gotten his attention before her. She discounted Cynthia as a rival since Cynthia was now considered married to Ben and Ben wouldn't countenance any dalliance on her part or John's. Only Coach Larson puzzled Angela as Angela didn't know before on Earth that she also did men. Still, there was no mistaking what Angela saw them do together. If it wasn't screwing, Angela wondered what in hell she was doing since it was the same as Coach Larson did with Coach Weaver.

She shuddered once more as he attempted to withdraw from her. Angela held him in place with her crossed legs. "Please, lover, leave it in a bit longer. Do that for me now and I'll give myself to you again."

Victoria gazed out in the direction of the town. She longed to see a campfire announcing that John and the others had arrived safely. Though she knew the centaurs would fight for all their lives, she still felt helpless without everyone around to increase their overall security. Without John nearby, she felt alone and worried that she might slip up. She knew she couldn't survive without the others, even if it meant being taken. Victoria knew her position wasn't at all good and hoped that nothing happened to John.

She still remembered how he appeared that first time in the pool without clothes. Statuesque and handsome, the perfect man for a woman who desired men. Even she had recognized that quality in him as he stood in the shallow water discussing her choices with her. Nor had she failed to see that he was as well hung as many men could hope for. Without a doubt, every boy she used as a slave in her home after school for better grades wasn't able to compare with him. He certainly didn't have any competition from the other men now on the strange world they were rudely deposited on. Still, other than noticing, she hadn't really cared how well he was hung as she wanted the same thing he wanted. She wanted to play with other girls' and to have them play with hers until she achieved total orgasmic pleasure.

Victoria grimaced as she remembered John taking her for the first time, a time she thought would never come about. Not on Earth, which it didn't. She simply hadn't counted on anything fantastic and unreal occurring as had happened. Her only consolation was that he was much nicer about it than her only other time, when she was raped. That gruesome event had shaped her life, leading her to become as physically fit as possible so she could better defend herself. That, in turn, led to becoming a physical education instructor.

She couldn't forget how she shunned men in college and stuck close to other women until another woman noticed and invited her to try something different and safer. Valerie was gentle and considerate, letting her explore at her own pace, not even asking to partake in return until Victoria was ready. Victoria

remembered her first time receiving as well as her first time in giving. After that, it was easier to shun men while accepting her pleasures from another woman who knew the right places and could recognize when Victoria didn't want to without forcing the issue. Victoria almost fell in love with Valerie, but didn't. Nor had Victoria fallen in love with anyone else, though she had the opportunity several times.

Kitten held onto her as they stood and watched for a campfire. She couldn't help but notice that Victoria's hand was cupping one breast of hers. She asked, "Are you gay, Coach Larson? You're holding my tit."

Victoria, broken out of her memories, replied, "You're not afraid of me, are you?"

"No, but I feel awkward with you holding me there," Kitten replied.

Victoria said, "Sorry," as she moved her hand down slightly as she remained in contact to support Kitten. Sensations of wanting continued to sweep through Victoria's body as the two women stood together with their bodies in contact with each other.

Kitten asked, "What's it like to have a woman?"

"Very hard to describe, but very enjoyable. What I recommend is that you remember just how much enjoyment you got having a man. Then think of that pleasure multiplied several times. That's what it's like when a woman pleasures you. Even then, it's not easy to describe. My advice to you is if you really want to know, you'll just have to try it once and discover for yourself. Did you feel anything else other than awkward when my hand was on your breast?"

"I might have. I just wasn't sure if I should have those feelings."

"Why shouldn't you have those feelings? They're natural. What's not natural is how our society represses those feelings, especially among heterosexuals. It was okay for a guy to get his rocks off, sow some wild oats, but it wasn't okay for a woman to feel anything. That's against a woman's true nature. Every woman is alive with feeling. So, you felt what comes natural. I don't see anything wrong with that. The fact that you got that feeling from another woman touching you shouldn't matter. What should matter is whether you're going to live under the oppression that society enforces or live your own life the way you want, taking whatever pleasure you want when it's available. That's how I live mine. I can take any man or any woman I want without wondering about myself. I don't need to label myself to be comfortable."

"Are you sure?" asked Kitten.

"It's not a matter of whether I'm sure, it's whether you feel comfortable. When something thrills you and you feel comfortable with it, then take all you can get. If not, then don't. Can it be any simpler than that?"

"And you think women are better lovers?" Kitten asked.

"I know they are. I've had men before, some of them the best you can imagine. I think Coach Weaver is probably near the top among men, but even he can't compare with a woman who instinctively knows what another woman desires. Anyway, you've had men already. It's up to you to explore women should you ever do more than wonder how it could be."

Kitten stood silently beside Victoria as they watched for signs of a campfire. For several long minutes, she did and said nothing. Then Kitten reached down to Victoria's hand and moved it back to cup her breast.

John glanced at the setting sun. He kissed Angela lightly before he stood up and left the boutique to talk with the centaurs. "Have you found enough to start a fire?" he asked.

"Yes, we found plenty of wood. We're ready for you to light it."

"Here's a lighter. It won't last forever, so don't play with it just to show off. You'll run it out of fuel before you've had maximum use of it. I've got another. Watch as I operate mine and then operate yours in the same way."

The centaur observed carefully as he watched John create a flame with his lighter. Then the centaur followed suit and expressed delight as he held the lighter so others could see. "John was right! We can carry fire with us from now on!"

The centaur dropped the lighter when the metal parts became too hot.

"I should have warned you that it gets hot after awhile. You have to use it when you get your flame and then put it away." John struck his lighter once more and touched it to some tattered rags that no one would be able to wear again. The rags caught fire and John let his lighter go out. John placed his lighter into a pouch on his belt while the flames from the campfire began to spread.

The centaur said, "This is truly a great day for us all. We have new allies and weapons to protect our freedoms. The Lizzars couldn't believe it when we slaughtered them so easily for once instead of waging a pitched battle as usual. Whatever you need, John, we shall try to provide."

"I'll keep that in mind. For now, just remember not to squander what little we have. When it's gone, there won't be anymore. We must remember to make the best use of what we have, even if it means passing up some opportunities for battle. The winner isn't always the side that wins the most battles. It's the side that scores on the most important battles," John said.

"I will remember that, even though it seems to be contradictory."

"Someday when I have the time, I'll explain it better to you. Maybe tomorrow since not all of you are returning," John said.

"Then I shall stay as I want to learn these new concepts."

Kitten shuddered as she felt Victoria's other hand reach down and massage her pubic area. She made no attempt to shove the hand away nor did she object as buried feelings burst upwards from where they were submerged.

"You okay, Kitten?"

"I'm fine, Coach. Just nervous."

"So was I my first time. Still, it was so unbelievably good that I didn't mind and later wanted more."

"I've been standing here wondering if the centaurs do things like this."

"I don't know. They're so different that I hesitate to ask. Still, their females have breasts and vaginas, though theirs are much larger than ours. Then again, I can understand that since their males have so much between their legs that I'm sure some of our girls just gush thinking of having a thing that big between their

legs. The only problem with that is that I don't think any of them can handle that much if too much force is used. Those male centaurs could easily forget how much smaller we are and use too much force. It's not something I'd like to have happen to me. Anyway, I know that they have breeding females to give the males pleasure when they return from battle. I don't know what they do for their female warriors. Maybe they do have gay and Lesbian centaurs," Victoria replied.

"Maybe," Kitten agreed.

"You like this?" asked Victoria.

"It...it feels fine. Thank you."

"Well, there's the signal fire. They made it safely. I hope."

Kitten said, "We'll know they did if they signal with it."

The centaurs held the piece of corrugated sheet metal between them. They flipped it so it was upright and blocked the fire in the direction of the cohort. Then they flipped it back so it didn't. Over and over, they repeated their actions as they blinked out a series of flashes to indicate that they were the ones at the fire and not someone else.

Kitten said, "There's a flash...And another one."

Victoria said, "Then it's definitely our people there. We have the town. Are you tired yet? Would you like to lie down? I don't have to stop when we do. That is, if you don't want me to stop."

Kitten answered, "I am getting tired since we did walk a lot today. You'll keep doing this for me?"

"Sure, if you want," Victoria replied.

Chapter 7

The centaurs arrived at the cohort camp a few hours after leaving the town. Several enthusiastically showed the weapons and other equipment they were given as one centaur reported to Sub-commander Frea.

"Sub-commander, John asks that some of the blind people be taken to the town since he can give them something useful to make them feel better about not being able to see. He says there is more to share with us."

"If this isn't a lot, then we might need another cohort to help. Did everyone make it to the town yesterday?" Frea replied.

"No, Sub-commander. We lost one warrior getting through the laser zone. John lost one woman fighting the Lizzars in the town. But he found another man and a woman there who we missed capturing

before."

"I shall have to speak with Victoria about who is to go from among her people. You should all rest now."

Victoria looked squarely at Frea without letting on how much she might like to explore the other's body.

"John wants more people sent to the town. He asks that some of your blind people be sent."

"He wants some of our blind people? Did he say why?" asked Victoria.

"Something about them not needing light to be useful," Frea answered.

"How are he and the others? Did they all make it safely?" Victoria asked.

"I lost one warrior getting them there. John lost one woman fighting off Lizzars in the town. He had another man and woman join him there. Apparently we didn't find everyone before," Frea answered.

"I'm sorry you lost a warrior. I can see now that some of your warriors have weapons. Are they satisfied with them?"

"They are very happy. I've heard nothing but how effectively they killed Lizzars with them with no losses among themselves for a change. When I send my reports to Commander Haro, I shall recommend that all units cooperate fully with you as you appear to be our solution to winning the war that we were losing. I no longer believe that we will eventually lose."

"Then what are our chances of getting all of us to the town?" Victoria asked.

"Had I another cohort with us now, I would not hesitate to immediately carry you all through the laser zone. As it stands now, we can only send some of you there at any one time. I hope you understand. Just to send a report to Commander Haro requires no less than five warriors in case they encounter any predators."

"Not with our weapons. Now one of your warriors is worth five. Consider that."

"You make a strong argument and trap me with my own recommendations. I just told you that I'm recommending that we cooperate fully. If I send five warriors, I break my own recommendation and make it worthless. If I send fewer, then I prove my own words. I shall send two. One of them must stand guard while the other sleeps. Then I shall try to move more than ten of your people. We should be able to carry twenty while leaving enough of us behind to protect the others," Frea said.

"That will have to do. I know you can't take all of us at one time since not all of your force is here. I'm not certain why you use so many of your warriors to carry so few."

"We usually move in columns of threes through the laser zone. The warrior in the center always lags slightly behind and between the two outer warriors. He is better shielded and able to warn the others of where to run if they have to shut their eyes completely," Frea explained.

"I understand now. Still, why not burden all your warriors equally?"

"Because not all of us are equally strong. The strongest always take the center and carry any loads."

John crawled out of the grocery store. Though a lot of food was spoiled and long gone, there was still plenty to see everyone through for a couple of weeks. He clutched something in his hands that he only happened to spot on his way out and wasn't even looking for in the first place. Of course, he had the bottle of wine, too, that he wanted and went in after. He stopped and stood up with his precious cargo. Then he put one pair of sunglasses on his face and looked around. He liked the way they fit and handed a pair to one of the centaurs. "Try these on. They're sunglasses. They shade your eyes from the sun's rays and ease any eye strain you might otherwise incur. I strongly suspect that these might be useful against the Lizzar's lasers. Jill, go get me that rifle, please."

"How will these be useful against lasers?" the centaur asked.

John answered, "Because they're mirrored sunglasses. You can see yourself in my lenses, just as I can see myself, stubby beard and all, in yours. Angela, I saw some razors in there. Looks like a several years supply if you use them until they're dull."

"Thanks for noticing. I don't see how you can stand to have pubic hair," Angela said.

"I'm used to always having it unlike you. Did you shave yours off to wear a bikini?" John asked.

Angela was about to crawl into the grocery store. She paused and looked up at John. She replied, "No, I was hoping that you'd go down on me the next time you had me. You had me first when I still had pubic hair. Since then, I've picked up a little experience in between and learned how good it feels without pubic hair in the way, like Coach Larson used to keep hers."

Angela crawled into the crevice and wiggled her ass provocatively once more as she disappeared.

"You like whatever it was she said?" the centaur asked.

"Very much so, Rone. We talk strangely compared to your language, but we generally know what we mean with our colorful descriptions that bear no relation to what we're actually saying," John answered.

"Then you don't actually eat her?" Rone asked.

"No, it just refers to sensually licking her to promote a response favorable to both of us," John answered.

Rone smiled knowingly, then said, "Yes, we do that, too, though it is very difficult to even attempt. Our women dearly love it if a man goes to that much effort to pleasure her. Those men of ours who can succeed, and not just attempt it, can usually have their pick from among our women each night."

"Okay, how do the sunglasses feel to you?"

"They feel fine. I forgot I had them on," Rone replied.

"Good. My next question is do you want to go hunting?"

"Hunting Lizzars?" asked Rone.

"Better than Lizzars," John replied.

The centaur asked, "What could be better than killing Lizzars?"

John answered, "Killing Lizzars and destroying their laser."

"You can destroy their lasers?" another centaur exclaimed.

"Yep! With this!" John said as he reached over for the rifle that Jill had brought over to him. He looked at the barrel and the attached scope before presenting it to the centaur to inspect.

"This can kill, I mean, destroy a laser?" the centaur asked.

"If it can't, then I'm going to be in big trouble. I'd like one of you to carry me toward one of the laser positions until I feel I'm in range. Then I'm going to empty a whole clip of ammunition if necessary to shut it down. If I succeed, you won't have to cover yourself with laser gel to travel back to join the others since their perimeter will have a blind spot in it. If I fail, then you better not throw away your laser gel since you'll still need it," John answered.

"How soon do you want to go?" Rone asked.

"Whenever one of you is willing to carry me so we can get in range quickly," John replied.

"Then get your laser gel on. I will carry you myself as soon as I am covered," Rone replied.

John removed his sunglasses and set down the bottle of wine. He was about to reach for the laser gel being brought forward when he suddenly felt willing female hands rubbing laser gel gently over most of his body. He stood still and enjoyed the gentle hands of Jill upon him as she saw to all of him including his face, though she lingered on another part long enough to arouse him.

"I figured I better get the little fella to stand up so I could get a proper amount of gel on you. Don't want you aroused after the gel is on. Hate to think of you having an exposed spot there where a laser could really cut down on your love life," she said.

John laughed. "I don't believe a word you said, Jill. You just like men and I'm glad you do."

The centaurs laughed along with John while Rone was being similarly administered to by two other centaurs as Rone couldn't reach all the way behind himself.

John asked, "Do you ever have this kind of behavior among your women, Rone?"

"Sometimes, we do. They are the ones who make the best breeders at our base camps. Your woman there should be a good breeder. I don't understand why you risk her life."

John replied, "I hadn't thought of it that way. Perhaps Jill would be an excellent breeder, but it's her choice, not mine. Until then, she'll just have to accept the same risks as the rest of us."

Jill said, "If I could be assured of having you every night, I might just accept being a breeder. However, I know you too well, John. You're not satisfied with just one woman and I don't want to be everyone's breeder."

John slipped his sunglasses back on, checked the rifle, and then permitted Jill to apply the laser gel to his hands and the rifle. When she finished, he said, "Well, it's time for Captain Sunshine to dazzle the enemy!"

Rone walked beside John as they went to the edge of the town and climbed down to the plain. They checked each other over once more before John was assisted onto his back. Then they rode off toward the laser position where the Mayor had led the adults the previous day.

Much as Victoria didn't want to lose what she felt she'd found, she selected Kitten to be one of the people to ride to the town. Kitten's still-healing foot would be less of a hindrance in town than out in the open, Victoria realized after considering why John wanted some of the blind people. Since she was able to convince Frea to take more than ten at a time, she sent all the blind people and nine who weren't to where they'd have the advantage.

Kitten kept her eyes closed tightly as she gripped her arms around the chest of the male centaur carrying her. She wondered if she was being rejected by Victoria because she didn't do anything back in return during the night. If so, she was sorry she hadn't as she knew she'd actually enjoyed being fondled and played with until she reached an orgasm that forced her to summon every reserve just to keep from moaning out loud. Much as she enjoyed it, she wasn't at all sure how anyone else might react to her and Victoria enjoying each other. Rather, to her enjoying Victoria's efforts, Kitten corrected herself. She was so deeply involved in thinking about whether she was being punished or rejected, she didn't notice the two times the centaur carrying her had to leap over bodies.

Then there was something different about everything. There were some comments from the centaurs about what was happening and she clung tightly to the centaur she was on, unsure if she should dare open her mouth to speak.

"The laser position on our right isn't firing at us. We don't know why. Do you?" the centaur asked her.

"Not at all," Kitten replied.

John turned to his centaur friend and said, "Well, if your eyes aren't open now, you can open them. I got the bastard!"

"Is it really destroyed?" Rone asked.

"See for yourself. Ready to go the next step with me?" John replied.

"What is that?" Rone asked.

"We'll attack any Lizzars left alive in it and kill them before we destroy any more equipment in there. That way they can't put it back into operation."

"Just the two of us?" Rone asked.

"Sure! Why not?" John exclaimed.

"Should I kneel so you can get back on?"

"Naw, I'll walk. If any Lizzars show up before we reach the tower, then we'll consider our options. If there are too many, then I might ask you for a ride."

"How many shots did it take?"

"Four, my good friend, Rone. I'm not certain, but I think I hit a Lizzar with one of my misses."

"I think I see a Lizzar coming out of the tower now. Are you going to shoot him now?"

John answered, "Not just yet. We'll get a little closer and I'll try to kill two with one bullet."

"Two? Can you really do that?"

"I don't know. That's why I'm going to wait some before I try. Then I will know."

"Yes, there is definitely a Lizzar outside. I don't think he sees us yet. These binoculars you gave me are very good."

"We'll just get closer until they can see us. They'll probably not be afraid of us this time, so we'll have a real advantage over them. If I shoot them now, they'll close up that tower so we can't get in. This way, we can fool them good."

"I like your thinking, John. We used speed to make our attacks. You just walk right up to them. Together, we should win."

"I do believe you're right," John replied.

The centaur said, as he slowed to a walk, "It's safe to look."

Kitten opened her eyes and glanced around. For some unknown reason, she counted heads and was shocked to discover that not everyone made it. She glanced back but couldn't see any bodies or anyone trailing at a distance. "What happened to the others?"

Her centaur said, "They were hit and fell."

"Why didn't you stop for them? Maybe they could have been helped up!"

Her centaur replied, "Stopping is asking to die. Then the Lizzars can concentrate their laser on one spot and burn through the gel anyway. We learned that lesson long ago. The hard way."

John sighted in on the Lizzars who were finally aware of him and Rone as they advanced on the laser tower. More Lizzars came out of the tower and then they began to advance toward him and the centaur.

"How soon will you shoot? They are getting close. I can still outrun them while carrying you if you think they are too many."

"Not yet. I want them a bit closer to us and farther from their tower so they can't escape easily."

"John, are you sure you know what you're doing? There are fourteen of them!"

John replied, "Well, I haven't done this before, but I know how it's supposed to be done."

"You've never fought like this before? Get on my back! We'll leave them for now!"

"No, not yet, Rone. I really feel that I can take them. Just let them get a bit closer."

Kitten guided one of the blind girls up the side of the slope leading to the town. She felt sorry for the girl, though she felt sorrier for the two who didn't make it. She wasn't quite sure why, though.

John fired at last.

Rone said, "You missed!" then a moment later, "Sorry, I thought you missed. I guess it took a while for him to die."

"I was hoping that I was close enough to get him and the one behind him," John said.

"Why not shoot the ones closest to us?" Rone asked.

"Because I studied a lot about tactics. One war hero back on Earth found out that if you shoot the last guys in the group first, the others won't run away because they think you're a bad shot. Now I'll shoot that last Lizzar before I work my way forward."

The centaur watched as John fired once more. "Good shooting, John. He fell fast."

John fired twice more before he paused.

"Aren't you going to keep shooting them?" Rone asked.

"Yes, just letting them bunch up some more. I don't want to waste too many bullets."

The centaur observed as the Lizzars moved closer together as they came closer to John and himself. Then John fired twice more and three more Lizzars fell on the ground. "You did get two with one shot! You are magnificent, John!"

John fired three more shots, dropping three more.

The centaur said, "I don't think they know the others are dead yet."

"They will with these shots since they're practically side by side. Here goes!" John fired off four more rounds, dropping the last Lizzar as he began his charge all alone.

Rone reached down to pick up the Lizzar's sword.

"We'll pick those up on the way out. No sense in carrying them to the tower and back," John said.

"Where's John?" Kitten asked.

Jill answered, "He went with Rone to knock out a laser tower. Did you have any trouble getting through?"

Kitten said, "We lost two girls and one centaur on the way in. Then my ride said that the laser on our right wasn't firing on us anymore. I guess that was John's doing."

Jill shouted gleefully, "John did it! One laser tower knocked out!"

"Rone, keep watch out here with the rifle. I'll use my pistol for any Lizzars still alive inside the tower." John entered the tower quickly after checking the entrance to be sure that no Lizzars were crouched and waiting on the other side. He pressed his back against the wall and glanced around thoroughly before he moved in farther. John eventually reached an upper level and stopped dead in his tracks as he found some of the adults from the Mayor's party chained to the walls.

"John! Was that you shooting?" Miss Haskin asked.

"Yes, that was me. Anymore of those Lizzars in here?" John replied.

"I don't think so. They all hurried downstairs after the explosion upstairs where the laser is."

"Okay, everyone keep quiet unless you see one trying to sneak up on me. I'm going to check out the rest of this tower before I free you and the others. Where are the men?"

Betty answered, "They killed Arnold and took the other men away with them."

John went up the next flight of stairs to where the laser weapon was positioned. He almost gagged when he saw what was left of Arnold hanging by his wrists above one laser aperture in the tower. A moment later, he spotted Arnold's legs draped outside the aperture where those fell after being sliced off by the laser. He couldn't see Rone below until the centaur stepped out from under the overhang meant to prevent anyone from easily scaling the tower on the outside. Beside Arnold's body, he found one dead Lizzar with a bullet in his chest just above his protective armor plate. John muttered, "You shouldn't have slouched when I fired. I'll bet you didn't listen to your mother when you were young, either."

John briefly studied the equipment supporting the remaining laser weapon, took aim at some components, and fired two shots. There were some additional sparks that emanated for a few moments before they ceased with a few white puffs of smoke. He wondered just how much more he ought to destroy before concluding that enough was damaged. He went back downstairs to where the women were chained.

"Was there another Lizzar up there?" Betty asked.

"No, I only destroyed some equipment so they can't put these laser guns back into operation very easily. Any idea where the keys are?"

Betty said, "Over there on that hook."

John followed her gaze and went over to take the keys from the hook. He went around from one woman to the next, unlocking them from the chains. He was unlocking the last woman when he felt his pistol taken from his holster. He turned in time to see Mrs. Cobb put the barrel in her mouth and pull the trigger.

"Why in hell did she have to do that?" John asked as he reached for his pistol.

"The Lizzars raped us. She couldn't live with the thought of possibly being pregnant from one of them. We tried to tell her that she couldn't get pregnant from them since they're a different species, but she convinced herself that she was while we were chained up. I guess I should have warned you about that before you released her," Betty said.

John picked up his pistol and returned it to his holster. "Follow me. We're going to Conway now."

John led the way down the stairs. Outside in the sunshine, the women looked around for others, but saw only Rone.

"Did you already send the rest away?" Betty asked.

"John killed them all. Only he and I came here," Rone answered.

Betty said, "Really? That was very brave of you, John. You too, uh..."

"Rone, ma'am."

Betty said, "Yes, you too, Rone. I'll try to think of some way to thank you both at a later time."

"After we reach Conway. For now, Rone will bring up the rear and I'll lead. The rest of you stay in between us. If you want, you can pick up some of the swords and knives the Lizzars have on them along the way. Let's go!" John said.

"John, can we do this tomorrow to the other laser tower?" Rone asked.

John answered, "Sure, Rone! Why should these Lizzars have all the fun?"

Kitten hobbled over to John as he climbed over the last of the slope to stand upright once more on the town's native soil. She cried, "I was so scared that you were out there alone!"

"Nothing to be alarmed about, Kitten. If I didn't make it back, Victoria would take care of you. How's your foot?"

"I figure I'm going to limp the...You got Miss Childer...oh! You got the other women back!"

"Most of them. Go easy on them. The Lizzars decided to rape them all. Mrs. Cobb convinced herself that they got her pregnant, so she committed suicide. Arnold Smather is dead, too. The Lizzars killed him to force the other men to cooperate. For now, I presume they're still alive somewhere as Lizzar prisoners," John said.

"Then it's a good thing that we didn't go with the Mayor. He deserves what he gets," Kitten said.

"Maybe, but those others don't. Tomorrow, I'm going with Rone to knock out the other tower so we can get back and forth to the town without always dressing in gel. Then we'll plan a surprise for the Lizzars when they return to their towers to put the lasers back in operation. Right, Rone?"

Rone exclaimed, "Right! They'll have a real hot time!"

"Go around to all the vehicles and the gas station. Find out if the gas tanks still hold gas. Let me know if there's any gas left. We'll be collecting bottles and gas cans to sabotage the towers. With luck, we can force the Lizzars to commit their forces here against the town. They ought to know by now about what's available in here. I don't think I'm wrong in believing that they'll want it just as much as the centaurs and ourselves. Rone, send some of the fastest warriors back to Sub-commander Freya and advise her of the plans we discussed on the way back from the tower."

"Right, Captain Sunshine!" Rone laughingly answered.

"What plans?" Kitten asked.

John replied, "I'll tell everyone tonight. Right now, get busy on finding what we need. Jill, see to the women we brought back, please."

"John, we discovered that the swimming pool is still holding water. Do you want to hold out there? It's larger and has a supply of water to drink, though it's a bit stale," Jill asked.

John thought for a moment, then nodded.

John entered the gym which was a real shambles. The roof had caved in and it was only possible to approach the pool by a circuitous route. When he reached the pool, it wasn't in much better shape, but it was still holding thousands of gallons of water at one end. It wasn't enough to swim in any longer, but it was more than enough for them to survive on for days, possibly weeks. He considered the thought that the Lizzars might somehow manage to put the town under siege. The water would be well worth defending.

He climbed onto part of the caved in roof and discovered that it provided excellent coverage of a quarter of their total outer perimeter. Not only that, but it gave good coverage of the town as well. It would be a vantage point that they could ill afford not to have. John made his way back down, through the school, and out to the grocery store. Once there, John ordered, "Start sending plenty of food to the school. Find pots and pans to cook in. We'll make our stand there if it becomes necessary."

John looked at the assemblage sitting around him in the center of the town. Centaur and human alike were listening to him as he discussed the plans he and Rone created on the way back to Conway. "As I see it, the cat is out of the bag. The Lizzars now have one gun with a couple of bullets. I don't think that's anything to worry about. Most likely, they'll use those just to prove to themselves that it really is a better weapon than their spears and swords. We still hold the advantage in weapons and command of a strategic position. Tomorrow we'll have some people and centaurs working on grading one slope for easier access by ourselves. We'll put guard positions at the top to keep the Lizzars from using it as well. Rone sent some of the fastest centaurs to notify Sub-commander Frea of our plans. Hopefully, she'll show up tomorrow with the rest of our forces now that one laser tower is out of commission. With everyone working on making weapons, we should be able to arm everyone with something better than the Lizzars have. Even though we'll be working on making more weapons, we'll still be taking action. Rone and I will attack the other laser tower tomorrow. After that, we'll build hidden fortifications. We'll wait for the Lizzars to get so close that we can't miss before we blast them. After that, we'll hold the fort while Sub-commander Frea's warriors perform as cavalry to rout the Lizzars into headlong retreat. It's my hope that we'll humiliate them totally into committing more forces here so we can win a major battle."

One of the blind women asked, "What about us? We can't even see them, let alone fight!"

"You'll get your chance to fight. You might not see what damage you cause, but we'll act as your eyes to guide you. Until the fight begins, you'll do what you can to find things inside the collapsed stores where your lack of sight isn't a handicap since we haven't found any flashlights yet," John replied.

Another blind woman asked, "Haven't you thought of pushing one of the cars near and using its headlights?"

"No, because I'm stupid and overlooked the obvious. We're still going to need your help going through the rubble since those will only penetrate so far," John answered.

Kitten snuggled into John's arms. Nervously, she asked, "Would you be upset if I made love to a woman?"

Stunned momentarily, John replied, "Well, that's up to you whether you want to or not. It shouldn't matter whether I'm upset or not. Does it matter to you if I become upset?"

"Yes, because you agreed to care for me since I have a broken foot. I kind of figured that I'd have to give myself to you occasionally just to show that I'm thankful. I gave it some thought and concluded that it

was no different in Coach Larson's case, either. She also agreed to care for me and did. I let her feel of me and I liked it, but I don't want to upset you. If it really bothers you, I won't let her do me anymore and I won't do her."

"As far as Vic, er, Coach...Hell with it. As far as Victoria is concerned, what you decide is your business. Not mine or hers unless you choose to make it so. The only thing I can do is caution you that there might be others who won't understand the circumstances. Their misunderstanding could lead to another breakup of our group. We really can't afford that just yet, so be very discreet if you and Victoria do pleasure each other. I don't think you'll have to worry about doing it with me or any other man since most everyone has decided that it's okay between a man and a woman. Well, put it this way. I told everyone that I'm not enforcing the Mayor's law about not screwing so long as it's consensual. It hasn't exactly led to endless orgies or screwing in the street, but it has let everyone know that it's permitted. If nothing else, just about no one has anymore misconceptions about how it's done now. I'd have to give out a lot of passing grades to this group if we were on Earth now."

"Good, because I'd like you to do me again. May I start?"

"Okay, sure. Go ahead and start."

Kitten bent her head down and took hold of John with her lips. She sputtered and said, "Damn, I knew someday this was going to happen! I forgot to check for that damn gel! Give me a moment to wipe you off, John. Do you mind if I call you that instead of Coach?"

"I don't mind," John replied as she wiped him off before bending down to her task.

Victoria woke wondering what the commotion was about. She walked carefully among the teenagers looking for the cause without discovering anything amiss. After seeing that everyone was settling back down, she found a place to lie down and went back to sleep. She thought to herself that she was lucky that they weren't on Earth with mosquitoes, chiggers, and other pests since no one yet had anything to wear. She wondered if they would ever have anything to wear again since the centaurs who reported from the town to Frea had indicated that only two people had any clothes. No one else had found any to wear.

Despite that and her personal preferences, Victoria looked forward to being reunited with John at the town now that they had a plan to hit the Lizzars harder than they'd ever been hit before. Already, she knew that John had dealt them one severe blow and was planning more. As well, she knew that she was right to refuse to go along with the Mayor, now that he was a prisoner of the Lizzars and two of her friends were dead because of him.

John walked around after Kitten finished with him if only because he felt a need to stretch some sorely abused muscles. He could have laughed at himself as he first limped away from her after her tender ministrations. After all, she had demanded so much of him and he gave willingly until he couldn't give anymore.

He noticed another couple smoking cigarettes taken from the grocery and apparently happy with each other's performance. It was clear from the glare of the three moons shining on their sweaty bodies that they had enjoyed themselves and were capping it off with a smoke.

"Hi Coach! Nice night, huh?"

"Hi Coach!" the girl said.

John replied, "Yes, hello. It is a nice night. Enjoy it while you can. Good night."

"Care for a smoke? We've got more," the boy asked.

"No thanks. I don't smoke, though I appreciate the offer." John walked on by, leaving them to each other's company. He continued to walk around the town as he inspected it from the aspect of night.

The sentries observed him. One asked, "What are you doing?"

"I'm looking at how our defenses appear at night. If the Lizzars don't show up before tomorrow night, I'll inspect them from outside," John replied.

"Why?" asked the sentry.

"So I'll know the weak spots where the Lizzars might try to gain ground on us. I'm trying to view the town as if I was attacking instead of defending. If I picture it correctly, then I'll be able to defend it better," John answered.

"I could give you a quick ride around the town on the outside if you wish."

"No thanks. I'll have to view it from a standing level so I'll see it the way the Lizzars will. Or do they ever ride anything?"

"Sometimes they ride captured warriors."

"Oh? How many do they have that you know of?"

"Hundreds. We do our best to free them when we encounter them, but some refuse to be freed to keep others held captive from being harmed."

"They're going to have to learn that war requires sacrifice. You can't give into the enemy even if you're captured. Every blow struck against the enemy, no matter how small, helps to strike him down that much sooner. If we're lucky here, we'll strike a very large blow that could send the Lizzars reeling back in disarray," John said.

The sentry said, "I certainly hope so."

Chapter 8

John left early in the morning with Rone and two other centaurs to strike at the other laser tower. Each carried a rifle with a scope as they galloped toward it in hopes of eliminating the tower before it could harm any of the remaining force due to arrive.

They arrived within range just after it was activated against the cohort. They fired a dozen shots at it causing the Lizzars to aim at them before they destroyed it. John remounted Rone and quickly rode with the centaurs to the tower. As they approached, he took a bottle of gasoline from a gel-coated bag.

Rone took the bottle from John as they stopped. He lit it and galloped toward the tower before tossing it with all his weight behind the throw. The Molotov cocktail arced up into the aperture the laser fired from, where it burst into flames. Within two minutes, John and the three centaurs easily picked off several Lizzars fleeing the burning tower before returning to the town.

Victoria saw John and the centaurs approaching the town at nearly the same time as her group. It was an easier ride if only because they didn't have to keep their eyes closed most of the time nor run at full speed. For once, no one was lost in reaching the town. She hurried over to greet him as he walked up.

"Miss me?" John asked.

"Some, I'll admit. You're my only ally."

"You appear scared."

"I am. One of the boys was murdered last night because he was gay. He must have made a pass at someone. You warned that they might go that far out of fear and you were right. You're nearly always right. Now I'm more than glad to see you. I'd even give myself to you again to stay alive."

"Was he murdered that brutally?" John asked.

She nodded.

"Okay, if you want, we'll enhance your sexuality again tonight just before the sun finishes setting so we can be observed. Fine with you?"

"Sure, whatever it takes to stay alive. Are you going to do anything about the murder?"

John answered, "I'll ask about it, but I'm not going to take any action even if I find out who did it. Right now we need everyone alive for defense of the town. After we win, we can begin living by some simple laws. By then, everyone will be in debt to so many people for holding up their end of the fight that not many will be willing to murder anyone because of mere differences. They'll know by then that they have to depend on each other to survive regardless of their differences. Sub-commander Frea, how are you?"

"I'm fine. Is the laser tower actually destroyed?"

John answered, "It's totally destroyed. Rone threw a Molotov cocktail inside to finish the job and drive out the last Lizzars from the tower. They were sitting ducks against our rifles. How are your efforts going?"

"I've sent runners to Commander Haro to send whatever he can spare for this battle. Are you absolutely sure that it will be here?" Frea asked.

"I'm positive that there will be a major battle here. We have all the books and weapons. The Lizzars know of their existence now. They'll want them if only to keep them out of yours and our hands. They know that if they fail we'll slaughter them so they'll probably send all the troops they can spare. They might even weaken other defenses to make this attack."

"Can we win this battle?" Frea asked.

"It's not a matter of whether we can win. We don't have any choice. If we try to destroy everything so they can't get it, then we'll lose in the long run because they'll regain the technology edge. If we miss so

much as a single page of something critical, we'll lose even sooner. Our only choice is to stand and fight. We'll do our best to win," John answered.

"How are the preparations coming along?" Victoria asked.

"If we don't get attacked tonight, then we'll be about as ready as we can be when they show up. Now that you're here, you want to get some chlorine into what's left in the pool? It's been setting too long and probably needs some germs killed. Sub-commander Frea, have you instructed your warriors in the tactics I described to the warriors who reported to you?"

"I'll see to chlorinating the water," Victoria said.

Frea answered, "I have. I hope they'll really work."

"They've been used before. They're tested and true. You can rely on that," John said.

"Any problems with Kitten?" Victoria asked.

John smiled wickedly. "Actually, no. She's a real ball-buster but she's willing to go bi. Just be extra careful if you can't restrain yourself before everything settles."

"I'll just do you until that time. Maybe a three-way won't be minded too much by the others. Would you mind?"

John smiled again. "I wondered how long it would take you to think of that solution. I'll be up for it so long as I'm not excluded."

"I'll see to it that you get both of us, but we'll do the three-way with a bit more privacy than we'll have tonight since I need to be seen getting it from you. Okay?"

"Yes, that's fine by me."

"Is this something I shouldn't discuss with others?" Frea asked.

"We'd rather you didn't. We don't know all your people's sexual habits and I'm sure some of ours seem strange to you. We have some taboos among many of our people that some of us disregard very carefully," John answered.

"I could arrange for some sentries to give you privacy. Commander Haro instructed me to see that you get whatever you want if you could produce results. It's clear that you are producing results. We can't afford to lose you now. Even I can see that."

"Does that 'whatever John wants' include you as well?" Victoria asked.

Frea nodded.

"Much as I appreciate the offer, I don't think we're very compatible. Put it this way, I'd have a very difficult time trying to have you, so I don't think you or any of your people will have to concern yourselves about that. We'll stick to our people for our sexual needs. I can only assume that your people will do the same. Maybe later, when some of the taboos disappear, then we might see some experimentation," John said.

"Should you change your mind, we're not against giving of ourselves to win our freedom. I guess we don't have the same taboos," Frea said.

"I'll keep that in mind, Sub-commander Frea. I'm certainly not going to prohibit anyone from trying later on. It's just that I'm trying not to make the same mistakes the Mayor went through," he replied.

Victoria looked for the canister containing the chlorine for the pool. She didn't like the job before on Earth. The chlorine dust almost always got in her nose even though she tried to shield herself from it. Instead, there wasn't a hint of chlorine odor as she found where the canister used to be. She went to another pile of what should have been hypochlorinate. Victoria hesitantly took a short whiff from it without detecting any chlorine odor.

John looked over the town square where almost everyone was gathered to hear him, save for a few centaurs and people on guard. Even so, the guards were still close enough that they could hear John as he spoke. "If we're not attacked tonight, we'll almost certainly see action tomorrow. Unless you're given instructions, no one is to leave their position. This is no time for John Wayne heroics. The only way we're going to win is by working as a team. Centaurs will have the task of acting as cavalry and message runners between town positions. Earth people will be responsible for manning the rooftops and bunkers we built. If any of the Lizzars get past the centaurs, then it's our responsibility to finish them off.

"Use arrows at close range within the town so we can recover those for re-use. Use knives, spears, clubs, and bricks to keep them from scaling the sides of the town and any buildings. If enough of the Lizzars gather into a group, such as five or six, then use a Molotov cocktail on them. Remember, we don't have an unlimited supply of bullets, arrows, or cocktails. Use those only when necessary.

"Sharpshooters, be on the lookout for Lizzar leaders. You're authorized to pick them off if you can spot them within your range. Try not to take them at the limit of your range or the Lizzar leaders will get smart and direct their troops from farther back. Let them get so close in that they don't suspect how far away you can reach them.

"Everyone remember where the traps are. Don't move around as I said before. Let the Lizzars be the ones to find out where the traps are. Don't skirt one while in their sight and give it away before it can do any good.

"Remember, you all have four or more individuals to every position. Take turns on guard tonight. Keep the talking down and try not to give your position away with any fires. We should all be quite used to the temperatures by now. We found a thermometer the other day and found out that it only got down to sixty last night. That's not cold. If you get cold, you should all know by now that snuggling works better than a fire to keep warm. Just remember that snuggling doesn't mean you have the right to take advantage of the other person. Should you negotiate or consent to something more to keep warm, try not to give your positions away with cigarettes afterwards. Remember that someone has to be watching for the enemy and not watching you if you do more than just snuggle.

"Move into your positions as soon as it gets dark. Don't give the enemy the chance to see where the positions are while it's still light. We know they have primitive telescopes because they use those for their laser sights. Good luck to all of you."

John walked away from the congregated group with Victoria holding onto his arm.

"We don't have any chlorine. Everything was useless," Victoria said.

"That might explain what caused the synthetics to dissolve. It started at the pool and worked outward.

Remember?"

"You could be right. It must have combined with something in that fog to create whatever dissolved the synthetics. Had it remained a gas, it would have killed us," she replied.

"Any chances we could use what remains to make poison gas bombs?" John asked.

"I don't think we have any. John, I'm ready for you to take me. The sun is nearly at the horizon," she replied.

"You sure you want it this openly public?" he asked as they stopped walking.

She answered, "I think I better," as she dropped to her knees.

Victoria whispered, "You actually weren't half-bad for a man."

"Thanks, I guess," he replied.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean that as a put down. It was meant as a compliment. Really. I guess with a little more practice, I could learn how to enjoy a man since I might not have much choice otherwise."

"I'm willing to help you practice."

"I don't doubt that. You already told me before that I have a body men want, not that I didn't know that. It was what drove me away from men in the first place. If you want to know about that, I'll tell you."

"It sounds to me like you need someone to talk with. I'll listen."

Victoria glanced around, then whispered, "I was raped as a teenager. It made me deathly afraid of men. When I first saw you the day we made our agreement, I thought for a moment you were going to rape both of us since we couldn't have said a word about it under the circumstances."

"I saw the fear in your eyes. It wasn't difficult for me to imagine what might have happened to you before," he said quietly.

"But you didn't. You don't know how often I prayed that you'd never be replaced as head coach, after that. Especially after you sent the first girl to me. You made it possible for me to fit in then and I prayed even harder that you'd never be replaced. I didn't mind sending you girls after that. It wasn't difficult for me to see why they chose you, either. Did you know that the girls back on Earth referred to you as a Greek Adonis?"

"I already had one girl call me that here."

"You were...Actually, you still are a heartthrob with most of them. Haven't you noticed how many of them have gazed longingly at you since the day our clothes were taken away?"

"Truthfully, no. I didn't know I was being watched that closely," he replied.

"I dare say you could have half of them now just by walking up and asking point blank if they want to fool around. You wouldn't even have to be nice about it, they're that enthralled by you. I didn't know until the day you caught me in a compromising position that you swam naked in the pool after hours. After that day, I was a lot more careful. It was really stupid of me to be caught the first time I did it at our school. You wouldn't believe how many girls I later caught sneaking around the gym to get a peek at you while

you were swimming. They were practically drooling over you. I even caught one girl passing around a photo of you in the water that one of them took. I confiscated that photo, but there was no telling how many more copies of it were circulating around or how many girls saw it," Victoria said.

"Really? I didn't know any of that."

"That was partly why I prayed a lot. Had one of those photos made it to the office, I figured you'd be gone by the end of the day. I kept my eyes open for those so I could intercept them."

"It could have been sticky, to say the least. Thanks for watching out for me."

"You're welcome, but I have to admit it was in my own best interests to keep you there. It's for my own self-interests that I can't go back to Earth, even if it becomes possible. Neither can you."

"I don't follow that one, Victoria."

"You have to remember we've been gone over two months. I think everyone knew we were missing on the first day, what with a thirty-foot deep hole in the ground where a quarter of the town once stood. Within a week, the remaining authorities probably were busy closing up our homes or inventorying them. Even if someone only entered my home to check for pets, it would have been immediately obvious to them about my sexual preferences. I wouldn't have a job left if I returned there and no career elsewhere, either. They would have notified any other schools where I tried to get work. They might even have gotten to you through one of the kids who saw me. They'd have asked around, found one or two, and found out that they were given a choice between us. Just about any other disaster could have been handled except the one that happened."

"That was sloppy. I find it difficult to believe that another emergency wouldn't have resulted in the same mess. You could have been in a car accident or something. Then the cops would have checked your home anyway."

"I listed you to be notified in the event of an emergency. You have enough common sense. I figured you'd check my home without me having to tell you ahead of time. But you're right. I should have been more careful," Victoria said.

"Yes, you should have been more careful," John agreed.

"I once thought about getting a strongbox, but I kept putting it off. At least, I could have put the pictures in it so no one would have found them easily."

"You took pictures?"

"Sorry, yes. It was partly to protect myself with afterwards. I knew none of the boys would talk knowing that I had pictures of them in compromising positions or conditions."

"Conditions?" asked John.

"Yes, I made them wear short see-through dresses over the locked chastity belts while they did chores in the house. Plus I made them shave off all their pubic hair and give it to me in an envelope with a love letter."

"Now I understand why some of the boys did that. I thought it was some sexual fad at first when I first noticed it in the showers. Did you know that some of them kept it shaved off after that?"

"No, I didn't. I guess I sure changed their lives."

"We found plenty of razors. I know that you shave your pubic hair. I'll see to it that you get some of them since not too many of us shave anymore."

"Thanks. Are you keeping your beard?" she asked.

"For now since we don't have enough water to spare for shaving. Anyway, I figure I have a head start on getting used to having a beard since someday we'll run out of razors. Is my beard a problem?"

"Not really. It's just that you look more like an Adonis without the beard. However, you're right about the razors not lasting forever. Still, unless we get back some of the other men, you and Ben are the only men with beards. Except for us women, you really don't have anyone to share the blades with."

"Maybe not, but I figure I can keep my beard trimmed with scissors. Anyway, once we get past the upcoming battle or battles, then we can settle back and revert to specializing once more. Probably someone will become a barber or hairdresser. We might even figure out how to make our own razors."

The sentry looked at John as he checked his pistol before walking down the incline with it and a crowbar in his hands. Two similarly armed centaurs followed John on his inspection of the town's outer slope. While John walked around looking at the slope in the darkness, the centaurs kept watch on the plain.

Above, on the almost level ground of the town, Ben and two more centaurs walked along keeping pace so no one in a defensive position would mistake John and the centaurs for Lizzars. As well, Ben and the additional centaurs could rush down if any Lizzars did show up in numbers too great for John's patrol to handle. Except for where the school was at, it was possible for Ben and his centaurs to always remain in sight and near enough to be of assistance.

John reached the back of the gym area where the shattered pool spilled out and peered in the darkness at the slight crack where a touch of light shone through. He had suspected as much before. Now he knew there was a serious chink in the armor that beckoned to the enemy. He continued on past the school to the graded path on the slope where he began his inspection. He and the two centaurs were halfway up when the alarm went out over the town.

"Lizzars! Lizzars!"

John and the centaurs ran up the path to the town. He hollered once, "Everyone keep quiet and stay alert!" before hurrying to his post on top of the gym while the two centaurs reported to their own positions. As John ran, he kept a quiet count as he gauged the amount of time passing. Reaching his post, John kept counting until he was sure two minutes went by. He hollered out, "Now!"

Below in the town square, several boys and centaurs raised a downed flagpole after lighting a flare and tying it to the top. The flare cast an eerie glow over the town. More importantly, it reflected in the eyes of the Lizzars approaching the town.

John stared out at the mass of eyes reflecting their burning hatred in the night. He didn't bother trying to count them as the Lizzars approached. He only hoped that the flare burned long enough for them to reach the slope so he could inflict maximum casualties upon them.

"Jill, go down into the pool area. Tell them that I could see a light shining through from outside. It might not be too late to block it from being seen. Make sure they're ready to fight off any Lizzars who try to dig through since the opening's too narrow for them right now."

"Right, Coach!" she answered.

"Then hurry your ass back here so I won't run out of messengers," he said as she left.

"Right, Coach!"

John avoided looking at the flare as he scanned the perimeter. The Lizzars appeared to be approaching at a uniform speed, but without any discernible formation. So far, their behavior matched what he had learned from the centaurs. Then again, with their armor-like backs and real armor plates to protect their bellies, he could understand why they didn't evolve any advanced formations. Just one Lizzar was formidable enough in hand-to-hand combat. He could already attest to that. Still, they could be beaten. John could also attest to that.

He watched the Lizzars get to only twenty yards away from the slopes before they charged in mass with hissing growls and yells meant to unnerve an enemy. John knew that some of his people were probably pissing involuntarily at hearing that while realizing that there was no turning back anymore. They were in for a fight, whether their hearts were in it or not. He hoped they were.

Around the town, Molotov cocktails flew out from positions to splatter and burn among the Lizzars attempting to scale the slopes. The night became less black as nearly two dozen fires raged at the base of the slopes. Dozens of Lizzars, their bodies on fire, ran helplessly in panic in the darkness before falling as they succumbed to the flames and smoke. Their burning bodies lit up enough of the plain for John to give his next signal.

"Centaur! Attack!" he yelled at the top of his lungs.

The centaurs lacked not in courage as they thundered down the inclined slope onto the plain. They easily bowled over the few Lizzars who'd found the easy slope. Then the centaurs clubbed them with weapons as they galloped by. Within moments, the centaurs were circling the town on the plain with the burning Lizzars to light their way. They boldly streaked in, struck, and slipped back away from the slower Lizzars as they reduced the odds against themselves and the town. After one pass around the town, the centaurs slipped back out of the fight, taking themselves back up the graded path to rest and see to any wounds they'd incurred.

John glanced around at the Lizzars as they milled about in confusion. Hitting them from the town and then from the plain had stalled their attack. As well, he was certain that some of their leaders were dead. It took them a minute, perhaps two, before they resumed their attempts to scale the slopes.

By the light of the dying fires, he could see bricks and rocks being thrown down upon the Lizzars with great effect. The teenagers had listened to some of his instructions, taking care to throw only at the closest Lizzars so that their falling bodies shoved others back down. The Lizzars began to tire from their efforts and had yet to kill anyone. John hoped that the battle could be won without losing any of his people or centaurs. It would boost their confidence just enough to last through more battles as John was sure this wasn't to be the last. There were just too few Lizzars attacking. Relying on information from the centaurs, he knew the Lizzars had many more troops available than were attacking.

The fires went out on the plain while the flare continued to burn toward the rope that held it in place. The Lizzars continued the assault inside the shadows of the slope only to have their eyes give them away as they reached the top. From hidden positions, teenagers with bricks, pipes, crowbars, and broken steel beams struck with a ferocity that John wasn't sure most of them possessed. Where there weren't any bunkers, patrolling centaurs shoved their spears into the surprised faces of Lizzars who then tumbled down backwards, either wounded or dead, to knock down other Lizzars to the plain.

Lizzars howled in pain and hissed their threats in growls that constantly echoed in the night air as the minutes ticked by. The flare went out, making it harder to spot the Lizzars. Only the sounds of climbing Lizzars remained to give them away. The assault lessened, but didn't stop. Not until the three moons began to rise. Then the Lizzars retreated at last as they no longer had total darkness to veil their attack.

"Cease fire!" John yelled from the rooftop.

A shout of victory went up from around the town as the teenagers and centaurs alike recognized they had won the first skirmish.

John shouted, "Casualty reports! Send your runners! Check your ammo! See to any wounded!"

"You want me down there to collect the information?" Jill asked.

"You bet your sweet ass, I do. We're not making them run up here after they fought off those Lizzars," John answered.

Jill took off down the slanted, broken roof into the gym, and out to the front of the school where she met and collected the information. A few minutes later, she ran back up to where John kept watch on the Lizzars who'd gathered well out of spear throwing range.

"How did we do? Any casualties?" John asked.

Jill said tearfully, "We lost one boy. He lost his balance and fell down the slope."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Any wounded?" John replied.

"Three wounded. Two girls, one boy."

"We didn't do too badly then. How bad are their wounds? Are they being treated?"

"The boy lost a hand and both girls lost a foot."

"Okay, you know their positions? Send someone there and have them sent to the pool."

Jill said, "Post Three wants to know if they can recover the body now."

John replied, "I'll ask Frea to send some warriors out for him. Remind Post Three not to fire on the centaurs. Also have the flagpole lowered so we can put our flag on it. Then they're to raise it back up. I'm going to walk around and talk with our people. They need to know how well they kicked ass tonight. Kitten, if the Lizzars begin to approach again, call out loud. I'll return as quickly as possible."

"Right, John."

"Who goes there?"

"John. How's it going in here?"

"Pretty good, sir. The Lizzars got smart after awhile and began throwing bricks back at us. You were right about throwing only at those we could see near the top. We didn't have to expose ourselves too much. We scrambled around a little to collect the bricks they threw back and used those again on them. How did the rest of the town do?"

"We lost one boy. He fell down the slope. We had another boy and two girls who were wounded. That's all we know of. Just keep your heads down for now, rest up, and we'll all see each other in the morning," John replied.

"John, do you think they'll attack again before morning?"

John answered, "They've been known to attack after the moons come up. Right now, I think they're trying to figure out what went wrong. We kicked their asses good, and I imagine they're not very happy campers as a result. I guess it depends on how fast they can come up with a plan of attack as to whether they attack again before morning."

"Thank you, John, for being honest with us. His Honor would have given us a line. At least you're honest enough to say you don't know."

"That's precisely what I'm saying. I don't know and I think they don't know yet, either," John said.

John walked away quietly until he reached another defensive position. He talked some with the boy who'd lost a hand and convinced him that he could still fight after his wounds were cared for where the supplies were being kept. Reluctantly, the boy left and John surveyed the position in hopes of discovering how it was that the Lizzars got so close.

The light from the three moons was in full force and he could see the blood the boy had lost. As well, he could see the bodies of Lizzars below on the plain. Then he spotted something that wasn't visible before because of the dirt and dust that hid it.

John ordered, "Get a hacksaw over here. Have that pipe cut away and pulled up here. Once that's cut loose, you shouldn't have so many of them reaching you so easily."

Two of the defending teenagers stared at the crushed pipe that was hidden before and uncovered by the climbing Lizzars who'd used it like a ladder. One said, "I'll go get a hacksaw right now!" and left.

John left as soon as they finished cutting away the pipe. He soon reached another position and talked some more. Each time, he usually met teenagers, all of whom he knew, who were proud of their accomplishment and just as sad as he was over losing one of their own when they learned of the one death.

He reached the position where the boy had died. The boy's body was already being carried back by centaurs to the town square. John asked, "How did it happen? Did I plan this position wrong?"

"No sir. He got carried away and couldn't see how close he was to the edge when he fell."

"Do we need more flares?" John asked.

"No sir, he was blind already. I mean, he really couldn't see that he moved too close to the edge."

"Oh...I hadn't thought of that happening," John said weakly.

"Coach, it wasn't your fault. We tried to keep him inside the bunker. He just wouldn't listen to us."

"I think he wanted to die, Coach."

"Yeah, Coach. He was talking about going out swinging. Don't blame yourself. Even we couldn't stop him."

"Maybe not, but I should have thought of that beforehand. Before I lose anyone else, I'm going to

rethink some of my decisions. We can't afford to lose anyone. Everyone here is important, even if they're blind or lame. Everyone! I can't think of a single reason to exclude anyone from being important to us. Not one single reason and I want everyone to know that," John replied.

"We told him that, Coach."

"Okay, you all did your best. What's happened can't be changed. If we have time in the morning, we'll hold a brief memorial over his grave. It's a hell of a thing that the only promise I can make is that some of us will be buried in dirt from mother Earth. When we win, I hope we can recover Steve's and the other bodies to bury them here as well. I think they'd like knowing that," John said.

From some distance behind him, the flagpole clanged as it was raised with a flag recovered from the hardware store. Whether it was appropriate or not, it looked good in the moonlight as it fluttered and waved its bold defiance at an army of Lizzars in the distance as similar flags had done for over two centuries before other enemies.

Kitten yelled, "Here they come again!"

John muttered, "Just like the Alamo."

Chapter 9

John reached the roof just as two shots rang out. He looked out over the plain and spotted the sudden commotion in the Lizzar ranks, for lack of a better term to think of them as. In those two locations, the attack faltered while the rest of the Lizzars continued onward. As he watched the attack unfold, he realized those were the first two shots fired all night. He could barely imagine the willpower those snipers had used earlier in holding their fire until they were sure they had a Lizzar leader in their sights.

As he watched, it was clear that the Lizzars were using four times as many troops as before. Though he didn't like it, he knew there would be more casualties. Nor had he been able to change anything about his troop dispositions. Regardless, the Lizzars advanced slowly giving the sharpshooters the opportunity to spot and shoot another Lizzar leader. The Lizzars around him faltered while the rest moved on. Then the Lizzars were close enough to charge and ran toward the slopes screaming at the top of their lungs.

As before, a dozen Molotov cocktails arced out from bunkers to burst below among the Lizzars on the plain. Fires leaped out after the splattered gasoline exploded, tossing Lizzars about within the mob. Lizzars leaped away from the flames. Other Lizzars, on fire, ran about seeking relief from the flames and smoke that consumed them. All the while, a hailstorm of bricks rained upon the Lizzars as the defenders lobbed them up to fall among the attackers while they stood shoulder to shoulder and nearly defenseless. Screams from the dying and injured Lizzars filled the air as more bricks, thrown like baseballs, smashed into Lizzar heads from the defenders thirty feet above. The plain became muddied with blood while bodies tripped the unwary and the hurried.

More Lizzars circled toward the graded path where centaurs stood guard. As more and more Lizzars reached it, the centaurs had no choice but to fall back. Lizzars called for more of their number to take

advantage of the discovered weakness while the centaurs called for their own reinforcements who hurried over to back their comrades. Up and down the slope, the fighting raged.

Frea hollered from the town square, "Is it time yet, John?"

He glanced around the town, then replied, "Yes! Pull back your warriors! Use the shotgun!"

Frea galloped over to the top of the grade while shouting for her warriors to withdraw. As soon as she had a clear range, she opened up with both barrels at near point blank range. The Lizzars fell back in panic, many of them bleeding in places where they thought they couldn't be hurt. She moved back as her warriors retook the path to stand against any further attempts by the Lizzars in gaining access to the town. She reloaded the double-barrel shotgun first before she looked up at John with a smile.

"You didn't tell me this kicked so hard!"

John replied, "I told you to only fire one barrel at a time! Then it won't kick so hard! Are you okay?"

"Yes! This is a great weapon!" she replied.

He hollered back, "Use it in good health!"

"They're falling back! They're retreating!"

John saw that the Lizzars were indeed retreating. He shouted, "Cease fire! Save your ammunition! Send your runners with casualty reports! See to your wounded!"

Jill ran down the roof to the gym and out to the front of the school to wait for the runners. Minutes later, she ran back and shouted, "No one killed! Five wounded!"

"Not quite. Frea sustained some losses among her warriors. We didn't get off without getting hurt. See to it that food and water are taken around to everyone. I'm going back out to check on our positions. Kitten, keep watch. You did well last time," John said with fatigue in his voice.

"Does that mean I earned a night with you?" Kitten asked.

"You don't have to earn that, but yes, I'll sleep with you soon."

John looked at the positions while trying hard not to let on that even he was appalled by the amount of blood around them. Though he knew some of it was from the teenagers, he steadied himself by remembering that most of it was from the Lizzars. As he moved around quickly, he gave new instructions.

"They're not going to retreat so easily the next time. You can see that they're using the dead bodies to climb easier. When I give the order, everyone is to fall back to the square. We'll give them something new to think about."

"Coach, are we going to use the bows?"

"As soon as we have them up here we will. Just remember to fall back together. Don't let the Lizzars break through your ranks. Make sure you know your new positions to take and be careful of the traps," John replied.

John took his place on the roof and signaled to Frea. She waved her warriors forward as she led half of them down the path onto the plain. As her force rounded the town and came in sight of the gathering Lizzars, her force spread out into a line formation and headed at a full charge toward the enemy. Thundering hooves were the only sound coming from them as they crossed the distance like a bygone cavalry charge.

Seemingly at the last moment, they threw spears as they halted just out of Lizzar throwing range. Their spears found many targets before the centaurs followed up their attack with one more weapon. Frea and three other centaurs aimed their shotguns and fired.

Blam! Blam!

Before the startled Lizzars could react, the cohort turned and withdrew at full gallop. Two minutes later, Frea led her force back up the path into the town. She hollered up at John, "Is that how you wanted it done?"

"You did it perfect! Did you see any stunned looks on their faces?"

"Yes! I saw fear on many of them for the first time ever!"

"Good! Now they know that we're not limited to defending. I don't want them to think that they're totally in control of when we'll fight!"

The sun came up and then the moons sank over the horizon. John slipped on his sunglasses as he maintained his vigil on the roof. As he looked out over the town, he could see some people and centaurs sleeping while others remained alert. He yawned and almost jumped out of his skin when he felt someone's hand on his shoulder. He turned and saw that it was Victoria.

"Time for me to relieve you. You need some rest. Take Kitten or Jill or whoever, get happy for awhile, and then get some sleep. I'll handle things until it gets going again," she said.

Kitten smiled and stood up from where she sat to take John's hand and lead him inside the gym.

"See, I'm not the only one who thinks you need some happiness and sleep. Treat him good, Kitten," Victoria said.

"I will, Coach," Kitten replied.

"Okay, okay. I'll go quietly. Be sure that Frea sends out another attack in about an hour."

"I'll see to it," Victoria said.

"Are you all right?" John asked.

"More than all right. Best orgasm ever! Thank you, John," Kitten replied as she gazed down upon John's face.

"Lie beside me and we'll get some sleep."

Kitten stood up, moved to one side, and sat down beside John for a moment before lying back with her head cradled in one of his arms. She reached over and grasped his other arm and lifted his hand to her breasts. Though she had put forth all the effort, he was soon asleep while she nestled beside him and wondered if he'd agree to have her again.

She smiled to think what her parents might think about her living as naked as when she came into the world and having sex in full public view, let alone while still only sixteen. Kitten remembered it was only a few months earlier that she was grounded a full week for watching an R-rated movie at a friend's home and the movie only featured partial nudity. She knew her parents would be mortified to learn that she had since had sex with two different men and a woman. Worse yet for her parents, Kitten knew she thoroughly liked it and wanted more.

Ignoring what she felt her parents might think, she placed her hands on John's and her pubic areas. Without disturbing John, she fondled him while she masturbated herself for the first time using techniques she had learned from Coach Larson.

Frea's attack an hour later with half her force was as successful as the earlier assault. Her force hit a different sector of the surrounding Lizzars with a charge that launched spears beyond the distance the Lizzars could retaliate from. Then she and several centaurs blasted away at several Lizzars who appeared to be leaders before withdrawing back to the town.

While the Lizzars were kept off balance and away from the town by the centaurs' assault, bricks, swords, and spears were recovered from the slopes around the town to use once more against the Lizzars. As well, the bodies of five slain centaurs were brought back up the slope they'd died defending. Victoria wasn't sure what the centaur burial rites were, but she was willing to abide by just about whatever they wished in order to honor their bravery.

John woke from his rest. He could see that people and centaurs were busy everywhere gathering weapons, distributing them, improving positions, and discussing ways to make things better. He quickly sought out Victoria and Sub-commander Frea.

"Do you practice memorial rites for your dead, Frea?" Victoria asked.

"Not very often lately. Too many of our dead are in the laser zones where they can't be recovered. We speak to their memories, but have been unable to do anymore than that," Frea answered.

"We're not in that situation here. Would you care to join me in burying the dead?" John asked.

"Bury? I'm sorry, but we don't bury our dead as you do. I'm aware of the few you buried before," Frea replied.

"What do you do with your dead?" John asked.

"When one of us dies and there are children, we take away the hair and hide from the body to give to the young. The body is then given to the water. If there are no children, then the entire body is given to the water," Frea answered.

"Is there some significance in giving the bodies to the water?" Victoria asked.

"I'm more interested in the other part," John said.

Freya replied, "Our lives come from the water that breaks when we're born. We give the bodies to the greater water for a greater rebirth when God deems it time. The other part? Oh! We give the young those parts to remember their parents by. The portions may then be used to hold valuables or solutions to problems as our parents once provided when alive."

"The pouches you carry gel and food in were once your parents?" Victoria exclaimed.

"It is the final gift a parent can provide to the young. No warrior or breeder would ever dare take such a gift away from another as it holds not only value, but memories of the family," Freya said.

"I guess the most we can do for your fallen warriors is to say a few kind words about their friendship, deeds, and loyalty. Is that permitted?" Victoria asked.

"Certainly. It's never wrong to remember the good, no matter what station was held in life. Nor is it wrong to forgive the bad while remembering the good, no matter how little it was. We will appreciate your kind words, Victoria," Freya answered.

"Then we better get on with it. After the brief ceremony, we'll let you move your fallen warriors back to where they fell or somewhere else if you feel it more appropriate," John said.

"You refer to your other reason for burial. Am I correct?" Freya asked.

John nodded.

"I can respect that since you have proven your other words to hold truth. I will see that the fallen are moved from the town for what you call hygienic reasons," Freya said.

John concluded his short speech in soft tones. "Let us not forget that they died that we might live in freedom. They fought to enjoy that same freedom and we must never take it away from ourselves nor let it be forcibly taken away by others. Remember that freedom is not what others say it is, but what you make of it while living your life. Exercise your freedom. Never let it be narrowed nor defined as anything less than what it should be for you. We are in the unique position where we may throw away all the old standards and create new ones that embrace everyone equally, giving each individual the right to live life in the way each chooses. That is what they fought for. That is what we fight for. We can honor their sacrifice by accepting nothing less than that for everyone. We'll now have a moment of silence for our fallen to show our respect to them."

Freya dabbed her eyes, then said, "John, you put words of meaning to our feelings. You expressed our inner thoughts perfectly. Thank you."

After Freya walked away, Victoria asked, "Did you mean everything you said about living our lives as we choose?"

John answered, "If you're asking whether I'm endorsing your lifestyle, then the answer is that I'm practicing politics. None of us can survive without each other. We're either going to be tolerant of some practices or we'll revert back to how it was on Earth. If that happens, we won't last long on this world."

"I think I see where you're going with what you're saying. I guess that means I have to be careful until you succeed in creating a new society."

"It does appear that creating a new society is my only choice if we're going to live to see old age after the fighting is done. Except for the adults among us, we have great material to mold a new society with. There's even a chance that I can change the thinking of most of the adults here enough to make it work."

"What about the seven men the Lizzars are holding?" Victoria asked.

"I'm sorry, but I've already written them off. I'd be surprised if more than half of them are still alive now. Even if they are and we knew where they were, we don't have the military strength to rescue them."

"In that case, you better consider some other problems. We have a surplus of women now."

"I don't see anything new to solve. If everyone is allowed to live as they choose, then I shouldn't have to make or enforce any laws concerning how many wives or husbands are to be permitted. That will be up to the individuals to decide."

"A brave new world?" she asked.

"Perhaps."

"Maybe we ought to rename the town to Eden," Victoria said.

"I don't dare since then someone would bring up the bible and divide us into different camps once more. So far, we're all in the same boat. We can't let anything divide us, no matter how well-intentioned. It's going to be difficult enough after the war ends when we begin dealing with our centaur friends on a new level without finding ourselves in disarray. I see lots of problems for us ahead and some of those are best solved now."

"Such as?" Victoria asked.

"I don't know where all our clothes went that the centaurs had us take off and leave behind. Considering that they're all naked, we might be better off dealing with them in a similar state of undress. That's not going to settle very well with some people if enough clothes are found and become available."

"True enough. That probably will come up later since there are some clothes still left," Victoria said.

John looked puzzled, then said, "Oh yes, the wedding dress. Well, maybe we can compromise later and just use the veils or something like that."

"I once pictured myself wearing a full wedding dress with veil, train, all the trimmings. It was something I dreamed of until..."

"I know what you're getting at. There's no need to go into that unless you want to," he said.

"I think I need to get more of it out of my system. Sorry, but I don't think our new society will work and I'm preparing for the worst. Are you sure you don't mind listening?"

"I don't mind. There's not much else I can do since everything else is being taken care of," John replied.

"Thanks, John. You've been the nicest thing that happened to me since I was raped, aside from becoming a Lesbian. I'm fairly certain that I haven't told you how it happened. I was sixteen, very sheltered, and naive. I thought then that every boy was taught to be a gentleman. The only boys I knew generally behaved like gentlemen. I accepted a date with one boy I thought nothing evil of. We went out, had dinner at a fast food restaurant, went to an early movie, and then drove through a state park on the

way home.

"He asked me if I wanted to take a stroll by the lake. Since I wasn't anywhere near the curfew limit my parents imposed on my dates, I saw no reason not to take a stroll. Neither of us was in a hurry to return home, not that I had anything against being there. It was a warm night, so we walked a bit before stopping to sit on a rock where we took off our shoes and socks to dangle our feet in the water.

"Conrad and I both noticed how warm the water was. That was when he suggested that we could go swimming after he asked if I knew how to swim. Of course, I replied that I knew how to swim, but that I didn't have a swimsuit with me. That was when he said he was willing to give me his underwear to use while he just skinny dipped. He seemed so gentlemanly about it and all. Because of that, I tried to be so equal by telling him I was just as brave as he was to go skinny dipping. It didn't take us long to make it a competition about who could undress the fastest.

"At first, there wasn't anything at all wrong with what we were doing. He walked into the water and checked the bottom before reaching his hand out to me. I took his hand and entered the water. For a few minutes, we just splashed around. Then the play got rougher and we slipped and fell together in the water. Feeling my body against his was all it took to trigger him into becoming an animal.

"He wanted me and told me so. I refused and started for the shore. He tackled me just as I was about out of the water. I fell on the beach and tried to resist him. He was stronger than me, took my hands by the wrists, and held them tightly with just one hand so I couldn't fight back. He forced my legs apart using his other hand and his knees, felt of my vagina for what seemed an eternity, and then shoved his penis in it. Then he raped me while fondling my breasts with his free hand.

"I thought it was over when he came, but he wasn't done by any means. After he withdrew from me, he straddled me while on his knees and crawled up to my face. His ass was on my breasts and his free hand was fondling my vagina once more. He ordered me to suck him until he was aroused. Then I felt his free hand grab me by my pubic hair while he warned me that if I bit him, he'd rip my snatch apart. He gave me a slight tug that really hurt just to get his message across. When he put his penis to my lips, I obeyed him. I gave him what he wanted because he had me by the short hairs as he reminded me several times. I sucked and sucked past the point of my jaws aching until I caused him to have another erection. That was when he finally let me stop so that he could move back down and rape me a second time.

"When he finished with me a second time, I wasn't sure what would happen next. For awhile, I thought he was going to make me suck him again. Instead, he stood up from me, lifted me by my wrists, and shoved me into the water. He ordered me to clean myself up. While I did that, he swam around a bit and talked to me about how big my tits were and how tight my snatch was. He told me I ought to be glad that he was gentle and didn't beat me with his fists. Then he threatened me not to tell or he'd go after my younger sister.

"Just thinking of him hurting my sister petrified me. There was no way I wanted my sister to go through what I had just then been through. Then he reminded me that he had a brother in her classes at school. It wasn't difficult for me to imagine his brother being like him then, so I figured that it wouldn't do any good getting just Conrad put away in jail. I cried and begged him not to touch her, swearing that I wouldn't tell. He made me prove that I wasn't lying by giving him another blow job and letting him take me a third time. I agreed just to spare her from being raped.

"He walked out of the water and stood in front of me. He ordered me to get on my knees. I did everything he ordered of me. After we finished, he stood up and didn't bother assisting me to my feet after ordering me to clean up again. When I reached the water, he kicked me in the ass so that I fell face first into the water. He said that was a reminder about how easy it would be for him or his brother to take

my sister if I backed out on my promise.

"Even then, it wasn't over. He ordered me to strut around in front of him while our bodies dried. I had to dance about and jiggle my knockers, as he called them. He ordered me to bump and grind while I danced. Once more, I did everything he ordered just to prove that I would keep my promise so my sister would be safe. Even then, he wasn't through with me.

"Conrad took my clothes and ordered me to crawl to the car. I had to ride around sitting naked in the front seat while he was dressed because he locked my clothes in the trunk. He used me as his trophy for a few hours, driving me around to show to his friends, ordering me to do various acts in front of them. When I tried to object, he threatened to kick me out naked at my house and take my sister later, so I kept my mouth shut except when he ordered it open. He almost did kick me out naked at my house, too. He stopped a block from my house, took my clothes from the trunk, ordered me out, then drove away and tossed my clothes in the street. I had to run out under the streetlights to retrieve my clothes and put them on so I wouldn't upset my parents anymore than they would be since I was late getting home. They grounded me for a month, but I didn't mind that. After all, it meant that I couldn't go out on another date and be raped.

"I kept my word about not telling and vowed that I'd never be as weak as I was that night. That was when I changed my direction in life, began working out with weights, took martial arts classes, participated in sports, and stayed away from anyone with a penis, except my father.

"That's why I humiliated the boys who said they'd do anything to pass. It's why I insisted that they wear a locked chastity belt. It's why I kept my pubic hair shaved off and ordered them to shave theirs. I was getting back at Conrad.

"You're a good listener, John. You didn't interrupt to criticize me for being stupid or try to sympathize about how I was mistreated. I appreciate you letting me get this out of my system. Can we go screw again? I need to feel good. I need to give something in exchange for what you just gave me."

John nodded.

"Thanks, John. I promise you that I'm not trying to get back at Conrad when I sleep with you. I'm not even doing it this time to make myself look normal. I just want to do something nice and I don't have anything except my snatch to offer you. I appreciate that you're accepting my offer. I won't make you regret it. Do you want privacy? If not, I'll do it right here."

John appeared unsure for a moment. Before he could answer, Victoria dropped to her knees in front of him.

"Okay, let's get that generator dug out so we can find out if it works or not. If not, we'll take what we need from it before we bust it up with a sledge hammer to make ammo," Betty Haskin said.

"Hey, Miss Haskin, how come you don't fool around?"

"It's not really any of your business," she replied.

"Don't you need a man, Miss Haskin? You know, to protect you?"

"I don't see any men here. Just boys with puny crotches. Now get digging so you can exercise some of the other muscles in your body that matter and maybe grow up to be men."

John felt as though he was dragging his ass back onto the roof after taking Victoria in sight of the whole town. He still wasn't sure how she managed to arouse him twice more and get something out of him both times. Perhaps it was what she said to him about the other girls she hoped he would enjoy, reminding him that most of the girls would love to have him at least once. Perhaps it was because she rubbed his hands on her breasts and shaved pubic area to stimulate him. Perhaps it was because she wanted him to punish her for being so cruel to boys before, though it wasn't without reason. Perhaps it was because he was caught up in her own outpouring of emotions and eager to help her gain some release from the guilt she felt. He only knew that he went through an overload of pleasure that lasted over an hour.

He glanced around the plain at the gathering Lizzars. As he did, he wondered if the town could really withstand an all-out massive assault. He knew the centaur warriors and people were ready and waiting with everything they could scrounge from within the town to use as a weapon. Still, he wondered if there was really a chance to survive.

As he wondered, he thought once more of the thorough screwing Victoria gave him. He paused in his thoughts to guess about whether she did that because she thought they were all going to die. John quickly rejected that as not in the game plan. He'd never coached a team for anything but winning. A losing attitude was intolerable to him. He was sure that he wasn't going to change that now.

"How can you go so long? Steve couldn't keep up with you and he was good. You've taken my best and Coach Larson's too and still look ready to go another time," Kitten asked.

"What? I'm sorry, but I wasn't listening," John replied.

Kitten smiled, then said, "I was wondering how you managed to screw for so long. Even Steve couldn't keep up with you."

"I haven't given any thought to that. I never did compare myself to anyone else as far as that goes."

"Well, you're good. I hope you'll have me again," Kitten said.

"I'm sure we can get together again. I enjoyed you very much," John replied.

"That's good. I enjoyed you as well. You gave me a super orgasm this morning. I'll take all of those that I can get. I'll even gladly experiment however you want just for your pleasure and mine."

Noticing Kitten's newly shaved pubic area, John asked, "You're willing to experiment?"

"I sure am! What do you have in mind?" she answered.

"How about a threesome?" John asked.

"You and me and what? Another guy, another gal, or a centaur?" she asked.

"I was thinking about another woman. Are you interested?"

"Yes, I think I am," she answered.

"Okay, then I'll arrange it. Not today, though. Probably tomorrow."

"That's fine with me. I don't have any dates for tomorrow."

"Am I the other woman?" Jill asked unexpectedly.

"Actually, I had someone else ask me already. However, I think I can fit you into another threesome after that. Is that okay with you, Jill?" John replied.

"Sure. Something tells me that I should shave," Jill answered.

"Your choice," John said.

"It'd be nicer if you did, too," Jill said.

"My beard bothers you that much?" asked John.

Jill laughed, then said, "Not your beard. I was referring to your pubic hair. It feels awful getting one caught in your teeth. Think about it. If you want, I'll shave you."

"I think the Lizzars are moving now, Coach," Kitten said.

John glanced out at the Lizzars, then shouted, "Lizzars approaching! Lizzars approaching!"

The Lizzars advanced as a mob. They charged as the front of the mob reached within thirty yards of the slope. By the time they reached it, Molotov cocktails were raining down upon them. Packed in worse than before, the gasoline set more of them afire than in the other attacks. Panic-stricken and crazed by the fire and smoke, the burning Lizzars forced their way through the mob, throwing the rest into retreat as they kept away from the flames.

Without anymore fighting, the Lizzars retreated to lick their wounds and rethink their problem. From the town, the people and centaurs cheered themselves over their easy victory.

"When do you think they'll attack next?" Jill asked.

John answered, "When it gets dark. They're going to think this out a lot more carefully now. They didn't expect the results to be worse with more troops attacking us. Since we apparently don't have any casualties, I'd like you to run over to the gas station and find out how Ben is doing. It would be nice if he can get some cars in operation. Seems to me we had enough of them to get more than one fixed."

"Sure thing, Coach. I'm looking forward to our threesome. Uh, are we all doing each of us?"

John answered, "That's part of the fun and adventure of a threesome."

"Then you better shave for sure. Likely as not, I'm going to be extra horny by then. I'll want to see if I can better my performance by taking you extra deep," Jill said.

"Only if it makes you enjoy it more. Doing it that way won't help the Coach at all since he won't feel most of what you do. With someone shorter than the Coach, that would be okay," Kitten said.

"Is that true, Coach?" Jill asked.

John answered, "Yes, now get your ass over to the gas station."

Victoria ambled up the roof as the sun settled onto the horizon. "Are they about ready to attack?"

"I'm not sure. I think we took out some important leaders today. They've been slow to react since then. You all rested up?" John replied.

"Absolutely and I feel great. Any changes in plans for us?"

"Some, but nothing to be concerned about. Ben's got tires on two of the good cars from the school parking lot. He found the hand pump for the underground fuel tanks so we should have plenty of gas for awhile. I guess the tanks were designed to withstand quakes. That's all I can figure since they're still intact. The centaurs have been grading the slope we use so a car can go up and down it. We'll put boards in place just before we're ready to send them out. Ben's still got modifications to make to the cars, though. I don't figure on using them until tomorrow or tomorrow night."

"Anything else?" Victoria asked.

"Yes, Kitten is willing to have a threesome tomorrow evening with us. Do you still want one?"

"Really? Yes, of course, I do!" Victoria exclaimed.

"Okay, then it's on for tomorrow at sundown."

The sun dropped below the horizon. Slowly, darkness took over from twilight. The flagpole lay ready to be raised with a flare to give some light to the night. Across the town, everyone was silent so that the Lizzars could be heard if they moved closer. Their armor rattled noticeably enough to give them away in the dark.

John hoped the Lizzars didn't figure that out. If they did and removed their armor, it might make it possible for them to reach the top of the slope before anyone knew they were attacking. He felt around in the dark for his runner and brushed against her breast.

She gasped briefly then quickly clasped his hand to her before feeling along his arm to his body while stepping closer toward him. Her hand wandered down his body to his groin and felt of him for just a moment before he heard her whisper, "Thank god, it's you, Coach! You almost scared me white!"

John whispered in her ear, "Go down into the pool and see if there's any progress on plugging that gap."

She released his hand and moved away into the darkness.

A few minutes later, John felt a tender hand brush against him in the pitch black darkness. The feminine hand explored him once more before a body drew up against him.

"It's me, Amandalee. It's almost finished, but they don't know how long it will take for the cement to dry."

He leaned toward her and whispered, "Good, just stand nearby. Sorry I scared you earlier."

"No trouble. That gave me a good excuse to feel you up. I always did want a reason to try that. God, but you get big when you're handled. At least that makes you easy to identify in the dark."

"You could have felt for my beard," he whispered.

She replied, "That's not as much fun," before stepping quietly aside.

John held his breath for a moment as he heard what sounded like clanking sounds moving closer. He listened carefully before letting his breath out slowly and quietly in the black night. He turned his head, trying to get the best angle to hear.

"Lizzars! Lizzars!" he hollered.

The flare was struck in the town square. Its burning tip lit up the town square with the only light around. The girls shifted the flagpole upwards and steadied it until it was locked in place. Then they hurried off to their assigned positions.

Almost immediately as soon as the flare was in place, the eyes of the Lizzars reflected in the night as they advanced at a walk. A solid wall of burning eyes surrounded the town as they closed in for battle. They advanced on the town without knowing that new defenses were in place.

John watched the Lizzars advance as he glanced around in every direction, his view blocked only once by Amandalee's beautiful black body. He sighed at seeing her so close and delectable as he refocused his mind on what would take place soon and resumed his observation.

The Lizzars continued to approach at their steady pace, unaware that they would soon be in range of the defender's new weapons. John did his best to estimate the distance. He watched as they came closer and closer until at last, John shouted, "Slingshots! Fire!"

From defensive positions all around the town, the near-silent hum of slingshots broke the stillness while bolts and screws whistled through the air at the oncoming horde of Lizzars. Cries of pain and clanks on metal armor announced the hits as the defenders launched each wave of missiles. Still, the Lizzars pressed forward to attack.

John occasionally saw a pair of Lizzar eyes falter and drop only to be replaced by another Lizzar as they continued to push forward. He watched for them to charge.

At last, the Lizzars reached the last twenty yards and broke into their charge. John shouted, "Molotovs! Now!"

Carefully hoarded bottles of gasoline were lit and thrown out into the mass of Lizzars. Some exploded while others shattered and splattered flaming gas about. Burning Lizzars panicked while others pressed on, tearing at the dirt in their efforts to climb the slope. They climbed while others died from smoke and flames. Above them the town was quiet in stark contrast as the defenders waited to see the eyes of the first Lizzars to reach the top.

Without any need for more orders, the defenders fired their slingshots at point blank range at the heads of the Lizzars first to reach the top. Other defenders stabbed out with spears at the eyes that reflected back the flare's light. Over and over again, the process was repeated.

Between the defensive posts, the centaurs kept up a constant patrol, thwarting the Lizzars lucky enough not to climb up directly against a defensive post. When some fortunate Lizzars gained the high ground, centaurs dashed over to engage them with spears. The centaurs drove the Lizzars backwards to fall down the slopes.

The attack continued until the three moons began to rise. Then the Lizzars retreated, leaving their dead and wounded behind. Upon seeing the Lizzars turning, John called out, "Cease fire! Send your status

reports! See to your wounded!"

"I'm going down to get the reports, Coach!" Amandalee said.

He watched as the runners left their posts and ran toward the school to meet with Amandalee. Her ebony black body stood out in contrast to them while they gave her their status reports. He could see from her reaction that the news wasn't good. When she left them to bring back the reports, tear tracks briefly reflected the moonlight off her cheeks.

She approached him quietly on the roof, her tears still flowing. John asked, "How bad was it?"

Her voice cracking, she said, "We lost five and have seven wounded. Every post had someone hurt or killed. Are we going to survive at all? It doesn't seem possible now."

John placed a comforting arm around her shoulder to console her as he answered softly, "Yes, we'll survive. We still haven't used up all our tricks. If you want to cry, then go ahead and do so. No one's going to think any less of you for feeling grief over losing our friends."

She buried her head on his shoulder and hugged him tightly as she went ahead and cried.

Through the rest of the night, John kept watch from the roof. When the morning arrived, the Lizzars had yet to launch another attack. Victoria took over while he went down into the gym to sleep as people changed shifts all over the town. He took over a soft spot provided by some rags and padding covered by a towel, all of which were recovered from the debris or someone's wall locker. He laid down and stared up in surprise to see Amandalee standing beside him.

"Coach, may I sleep with you? I don't want to die as a fifteen-year old virgin."

"Are there many girls still saving themselves for anyone in particular?" John asked.

Amandalee answered, "Maybe a dozen who'd like to have you as their first. Some of the others are already decided on who they want. A few of my friends have already given themselves to each other. A lot of the girls are afraid to do anything yet except for a blow job. I think most of us girls have done that now since we can't get pregnant that way."

"Have any of the girls considered other ways?" John asked.

"Sure, some of us give hand jobs, too. I almost forgot that."

"No, I mean for yourselves. It's good that you're giving the men pleasure, but what of yourselves? Are you doing anything to give yourselves pleasure?"

"Some of the girls masturbate. Is that what you mean?" Amandalee replied.

"Partly. I've known women to sometimes feel each other up to stimulate pleasure and wondered if anyone was doing that as well. If they are, I don't mind. We're trying not to make silly rules around here like we had on Earth."

"I think I saw something like that. I wasn't sure what was going on and I thought I should keep quiet about it. Is that going to be okay to do?"

John answered, "Since I presume that most of the women don't want to get pregnant, it only seems fair for it to be all right since it sounds like all the women have been seeing to the men in some manner. Pleasure isn't just for the men alone to enjoy."

"Uh, I guess you're right. Should I tell this to others?"

"There's no need to talk it around deliberately. We don't want to turn this into an issue. Just don't let it disturb you if anyone or yourself decides to seek pleasure that way. If someone complains, tell them to see me."

"Can I have you again sometime? I'd really like to do you again now that I know what to expect," Amandalee asked.

"Sure, we can love each other again," he answered.

Victoria woke John and asked, "Ready to go on duty?"

"Sure, how did we do during the day?" he asked.

"They didn't attack us anymore. You didn't sleep through any attacks. They're standing out there way out of range like before. Near as we can tell, they've got more troops, but they haven't tried to attack at all."

"I'm sure we didn't hurt them any worse this morning than before. We drove them off, but I wasn't aware that their casualties were any higher. I wonder what they're up to."

"I was hoping that you'd know."

"Well, I'll take a look. Maybe I'll spot something. If not, then we'll just use the time to improve our defenses."

"Are we still on for this evening?" Victoria asked.

"Unless we're fighting them off, I don't see why not," John answered.

John glanced around as he reached the roof. Fresh runners were standing by to carry orders for him if and when needed. He noticed that Cynthia was still wearing her wedding dress. As far as he knew, only she and Ben had anything to wear. What towels had been found in gym lockers were being used for bedding since everyone had chosen to have a soft place to sleep rather than something to wrap around them. He still remembered how energetically the students given the tasks of breaking off the remaining locks had been. They were sweaty and tired when they finished, but the smiles on their faces said they were pleased with their results.

"Cynthia, over here, please!" John said.

Cynthia skipped over to him while hiking her dress so she wouldn't trip.

"Are you going to be able to run with that on?" he asked.

"Do you want me to take it off?" she asked.

"I think it would be safer and better if you do."

"Why would it be better?" she asked.

"Because you won't be causing anyone else to think you're better than they are. Everyone else except Ben is going without in order to have bedding. Plus, I'm concerned that you'll trip when running in that dress. If you want to claim it as yours, I really couldn't care less. My suggestion, though, is to take it off and put it away somewhere."

"Do I really appear like I'm trying to be better than everyone else?" she asked.

John nodded.

Cynthia lifted up the dress and slipped it off her body. She folded it carefully over one arm and carried it away. As she walked away, John said, "I also want you to go to the gas station and find out what progress Ben has to report."

Moments later, he watched her running toward the gas station while the dress fluttered from her arm where she carried it. Minutes later, when she returned at a run, she didn't have the dress with her anymore. She soon reached the rooftop and went directly to John.

"Ben's going to go nude, too, Coach. He says that he has one car ready and should have two more ready by sunset. Anything else you want me to find out?"

"Yes, get down to where Miss Haskin is working at the jail. Find out if she has anything good to report concerning the generator and wiring project. I'd like to have lights tonight before the Lizzars attack."

Ben drove the first car slowly over the broken asphalt while several boys walked in front and beat with sledge hammers at some of the jagged road chunks sticking up to keep them from hitting the undercarriage. Behind him, two more cars drove slowly. Around them, the centaurs stared in amazement at the machines they were told could move without pushing or pulling. It hadn't seemed possible because the centaurs hadn't seen any cars moving on their own until a few moments ago.

John looked down from his command position at the cars with their roofs cut open so the passenger could stand and fire a weapon in any direction. The side windows were rolled down and filled with sheet metal so that the Lizzars couldn't break them or stab inside with their swords. The front and rear windows were covered with more metal pierced with slots for viewing out.

Ben stopped beside the school and stepped out naked as Cynthia had said he would be. He hollered, "Well, I might be able to fix some more up, but they'll take a lot more work than these did."

John replied, "Then you better get to fixing them. You know more about them than anyone else. I don't want any of your mechanics driving them on missions, either. We can't risk any of you out there."

"I've had more than my fill of fighting. Fixing cars is fine with me for now. Besides, I'm a married man. Just try not to break any of these before we get some more ready. I don't have many parts on hand," Ben said.

"Runner! Where's my runner?" John hollered.

"Here Coach!" Jill said.

"Go tell our drivers and gunners to get their asses up and load their cars. They're going out as soon as it gets dark."

"Right, Coach!" Jill exclaimed.

The three boys and three girls stepped up to their cars. Each carried cardboard boxes filled with their weapons. The girls took the drivers' seats while the boys climbed into the back and positioned their boxes. Each girl wore a belt taken from the jail with a sidearm holstered in it. The boys carried rifles that they tied up with a safety rope so they couldn't drop them outside the car.

John called down from the roof, "Ready, Dennis?"

"Just about, Coach!" the boy from the lead car hollered back.

"Do you all remember the rules of engagement we discussed?" John asked.

The boys and girls all nodded.

John shouted, "Sub-commander Frea, are your warriors ready?"

Freya shouted, "We're ready when they are! Will this really scare the Lizzars?"

"I certainly hope so! We'll know for sure by counting how many Lizzar turds they leave behind!" John replied.

Dennis shouted, "Okay to play the stereo, Coach?"

John shouted, "Only while the car is running. Make sure you shut it off otherwise to save the battery. What are you going to play?"

Dennis shouted, "I found a copy of Ride of the Valkyries!"

John smiled as he remembered how the tune went. He shouted down, "Don't play it until you turn on the headlights and break away from Freya's covering force! You'll have more effect that way!"

"Gotcha! We're ready then!" Dennis replied.

The three girls started the engines while the boys sat down in the back seats. Freya led half her force down the graded slope dragging boards behind them so the cars wouldn't bog down in the loose dirt. The three cars slipped inside the formation, causing it to bulge slightly in places. Then they drove down the slope onto the plain.

Nearly everyone was awake and at a position in order to watch, regardless of which defensive shift they were on. Those who weren't on perimeter guard duty moved about within the town to high points of elevation to get the best view.

The formation of centaurs with three cars hidden by their bodies and the sound of their hooves moved around to strike the Lizzars who caught only a glimpse of them in the last rays of twilight.

Dennis stood up and shouted, "Freya, we're ready!"

Freya shouted, "Break left and right!"

The columns of centaurs split into two directions away from the cars, leaving them alone in the night.

Dennis said, "Turn on the tape. Keep the lights off for a few more moments. Turn it up loud."

The girl stuffed earplugs into her ears, then shoved the tape into the player and twisted the volume knob to maximum.

From the town, the cars couldn't be seen in the darkness. Only the first sounds of the music rumbling through the night air gave any indication where the dull, black-painted cars were at until a few seconds later the headlights of the first car came on. A few moments later, the second car was positioned beside it and switched its lights on. Then mere moments later, the third car was on the other side and switched its lights on. The three cars raced at high speed over the nearly level plain as they circled the town once without doing anything to the enemy who shielded their eyes against the blinding glare of the headlights on high beam.

Dennis bent down and lit the rag-fuse of his Molotov cocktail when his car pulled back into the lead as the cars became a column once more. Behind him, the other boys did the same. As the cars drove closer to the enemy, he stood up, drew back his arm, and threw.

Three bottles arced out from the cars at the Lizzars who never saw them coming for shielding their eyes from the lights. The Molotov cocktails fell among the mass of Lizzars. One exploded. The other two shattered and scattered fuel among them. Three fires raged among the Lizzars while the cars drove on and the boys ducked back inside for another cocktail. Within another minute, three more cocktails arced out into the mass of surrounding Lizzars, starting three more fires. Where the fires burned, the Lizzars panicked and ran about trying to extinguish themselves before the smoke and fire killed them.

One Lizzar ran out in front of the lead car and bounced off its reinforced front bumper as it slammed into him with bone breaking force. His body was thrown back into the mass of Lizzars, bowling down a dozen of them. The cars sped onward from the hit and run assault as the boys bent down for another cocktail.

Six more Molotov cocktails were thrown before the Lizzars finally got the message and retreated in confusion and panic. Upon seeing the Lizzars run, the cars drove around the town once more before heading for the graded slope guarded by half of Frea's force. Once back inside the town with the boards pulled back up the slope to prevent easy Lizzar access, Frea looked at the cars with envy.

Dennis asked, "You like our cars?"

She cried out, "I wish I could ride in one. Never have I seen anything move so fast. Not even the lizard cats or the frilled mountain dogs can run that fast. I can't even run that fast."

John hollered down, "Well done! You put them on the defensive and made them run!"

"Thanks, Coach!" Dennis replied.

"Okay, get some rest now. Make sure you don't leave any Molotov's inside where they can heat up!"

"Right, Coach! Hey, Coach? Got a question!" Dennis answered.

John asked, "What's your question?"

"Can you marry some of us? You conduct funerals. I figure you can conduct a wedding. Cynthia and Ben said we could borrow their clothes to make it formal."

"You don't want to just exchange vows in the sight of God?" John asked.

"We'd like it to be more formal. Kind of official that we're not going to cheat on each other," Dennis answered.

"I don't know how, but I'll conduct a wedding ceremony if that's what you want!"

"Thanks, Coach! We'd like to get married tomorrow. Well, she does. I wanted to do it today," Dennis said.

"Why the delay?" asked John.

"She wants to be sure everything fits."

Chapter 10

John looked at the couple, Gail in the borrowed wedding gown, her hair done up by someone and her body as clean as she could get it with a damp rag. Dennis wore simple trousers and a white shirt found in the grocery store. Though they were both barefoot, it was easy to tell they didn't mind that so much as wanting to have something that at least had the appearance of formality.

One of the girls held a disposable camera found on a shelf in the grocery. She took pictures though no one had any idea how they'd get those developed. If nothing else, it simply made the atmosphere more real, more reminiscent of what they'd lost when their portion of Conway was stolen from Earth by the Lizzars.

For a ring, Dennis found one made of plastic in a gumball machine. Even so, it wouldn't fit on anyone's finger. The most it could do was slip up onto the fingernail and stop short of the first knuckle. Again, it was only something they were still doing in keeping with tradition.

"Well, we found a Bible, but I don't know enough of it to really know what might be appropriate for this occasion, so this part of the ceremony is going to be an informal prelude to their vows," John said.

"In a way, the event that overtook our lives and brought us here could simply be a new beginning for mankind just as this wedding is a new beginning for Dennis and Gail. Rather than lament on what we've lost, I think we should all look forward to better times. Certainly Dennis and Gail see that there can be better times ahead as they are pledging their love to each other in an exclusive contract of matrimony."

"Since we have no real laws governing us, I can't tell any of you how to handle your relationships or marriages, whether you'll decide to have more than one husband or wife or simply one of each like Dennis and Gail. Seeing as this is how they want their marriage to be, I can only admonish everyone to respect their wishes and not attempt to tear them apart or interfere. This said, I guess it's time we moved on to the vows which Dennis and Gail will speak in the sight of God and their friends."

John watched Dennis and Gail open a soda can together in place of cutting a cake that they didn't have. They were already naked once more as someone suggested that the clothes be kept clean so

someone else could use those later. The hot soda fizzed out in a sticky spray that splattered on them and some of the guests. To the merriment of all, Dennis and Gail alternately licked each other where the soda landed on them, regardless of where it went.

By the time John left, Dennis and Gail were already screwing each other on the grass. John didn't blame them for starting right where they were as there weren't any places in the town that were truly private. As well, he was grateful that the Lizzars didn't attack and spoil the wedding. He hoped that their lives would truly be better as he suggested they would in the ceremony.

Sundown approached and John looked out over the plain. The Lizzars were keeping their distance after the previous night's attack. He knew they were up to something but until they acted, he hadn't a clue as to what it might be.

Kitten came over to him and asked, "Are you going to allow me to shave you or not?"

"From what I've heard so far, if you nick me, there's about a dozen women ready to tear your head off. Go ahead and shave me," John said.

He stood there quietly as she gently used the safety razor to remove every pubic hair she could find from below his balls to halfway to his navel. Where her fingers touched him after the hair was gone felt strange and erotic while immediately arousing him.

Kitten said, "I'm done now. Are you ready for our threesome with Jill?"

John said breathlessly, "God, am I ever! You may have just unleashed more upon yourselves than you expected. I'm feeling more horny than ever before. I can't wait to take you and Jill."

Kitten gave him her hand and led him from the roof into the gym where Jill waited for them. Jill was just finishing shaving herself.

Jill said, "God, am I horny now!"

Kitten laughed, then said, "That's exactly how I felt when I shaved myself there for the first time. John's extra horny, too. Hell, he's still standing up hard!"

John reached the roof as his member became almost limp again. The lingering twilight was still strong enough to reveal that he wasn't fully back to normal after finishing with Kitten and Jill. Amandalee noticed him as he walked over to where he normally stood and went over beside him.

"You look like you're still horny."

"I am," John admitted.

Amandalee asked, "May I do you here?"

"Sure, go ahead if you want," he answered.

The three cars drove out under the cover of darkness and their escort of centaurs. They soon broke away from the cohort and lit up their lights and the music. Around the town they drove before heading

out toward the Lizzar line. As their lights shone on one portion, a strange object came into sight.

Dennis yelled, "Shit! It's got to be what the centaurs warned us about! Get us out of here, Gail! Give your signals!"

Because of her ear plugs, Gail didn't react. Dennis reached over the front seat and ejected the tape from the stereo player. He caught Gail's attention and shouted, "Portable laser! Get us out of here! Give the signals!"

Gail pressed on the car horn, blasting the horn several times before turning sharply away to return to the town. As soon as she changed directions, the other two cars followed.

Sub-commander Frea looked at the three cars returning to the ramp on the slope with questions in her mind. She wondered why none of the cars had attacked the Lizzars before returning.

Dennis stood up and yelled, "Portable laser coming!"

Instantly she understood. She knew at last why the Lizzars hadn't attacked for over a day. They were waiting on their super weapon to even the odds. She let the cars drive up into the town and then followed with her force which drew the ramp up into the town after them so it wouldn't be easy for the Lizzars to get in.

Dennis stopped in front of the school and shouted, "Portable laser coming, Coach!"

"Okay! Now we know what they're up to! Everyone get under cover and get yourselves covered with laser gel! Cars too! Amandalee! Get around to all our snipers! Tell them I want that damned laser knocked out if it gets inside their range! Remind them to wear their sunglasses!" John said.

Amandalee finished applying her laser gel before running down the slope of the wrecked gym roof, into the gym, and out to where the snipers were. John reached for the gel himself only to feel someone glop it onto him and start spreading it about.

"Thanks, whoever's applying gel on me," John said.

"Anytime, Coach," he heard Angela say.

"Have you covered yourself yet, Angela?" John asked.

"Don't worry about me," she said.

"Like hell, I won't. You make sure you get covered with laser gel since you're one of my runners. When you finish covering yourself, get around to everyone who's off duty and make sure they all know not to poke their heads out without it."

"Okay, Coach. Anything else? Ohhh! You shaved your pubic hair! I like the feel of this a lot!" Angela said.

"Well, as much as I appreciate you fondling me because it feels good, there isn't any time for that now. So, please hurry up."

Cynthia came running up the slope shouting, "Where's John?"

"Over here," John replied.

Cynthia slowed down and said, "Ben's got an idea for dealing with the portable laser."

"Well, what's his idea?" John asked.

"Ben found lots of aluminum foil in the grocery the other day. He wants to cover one of the cars and send it out," she said.

"Let me think on that a moment. Are you covered in gel yet? If not, get busy coating yourself while I think on this."

John felt Angela's hands leave him at last. As far as he could tell, he was covered from the top of his head to the top of his feet. He considered the risks of covering a car and expecting the aluminum foil to do the job. He had already ordered them covered with laser gel.

John finally said, "No, but go find Miss Haskin after you tell Ben that I said no. Have her put her crew to work on building some mirrors using the foil. If we can reflect it back at them, we might cause some real damage and make them afraid to ever use it again."

Cynthia replied, "Okay, I'll tell Ben what you said. And Miss Haskin."

The laser beam shot out in the pitch blackness probing for the town's defenders. In a few places, it set debris on fire. As the beam swept about, people and centaurs alike dropped below the beam or moved behind brick walls that were still standing. Several rifle shots rang out without hitting the portable laser weapon. The only satisfaction the snipers had was that they heard some cries of pain from the Lizzars that they did hit in the darkness.

Miss Haskin and her crew gathered lumber and aluminum foil hurriedly. They built a simple box frame and stretched the foil over it, tacking it down carefully so it wasn't ripped. As soon as one frame was ready, it was carried off to be used while they went to work on constructing more.

John hoped the foil idea worked. If it didn't, he could tell from the distance the laser was being used that he'd have to send snipers out in cars to get within rifle range. As well, he sensed that the Lizzars were probably approaching the town across the plain now that the Lizzars had support for their assault. A couple more shots were fired into the night without any better luck.

Then the first foil panel went up. The beam swept toward it. For a moment, it was reflected back, then it burnt through the foil.

Someone shouted, "The foil's no good! We need a mirror! Find a mirror!"

John was glad he had vetoed the foil on the car idea. It could have meant the deaths of two people out on the plain. He shouted, "Check the locker rooms for mirrors!"

From nearby, Amandalee said, "I'll check!"

Minutes passed, then Amandalee called out, "We have a mirror! We found one that wasn't broken!"

John shouted, "Take it to where the beam is hitting! Don't bring it up here! And be careful!"

"Shit!" he heard someone holler as a pole began burning.

The light permitted him to follow Amandalee's progress as she carried the mirror across the town to where the laser was sweeping across and causing damage. He expected her to give the mirror to one of

the boys but she reached where the beam was hitting and stood her ground. As it swept onto her, she held the mirror out and intercepted the beam. It reflected up into the sky.

"Aim it down!" someone shouted.

Amandalee jiggled the mirror as she tried to send the beam back at the Lizzars while walking to keep the beam in the mirror. Two boys ran over to her. One grabbed her and said, "I'll guide you! Just keep the beam in the mirror!"

John watched anxiously as she kept trying her best to focus the beam back on the Lizzars. Then, incredibly, she managed to get it down lower and sweep it back across the front of the oncoming Lizzars. Screams filled the air as dozens of Lizzars, blinded and hurt by the laser beam, stopped their assault.

"Do it again!" someone shouted.

"Give 'em hell, Amandalee!"

Amandalee, energized by the cheering around her steadied herself to the task as she walked with the beam and sent it again into the Lizzars. More screams filled the air as more Lizzars were stopped dead.

Then Amandalee managed to send the beam right back almost on the same path from which it was coming at her. There was a momentary burst of energy released where it impacted before the laser beam died.

The people and centaurs cheered loudly in appreciation of Amandalee's efforts. John shouted, "Quiet! Quiet! We're still under attack!" without being heard. He finally drew his pistol and fired a round off into the air in the direction of the Lizzars so that the bullet wouldn't be a complete waste.

John shouted, "Quiet! We're still under attack!" as the cheering subsided.

Then the town was quiet once more.

John hollered, "Pass it along! Put the mirror in a safe place!"

The message was passed along to Amandalee. Then the town became deathly quiet once more. The burning pole lit up enough of the area that the defenders were soon able to see the glowing eyes of the approaching Lizzars. Silently, the defenders waited for the Lizzars to get close enough for them to fight.

Then the stillness of the night was broken again as the generator chugged into life. Lights strung up around the town using recovered electrical wire from buildings and from the hardware store sprang into life, illuminating the area ten times brighter. The Lizzars halted suddenly before they got in range of the town. While the Lizzars stood their ground, their leaders conferred with each other over the sudden change in circumstances. Then, unexpectedly, the Lizzars turned and withdrew.

John made no effort to halt the cheering defenders. He, himself, even shouted, "Go home, Lizzars! We've got you beat!"

By sunrise, John received two more requests to conduct wedding ceremonies from couples who were encouraged by their last victory into believing they could really win. He officiated at their ceremonies as fast as they could get the clothes on, say their vows, and undress to hand over the wedding duds to the next couple. When he left them in the town square where he had officiated, both couples were going at it with all the gusto they could manage. He sensed then that a new tradition was forming of consummating

the wedding as soon as possible, even if it meant doing it in front of the guests.

When he woke up in the afternoon, much of his laser gel was already flaking off his body. Nearby, Amandalee lay sleeping. As he gazed at her, he noticed that she was wounded and hadn't said a word about losing two fingers from her left hand while countering the portable laser. Had her wounds been more serious, he would have put her on bed rest or light duties. He sat up and looked around.

Not far from him, Miss Childer was caring for the wounded. She was going from one wounded individual to another, seeing to their bandages and cleaning their wounds. John knew their supplies wouldn't last forever, but at least they did have medical supplies which were recovered from the jail and grocery store. Considering the fighting they were trapped in, there was no sense in saving those for a rainy day. Everyone would simply have to hope that they could someday find alternatives.

He stood up and walked over to Miss Childer.

"Hi John," she said softly.

"Good afternoon. Have you seen Amandalee yet?"

"No, is she sick?" asked Miss Childer.

"She lost two fingers last night and apparently didn't report being wounded. Please see what you can do for her when she wakes up."

"Oh, the poor Dear! I'll see to her right now!"

"I think sleep is best for now since she hasn't said anything yet. At the rate we're going, I'm going to have to have someone design some awards for wounds suffered in battle just to recognize sacrifice. Do you think that's a good idea?"

"Not really. I haven't heard anyone ask for recognition. If anything, I hear most of them asking if you're all right. I get that particularly from those who are brought in here unconscious and don't know if we're the last survivors in hiding or what. They really care about you."

"I care about them. It tears me up seeing any of them get hurt or die. Hopefully we can end this fighting soon so we don't lose anymore of them," John replied.

"Lizzars! Lizzars!" Victoria shouted.

She watched the small group of Lizzars approaching the town on foot. It took her a moment before she sighted in on them with a rifle scope to see what they were up to. She stared at the white flag they carried and then noticed that there was a man in chains walking among them. Not only that, but he was dressed.

"Michelle! Go get John! I need his advice on this!" Victoria said.

John hurried to the roof with Michelle. He accepted the rifle scope from Victoria and gazed out at the approaching envoys. "Well, it looks like they want to talk. We'll let them come up to the slope and talk down to them. Keep everyone else alert."

"Are you going to talk to them?" Victoria asked.

"Would you rather do the talking?" he asked.

"No, I'm hoping that you will. You're the leader here. No one disputes that in the least, especially not after how well you've done so far," she answered.

"Then I guess I'll do the talking. Looks like they'll be getting near enough pretty soon. I better get on over to the edge. You direct the defense if anything happens."

"Take care of yourself, John."

John stared down at the group of Lizzars. One carried what turned out to be a white tee-shirt on the end of a spear. John looked at the man for any sign of treachery or warning. It took him a moment to recognize Mayor Grean because of the shaggy beard covering much of his face.

One Lizzar said, "Come down here! Now!"

"You're not in any position to give orders. If you want to talk, then say what you have to say. You're interrupting my TV program," John replied.

The same Lizzar said, "I am Chief of Commanders. I order you to surrender now."

"I can't do that. If I do, I'll miss the commercials," John said.

The Lizzar turned to the Mayor and said, "Tell him to surrender. Use your power to order him!"

"As your mayor, I order you to surrender the town to the Lizzars."

John looked at Mayor Grean, then said, "You're not the mayor any longer. Enough of the kids turned 18 after you left and voted you out. I voted for you even though I thought you were dead. Sorry, but you lost, so you can't order anyone here to surrender, Mr. Grean."

The Lizzar looked at Mayor Grean, then drew his sword and beheaded him.

"Now look what you went and did. You wasted a perfectly good mayor and broke the truce. Sniper, take out the fucking Lizzar who broke the truce!"

One shot echoed in the air. The Lizzar Chief of Commanders fell to the ground with a bullet in his forehead.

"Next time you ass wipes come under a flag of truce, you better honor it completely. Now get the hell out of here before I have you all shot for breaking a truce!"

The remaining two Lizzars blinked a couple of times, then turned and walked away.

"You're not getting out of here fast enough!" John shouted. "Sniper, shoot one of them in the tail!"

Another shot rang out. One of the Lizzars jerked up into the air when he felt the bullet hit him in the tail that hung down from his ass three-quarters of the way to the ground. John yelled, "Run, you bastards!" Both Lizzars ran while the town defenders laughed.

Sub-commander Frea asked, "Shall I have some of my warriors recover his body and head for

burial?"

John turned to her and replied with a note of reluctance in his voice, "Yes, thank you."

She signaled two warriors to retrieve the body, then said, "You don't sound pleased. Is something wrong?"

"Only that he almost got us all captured by the Lizzars had we followed him."

"You are not going to forget the bad and remember the good he did?" she asked.

"I'm going to, but it's taking a bit of effort on my part to get over what he did."

"It's good that you do so. Hatreds shouldn't be allowed to carry on past death. When the Lizzars are dead, we will not hate them in our memories. We will try to remember the good they did."

"What good did they do? I haven't seen any yet," John asked.

"Then they will be forgotten completely if they did no good. We will not waste our energy hating someone who is dead."

"Let's change the subject. How soon do you expect your reinforcements to arrive?"

"In four more days, John. Commander Haro should have already spoken with Over Commander Zira whom you met briefly. Unless Over Commander Zira is a fool, which I don't believe, he should have given Commander Haro the warriors he will need for a major battle. They should have weapons made by then using the rope and instructions you gave me to send on," she replied.

"We can easily hold out for four more days as long as we don't do anything stupid like surrendering." John turned to Anita and said, "Tell the burial detail to strip Grean's body of all clothing and jewelry. Have everything searched for any messages including his body. There's always a chance that he knew he was going to die and did something good for us by carrying a message."

John looked up from Amandalee as the runner approached him. He grunted as he thrust once more into her.

"Should I wait until you're through, Coach?" the girl asked.

"Go ahead and talk while I finish up on Amandalee. She requested this and by God, I think she deserves it."

"Okay, Coach. We found a page from a book in Mayor Grean's clothing."

John stopped suddenly and looked up at the girl. "They have a book?"

"It seems so. Someone wrote a message on the page we found. The message states that they're being forced to talk about weapons and how to make them. They're being treated better now that the Lizzars believe them after being defeated by us. They wish us good luck and say not to worry about the book. The Lizzars only got one, apparently because of the cover picture on it, but it's not going to do them any good because it's about submarines."

John laughed out loud as he thought of how little use the book would be in helping them win a land battle.

"The message also stated that the Lizzars picked up all the clothes because they wondered what in hell they were. Other than that, they stated that they knew Arnold was dead and they don't know what happened to the women captured with them."

"Did they give any indication where they're being held?" John asked.

"No sir," she answered.

John said, "Okay, thanks. I better get back now to Amandalee before she cools off."

Chapter 11

Kitten walked up to John as he stood on the roof looking out over the plain through a rifle scope. "Are you busy, Coach?"

"Not really. Just checking to see if the Lizzars have moved any closer. They're still maintaining their distance. I guess we threw a monkey wrench in by killing their Chief of Commanders. What's the problem, Kitten?"

"I don't have a problem. Miss Haskin is the one with a problem. Some of the others think she's queer because she doesn't do any of the boys. I've heard them speak about Miss Childer, too, but I think Miss Haskin is the one in trouble."

"What kind of trouble are we talking about?" John asked.

"They're planning on raping her or beating her to death if she resists."

"That is serious. Are they planning anything for Miss Childer?"

"Not yet, because she's working as our nurse. I think they figure to do Miss Haskin in order to scare both of them into changing their behavior since they're the only older adults who are single. I know that some of the other older women aren't fooling around, but they had husbands once so I guess the boys figure they're trying to be faithful or something."

"Do you have any indication of when they plan on taking action?" John asked.

"Probably tonight, just before the lights come on," she answered.

"Okay, I'll deal with this. Cheryl, I want you to go around to everyone who's off duty and anyone who's not in a bunker. Tell them to assemble in the town square for a meeting to begin in twenty minutes. When you see Miss Haskin, tell her to report here on the double."

"Don't you want to know who I overheard saying these things?" Kitten asked.

John answered, "No, because I might be tempted to beat them within an inch of their lives, if not kill them. I'd rather not know for now so I won't overreact."

John stared at Miss Haskin as she approached. He could see why some of the boys might want her. Her body was fully mature and a delight for the eyes, not that most of the women weren't for they were all in excellent shape and trimly muscled after living for over two months on a world without fattening foods. Being ripped away from Earth had left them with few things to do that didn't require physical effort so everyone was getting a workout each day. Thinking about how some of the women and girls looked before on Earth, John knew being torn away from home was the best thing to happen to their figures.

"You wanted to see me?" she asked.

Resisting an impulse to remark smartly that he always wanted to see her naked, John replied, "Yes, I've learned about a plot against you personally. I'm holding a meeting in just a few more minutes to discuss this matter and let others know how I feel."

"A plot against me? What for? I haven't hurt anyone!" she exclaimed.

"I know you haven't. In all earnestness, you're the target of some wrong-minded people whom I hope to straighten out. What I've learned is that many of the boys feel you're gay, er, Lesbian, I mean. Some of them were planning on raping you and killing you if you resisted. I'm not going to stand for that. Regardless, I wanted you to know ahead of time so you can protect yourself in case I fail."

"They think I'm a Lesbian? I know who's responsible for starting that rumor and why. Damn vicious bastards! Some of the boys just don't take rejection too well. God damn them anyway! They think just because we all live naked and screwing is permitted that I'm supposed to lie down for any or all of them! I feel like marching over and twisting the little penises off those twerps just to teach them a lesson or two!"

"Easy now, Miss Haskin! I'm not trying to rile you! I'm just trying to warn you beforehand. Then I'm going to lay down some rules in hopes of them becoming accepted as law," John said quickly.

"Would you quit calling me Miss Haskin? Damn it, John! I thought you knew my first name."

John blushed, then admitted, "I forgot it."

"You're kidding? You know every single kid and you can't remember my name? I'm amazed. I thought you were only trying to be polite. Didn't you even think to ask someone else?"

John replied, "Sure, after it was too late to ask without being embarrassed. It was always on the tip of my tongue and I couldn't remember it."

She smiled and said, "It's Betty. Think you can remember that or do I need a name tag?"

"I'll try to remember, Betty. You don't need a name tag. Could you do me a favor and tell me what Miss Childer's first name is? I can't remember hers, either."

Betty smiled, then said, "At least it's not just me. Her name is Tammy. Got that?"

John nodded.

"Seems I keep becoming more beholden to you, John. You helped dig me out of the rubble when we landed. Then you rescued me from the Lizzars. Now this."

"Those were the right things to do. Now I'm going to go conduct my meeting. I want you to attend without worrying about me pointing you out. I don't intend to give out anyone's names," John said.

"I called you all here to lay down a rule that I don't think has penetrated through to everyone yet. Once before, I mentioned that I will not tolerate rape. Not for any reasons! It's come to my attention that some of you intend to rape someone because she's not putting out. To further compound that, I understand the plan is to kill her if she resists. Well, I've got news for you. If that happens, I'll hunt you down even though I don't know the names of those planning this rape yet. I specifically asked not to be given the names so I wouldn't treat any of you with any less respect than I already have for you as heroes in our defense. That's why it disturbs me that some of you are planning on raping and possibly killing someone because they believe she's a Lesbian.

"Right now, we need everyone here in order to defend ourselves against the Lizzars. Everyone we lose, no matter what the reason, makes us a little weaker. It's bad enough that the Lizzars are killing us. Don't make this worse by helping them. If any of you kill any of us, the only thing I can figure is that you're on the Lizzars' side. I can't believe that you're still on our side if you're willing to weaken us by even one life.

"I'm going to lay down one more rule in addition to my rule on rape. This rule better be followed religiously. No one of us is to kill any of us unless we can prove treason. While we're at war, killing one of us is treason.

"So far, we now have two rules to guide ourselves by. The first rule is that no one can force themselves on anyone else. The second rule is that none of us may kill another of us without proof of treason.

"I hope you'll accept these rules while you learn to be more tolerant of each other. Personally, I don't really care if two men or two women decide to shack up so long as they're willing to help us fight for our lives and our freedom. I think our lives and freedom are the really important matters that we should concern ourselves with. Not someone's perceived sense of sexual morality.

"Consider one more thing. If we're fighting for our freedom, then what gives us the right to restrict the freedom of some members of our community? None of us are fully free unless all of us are free. I suggest that all of you adopt my attitude of tolerance toward each other's behavior as it's the only way we're going to co-exist and be fully free. To those of you who might be gay or Lesbian, I suggest you remain discreet as this is still a touchy issue with some members of our community who haven't yet learned tolerance or the full meaning of freedom. That's all I have to say on the matter other than don't violate these rules. This meeting is over."

Betty hollered, "Hey John, have you got time for me tonight? I've owed you since you rescued me from the tower and I'd really like to have a real man as well."

"Well, sure. Whenever you're ready is fine with me," John replied.

Betty hollered, "Then hell, right now is fine. I'll be up there in a moment!"

John watched Betty make her way through the kids and some adults who hadn't left yet. When she reached him, she said, "I've seen you operate and know you like a blow job first," as she knelt down and reached for his organ.

She took him in her mouth and sucked gently while her hands moved to his ass and caressed it for awhile before she fondled his balls and stroked his thighs. When he came slightly, she swallowed as if she'd done it many times before and released him with a smacking of her lips.

"Mmmm. You ready for me?" she asked as she laid back on the ground.

Without a word, John took his place on her and found her ready as he spread her before entering her. She moaned, "Oh god, John, that's great!" as he penetrated her fully. "Oh, yes, yes, shove it in and stroke me hard, babe! I've needed a real man for some time now!"

John whispered as he thrust himself in, "Aren't you laying it on a bit thick?"

She whispered back, "Just paying back those twisted twerps with their tiny things. Don't you dare hold back. I want all you can give, even if it takes us the next two hours."

John felt her hands grasp him and pull him forcefully into her on his thrust. She moaned loudly again and again with each thrust while she gyrated her hips in response. After awhile, she began to convince John that she really might be feeling something and not acting.

John glanced around. He noticed that most of the crowd was gone. He whispered, "You don't have to put on an act anymore. Just about everyone is gone now."

"What act? I'm always this loud," she replied before moaning once more loudly.

John felt her nails dig in as she spurred him into more forceful thrusts. He complied with her demands as she continued to moan loudly with each one. Then she hollered, "Yes, I'm coming! Damn it, yes! Pound me, John! Harder! Give me everything you've got!"

She moaned several times more as he threw himself in her as hard as he could. Then he felt himself come and she hollered, "Yahoo! That's a good one, John!"

"I just came. Mind if I pause and enjoy it?"

"Sure, so long as you give me another in a few minutes. God, what an orgasm this one was!"

"Are you always like this when you have sex?" he asked.

"Every time. It scared the hell out of my first boyfriend when we both discovered it the first time we had sex. We couldn't do it at my home after that for fear of one of the neighbors telling my folks. It was bad enough that we had to clean up after ourselves since I was a virgin until then. Our second time was out in the country and I must have scared every bird away for miles."

"Sounds like you enjoyed it, though."

"Damn straight, I did! You want to pull out now and start over? I do."

John said, "I should clean myself off first."

"Screw cleaning up. It's just us. Sloppy sex doesn't bother me at all. I also liked what you said in your meeting. Tammy's going to appreciate what you said even more because I know she's a Lesbian. I visited her apartment once on Earth. She had all sorts of Lesbian books and stuff. She admitted to me that she is."

"Well, I meant every word I said."

"I'm sure you did. Now pull out and kneel over me so I can get to you. I meant every word I said, plus I've been without a man for too long. You're definitely a real man."

John felt like he was dragging his ass once more when he went to the roof to observe the Lizzars. He felt drained and believed that Betty had actually taken everything he could give her. He glanced at the sun's position and guessed that she'd actually kept him going for close to two hours with only a few rests. She hadn't lied either about liking it sloppy or being noisy. Every time he took her, she had yelled and moaned loudly with glee and delight.

She reminded him of one girl he'd had from the cheerleader squad two years earlier who was quite vocal when she felt him inside her. He hadn't admitted to Victoria that he'd had that girl close to half a dozen times or that she was one of the girls he got pregnant. Nor had he told Victoria that she was quite inventive in how to have sex on those later visits. She once had him chase her through the school while they were both naked. That time ended with them in the teacher's lounge. Mostly they did it in the gym and once on the athletic field after it snowed. He remembered that was also after another chase and that he took her dare to take her outside when he caught her there. It was their last time together because she got pregnant.

John glanced around at the Lizzars. He used the rifle scope to check on them. They appeared to be closer. Then he spotted something odd about them. They were spaced in rows!

John hollered, "The Lizzars are up to something! Be on your toes tonight!"

He glanced at the sun as it began to touch the horizon. It wouldn't be long before it became dark, not that it mattered much. After all, Betty had the generator working and they were only running it two hours each night between sunset and moon rise.

Cheryl came over and asked, "Coach, are you willing to take any woman?"

He turned to her, smiled, and said, "Yes."

"Do you always do it hard?" she asked.

"No, I try to do it so that it feels good to the woman and myself. If she wants it hard, I oblige her. If she wants it gentle, then I go easy."

"Then you wouldn't hurt me?" Cheryl asked.

"Not deliberately. Are you a virgin?"

"Well, I guess I am. I tried with one boy, but he was too short to get in me. Does that mean I'm not still a virgin?"

"Did he break your hymen? Did you bleed?" John asked.

"No, I didn't bleed."

"Then for all practical purposes, you're still a virgin. If I take you, it's going to hurt the first time. You might want to find a boy with more than the boy you already tried."

"I think I want you first. I'd like to be absolutely sure when I'm not a virgin anymore."

"Fine, then we'll get together in the morning. I don't think I could give you much of anything right now."

"Not now? I was hoping that you would before I lose my nerve."

"Well, I have one slight problem. I don't have an erection at the moment, so I wouldn't be able to enter you."

"Cheryl, just give him a damn good blow job! That usually arouses him," Amandalee said.

"May I, Coach?" Cheryl asked.

"Sure, if you really want to try now. You'll have to hurry so we can finish before dark. I think the Lizzars will attack tonight," he replied.

Cheryl squatted down and reached her hands out for his crotch. She took him tenderly between her fingers, almost like handling a flute. She drew in her breath and put his penis to her lips.

Amandalee said, "Suck, Cheryl, not blow! That's just a euphemism."

"Suck?" Cheryl asked after letting out her breath.

Amandalee replied, "Yes, you really suck on it and try to make him come in your mouth. If you're willing to swallow, it usually impresses the guys."

Cheryl asked, "How much of him should I suck in?"

Amandalee answered, "Whatever feels comfortable to you or that you notice makes him hot to trot. With the Coach, just do whatever feels comfortable to you. He's good about sharing the pleasure."

Cheryl opened her mouth and shoved it around John's organ until she had half of it in. Her tongue explored her new toy while her eyes grew large. Then she remembered to suck. She gripped him with her lips and teeth while she tried to suck him as if drinking a thick chocolate shake through a thin straw.

Amandalee giggled, then said, "Go easier on the Coach, Cheryl. You don't have to rush it."

Cheryl eased up on sucking as Amandalee reached in between John's legs from behind. Amandalee felt of his balls and gently cupped them in her palm for a moment before jiggling them about for a few moments.

Cheryl suddenly felt something slick in her mouth as John's member suddenly enlarged to twice what it was in size. Unsure what to do, she swallowed as more came. She gagged and released John. She stared at his member as it swayed up and down in front of her face. Cheryl exclaimed, "I aroused him!"

Amandalee said, "Then you better hurry, gal! Get on your back and let John rid you of that terrible, awful case of virginity!"

John could only assume that women knew more about how to inspire someone than he did. Cheryl left with a shitty grin on her face as the last sliver of the sun disappeared below the horizon.

He glanced out at the Lizzars and saw immediately that they were moving closer at a very slow pace as if trying to fool him and the others in the town. The lines they formed were more defined and spaced apart. He was certain he knew what they were going to do.

"Amandalee, get around to all the bunkers and tell everyone to expect the Lizzars to attack in waves. Molotov cocktails aren't going to be effective, so they should save those. Now hurry!"

Amandalee ran down the sloped roof into the gym and disappeared to emerge from the front doors of the school moments later. He watched her run with her breasts flopping about toward the nearest bunker.

The twilight disappeared to be replaced with light from the light bulbs strung around the town. Faint smatterings of light reflected out toward the Lizzars who could be seen moving toward the town. John shouted, "Lizzars moving in! Snipers, watch for leaders!"

Cynthia walked up the sloped remains of the gym roof. She asked, "Where's the Coach?"

"I'm over here," John said.

"Ben's got the bumpers ready on the new car."

John exclaimed, "Great! Tell him to wheel it out and turn it over to Dennis and Gail."

"Are you going to let them take it out?" Cynthia asked.

"We'll have to try this sooner or later. The Lizzar formation is perfect tonight for testing it, so yes. Amandalee, go tell Frea that we're going to need the ramps put in place."

Cynthia and Amandalee both hurried back down the roof into the dark gym.

Dennis smiled as he entered the special car and took his seat in the back while Gail got behind the driver's wheel. She started the car and pulled up behind Frea's centaurs. They quickly hauled the ramps down the slope and moved aside for the car to drive down onto the plain. Gail turned on the headlights and accelerated. The car sped out directly toward the Lizzars who kept advancing, unaware of her intentions. Behind the car, the centaurs returned up the slope, taking the ramp with them.

The car drove right into the front line, scattering Lizzars about like toys on both sides as the angled bumpers and shielding prevented the Lizzars from falling beneath the wheels where their bodies or armor might flip the car. Gail didn't even bother to turn around after hitting the first line. She kept going forward and hit the second and third lines before the Lizzars got wise and scattered as it bore down on the next line. Only then did she turn the wheel and drive at the lines from behind, hitting more Lizzars and tossing them limply aside. Dennis watched from inside for any Lizzars lucky enough to grab hold and try to climb onto the car.

She drove without any pattern as she kept the car moving about into and out of their lines, sometimes hitting more Lizzars and sometimes only causing them to scatter out of the way. Occasionally, spears and swords clanged against the metal. All the while, the Lizzars pressed forward toward the town.

John shouted, "They're charging!" as the first rank got within thirty yards and ran for the slope.

A few slingshot missiles found targets before the first rank of Lizzars reached the safe area at the base of the slope. The Lizzars climbed as quickly as possible toward the top while the second rank approached within thirty yards. Then the second rank charged the town.

From the bunkers, the defenders waited with their weapons at the ready for the Lizzars to stick their heads up. The town's lights lit up the Lizzars as their heads became visible and their hands grasped the dirt to pull themselves up onto the nearly level ground. Without further orders, the defenders in the bunkers fired their slingshots or stabbed at the Lizzars with their spears. In between the bunkers, patrolling centaurs darted near the edge to strike at the Lizzars who made it over the top edge.

John watched as some Lizzars managed to penetrate twenty yards into the town before being engaged

in battle by eager centaurs. For the most part, it was a slaughter as the Lizzars didn't have the massive numbers they needed to properly defend themselves against the better equipped centaurs and human defenders.

Arrows often sped into some Lizzars before they even knew they were in danger. A few died standing close enough to the lights for their shocked faces to be seen as they examined the arrow sticking out of them while oblivious to the danger of more arrows or other defenders coming at them. A few couldn't see what was sticking them in the back, unaware that their natural back plates would no longer give them adequate protection from behind against the high velocity arrows shot at them with hunting bows. Some of them staggered about while trying to feel behind them with their hands for the sudden cause of their pain.

By the time the second wave reached the crest of the slope, the first wave was all but gone. The second wave met with much the same disaster. Out on the plain, the car continued to chew up the oncoming ranks.

John worked alongside everyone else to toss the Lizzar bodies back out of the town. Though he witnessed it himself, it was still incredible how many Lizzars had charged and died in the effort. It wasn't without cost, either. Three women and two boys were killed defending vital positions, the generator and the gas station.

Below the town on the plain, all four of their operational cars were busy dragging the bodies away from the slope as those tumbled down minus their weapons and armor. Some used boat anchors to snag the dead bodies while others used garden rakes attached to the rear bumpers. Some of the centaurs assisted with shoving the bodies away from the slope so the cars could reach them without getting bogged down in the loose and often muddy dirt.

John finally went to bed in the gym along with many others from the night shift after nearly two hours of carrying bodies. His last action was to speak a brief memorial over their own dead, both human and centaur. Then the dead humans were buried and the dead centaurs dragged away for their own rites, what little of those could be done at that time.

When John woke up, he gazed into Betty's eyes. He asked, "Are you here for another go?"

"Actually, no, but I won't turn you down if that's what you want," she answered.

"Oh? Then what's the occasion?" he asked.

"I've succeeded in making a bomb. Actually, it's more like a grenade. We have enough material to make a few hundred of them," she answered.

"I must have been dead asleep. I didn't hear any go off."

"I haven't used any of them yet. They're too dangerous. I'd like for someone in one of the cars to use my first batch."

He exclaimed, "They're that explosive?"

"No, poisonous. I better explain. We found lots of condoms in the grocery along with ammonia and household cleaners containing chlorine that hadn't deteriorated during our trip here. Anyway, if you mix

ammonia and a cleaner with chlorine, it releases chlorine gas. I didn't solve the problem until after you and I screwed. That was when I thought of putting one in a condom and the other in another condom. Then, with some help, I tied one condom tightly and inserted it inside the other before tying it. All you have to do is throw it. When it hits, both condoms should break open mixing the two chemicals. When they do, you get your poison gas."

"Well, you've proved again that you definitely know your science. Why did you think of condoms?"

"Thanks for the compliment. I thought of condoms afterwards because I realized how exposed I was to pregnancy."

"Are you concerned with becoming pregnant?" he asked.

"Shouldn't I be? After all, we don't have any doctors."

"Then why are you agreeable to me having you again?"

"Because I also like to screw. I should have repaid you a lot earlier than I did, like I said I would. Then I wouldn't have had any problems develop with those boys. Face it, if I'm seen screwing you often enough, the boys are going to leave me alone. That in itself eliminates several problems among us. I get a man with experience. You get some sex, not that you're suffering from a lack of it. I know you already get plenty. I've already seen you screw enough women and girls to know that for a fact."

"Well, that's true enough. I'm getting much more than I ever used to."

"Well, if you want more, I'm available to you. Anytime, anywhere, especially if the boys can see us. I don't mind rubbing it in after what they were planning," she said.

"I liked having you, but we'll have to take it easier next time. I felt wiped out after last night with you."

"Was I too demanding?" she asked.

"Just a bit."

"Sorry, but I was horny, too. I'm not usually that bitchy or demanding. If you want me now, it won't be a marathon like yesterday."

"Well, I don't think I've ever turned down a lady's offer. I'm not about to start now."

Betty smiled, then stepped closer.

Jill came running into the gym. "Coach Weaver! Coach Larson wants you on the roof! The Lizzars are up to something!"

Betty said, "I guess this will have to wait," as she stood up from him.

"Yes, but thank you for what we had. I thoroughly enjoyed you. Oh! Go ahead with making the bombs. We're going to need them."

Victoria said, as she saw John approaching up the sloped roof, "The Lizzars are using formations, I think."

John accepted the rifle scope from her and looked far out onto the plain, where the Lizzars were. He

noticed how the Lizzars were actually in rows and columns. They were even moving together in their formations. John said, "That's what they're doing, all right. Who's the runner here?"

"I am," Cheryl said.

"Go tell Sub-commander Frea that I need to speak with her as soon as possible."

Freya galloped over beside the wall and hollered up to John, "I'm here! What's the matter?"

"Have you noticed the Lizzar formations yet?"

"Yes! What of them?" Freya asked.

"Those formations change a lot of things, especially for the cohorts your people are sending to reinforce us. I'm writing down some information for Commander Haro and Over Commander Zira. I need you to send this information to them as quickly as possible. Whoever you choose is going to have to be prepared to run from the enemy. This information is too important to be lost by stopping to fight."

"I shall have messengers ready. How soon do you need them?"

"In a few more minutes. I'm almost done," John replied.

John watched the three centaur warriors gallop down the slope from the town onto the plain. They took their time until they approached the surrounding Lizzars. Then one centaur warrior opened fire with a pump action shotgun. The Lizzars quickly got the hint to scatter when they found themselves against something they hadn't faced before. Then the three centaurs raced through the gap in their lines before the Lizzars could turn back to throw their spears. John breathed a sigh of relief at seeing them get through the enemy lines without casualties. He hoped they were just as successful in avoiding the numerous predators he knew existed on the plains.

The snipers paid strict attention to John as he spoke.

"Now, more than ever before, it's important to kill their leaders. Now that the Lizzars are using formations, killing a leader of theirs will disrupt their control and effectiveness even more than before. If you're not sure whether a Lizzar is a leader or not, go ahead and shoot him. Just be sure that you can hit who you shoot at. Don't waste bullets on targets too far away. Let them get well within your range before you start shooting."

Victoria walked up in the darkness to John as he watched the far off Lizzars. She asked, "Any change?"

John answered, "No, they're still maintaining their distance and keeping themselves in their new formations. I've tried counting them now that they're easier to count."

"How many are there?"

"Close to four thousand of them now," he answered.

"Can we hold off that many of them?" she asked.

"I think we can. It just depends on how they attack and when."

"Okay. Anyway, I came up here to let you know ahead of time that Kitten and I are going to fool around some by ourselves. We're going to try to be discreet, but there aren't any places with total privacy."

"All right, I'll be ready to run interference if anyone tries to take matters into their own hands. Enjoy yourselves."

"Thanks, John. I'll let you know when we're finished so you won't be worrying about us too much. I know you have more important things to think about right now. See you later."

Victoria then walked out of the poor light provided from the string of lights that dimly lit up the town.

Victoria approached John as he observed the distant Lizzars. She stopped and stood beside him.

"Any problems with anyone?" John asked.

"Not a one, thanks."

"No problem. I'm beginning to wonder now just how soon the Lizzars intend to attack. It's possible, if not probable, that Paul is responsible for training them. He might even be observing them from the other side."

"Are you going to have him killed as a traitor?" Victoria asked.

John answered, "Not unless I have to. Right now, I believe that he's doing this under the threat of torture and death. I saw what they did to Arnold and I figure that Arnold died slowly in a lot of pain. Such demonstrations in front of other prisoners tend to break them. That's what concerns me most. There's a chance that the men they hold will forget whose side they're on. If that happens, then we won't ever be able to trust them. If that's the case, then we'll have to kill them eventually."

"Eventually?" she asked.

"Yes, eventually. I've been considering a few things lately that might not sound very humane. If it comes to it, I'll let them get some of the girls pregnant before we kill them. I think that will be the last real contribution they can make to our long term survival as a race on this world. At least, we won't lose their genes."

"It sounds to me like you expect all the women to become pregnant."

"If we're to have any chance for long term survival as a race on this world, that's the best way to give ourselves a head start. Otherwise, I could just go around asking all the women and girls to screw and to hell with anyone else's genes. That's not the main reason though why I haven't. We're both smart enough to know that if I do take all the women, it's going to cause us to become divided as a camp. It wouldn't be long before the boys decided that I should be removed or restrained somehow."

"I wondered about that after telling you that you could have about any girl you wanted just by asking. You surprised me when you didn't start asking around."

"Don't think I don't want all of them. Truthfully, I'd like nothing less than to have every woman and girl

in town."

"You really like sex," she stated.

"Very much so. It's like a drug to me. What's worse is that I can now see everything each of them has to offer. That only makes me want them even more."

"Considering that, I'm puzzled about how you've managed to restrain yourself."

"Right now, I'm restraining myself through sheer will power and by accepting what I'm getting offered. When we were on Earth, I used to cool myself down after school by swimming to rid myself of my desires. It wasn't easy being among that many girls each day of the week without some outlet. When you came along, you provided me with some relief after you accepted my proposition."

"Swimming released your desires?" Victoria asked.

"No, it only lessened them. Once I got home, I usually masturbated myself to release the pent up pressure. I also masturbated before going to work each morning so that I could face those girls without losing my self-control. That day I stumbled across your secret was very difficult for me. I very much wanted both of you then. It was only the fear on your faces that kept me from losing my self-control while my nose inhaled the scent of your bodies. I've never forced myself on a woman, no matter how much I desired her. I've always negotiated or received voluntary consent before taking any woman."

"I thought I saw desire on your face then. I'm glad you didn't take me then if only because things worked out better that way for both of us."

John replied, "Yes, I have to agree with you. Things did work out better for both of us because of that day. You told me about how your body's appeal worked against you. Mine worked against me in a different way. What I heard from other boys when I was a teen was that I was too effeminate looking. I didn't know what the girls thought about me. Had I known, I might have gone down a different course of life. Instead, I tried to overcome my misunderstood appearance by getting into sports so the boys wouldn't think I was queer. I worked hard to excel in sports and succeeded enough to the point that I could get my degree in physical education in college since I wasn't so good that I could become a professional sports player. However, getting into sports only increased the pressure I was under as I matured. My body demanded sexual release and I misunderstood what I wanted because I was always among boys. I mistakenly thought the boys were right about me being queer since I became so horny while participating in sports. That was why I began masturbating. I didn't want to find out that I was queer by asking another boy to have sex."

"Then how did you discover that you weren't gay?"

"My first year as a teacher was what clued me in. As the rookie teacher in the department, I was given an all-girls class to teach, partly because of my looks. I think even the other coaches thought I was gay and could be trusted among them since there wasn't a female coach available that year. It wasn't until the school year was about half over that I realized I actually desired women. I was still horny as ever and I was only dealing with girls. It just took awhile to get the mistaken mind set out of my head. Once I realized that, I began to fantasize about having them all. I pictured myself entering their locker area and having them all flock nakedly to me. I didn't realize that I had any sex appeal that might have made that possible. Had I known, I actually might have tried. Anyway, that's when I began my daily routine of masturbating before school, swimming in the nude after school, and masturbating when I got home. Then things changed. The head coach died and everyone moved up a notch. The next coach got recognized and hired away so I became head coach before the end of my second year of teaching. Then you came on board to take care of the girls and Neil came on as my assistant in my third year of teaching."

"I've wondered how Neil is doing without us."

"Hard to say. I guess he was just as puzzled about half the school disappearing as we were at first. Now, I guess, he's got the head coach job at half of a high school. I guess they'll have to rebuild the school before he'll have much of anything to do since we have the athletic facilities with us. Maybe he'll be able to take the school all the way to the state championship. I sure wanted to win that. We came close three times. I guess that's the only thing I regret not accomplishing right now. I was so sure that this year would be our year. Looks like that won't happen now for at least the next three years since we've got most of the football squad here. He'll have to rebuild the entire program while the school is rebuilt."

"I know you would have won the state championship this year. You've certainly demonstrated right here that you have the ability," Victoria said.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence in me. However, I suspect that it was because my players didn't want to fail, either in class or on the field. I guess that was because they didn't want to take the only other way to improve their grades. In a way, you gave them as much incentive to win as I did. It's almost enough to make you wonder how other coaches motivate their players to play so well."

"I hadn't considered that angle. You could be right about how it worked out. May I ask some personal questions?"

"Such as?" he asked.

"Were you experienced at all before I came along?"

"Only a little. You'd like to hear about my first time, wouldn't you?"

She replied, "Well, only if it doesn't embarrass you. You're more complex than I ever imagined."

He exclaimed, "Me? Complex? I think not. Generally, I'm as cold hearted as they come. That's partly the result of the cruel treatment the other boys gave me as a teenager. I shut out all my emotions then as best I could. My first time, after discovering that I wasn't queer, was with a hooker. I drove to another town and shacked up with her for an entire weekend so she could teach me how to screw. That was after I bought a couple of dozen porno videos and watched them at home to self-teach myself. There's a world of difference between the pornos and how it really works, so it was a good thing for me that I spent the money to learn from a pro. That first summer after I began teaching, I got a summer job as a lifeguard at an ocean resort beach. I saved a couple of lives and discovered that I could be rewarded handsomely by the girls afterwards. However, I didn't have any idea then that girls would be willing to have sex for good grades, too. Anyway, I was too busy doing my job to notice that any of the girls were looking at me or I might have discovered then what I know now. What I'm saying is that I knew I'd stand a good chance of being laid if I saved a girl's life, so I applied myself very rigorously to watching the water instead of flirting with the girls on the beach. Had I known then that my looks alone could get me laid, I probably would have been a terrible lifeguard, but I also would have had a lot more girls in my bed. If anything, that only made my problem worse since I knew what I desired and possessed strong urges to have every girl around. My second year as a coach was the equivalent of sheer hell as I fought off those urges after being rewarded during the summer with some free sex just for doing my job. I hoped and prayed that I'd have to save some girl's life in the pool."

"Did that happen?" Victoria asked.

"No, the only person I pulled out of the pool that year was a boy who knew how to swim, but hit his head while horsing around. Consequently, I spent several weekends in a motel in another town getting laid with hookers."

"You didn't receive any offer from him?"

"No, I didn't. You're probably wondering why I said I'd accept boys when we made our deal. Well, truthfully I was getting back at some of the boys for how I was mistreated as a teenager. That's how come I understood why you humiliated the boys in your home. Knowing what I know now, I don't blame you for doing any of those things."

"I don't blame you, either. I guess kids can be more cruel than they realize while they're growing up. They screwed up both our lives. I wish I had sent you more girls now. I would have had there been more, but some chose me and others chose to accept their failing grades," Victoria said.

"It was the same way with my students. Most simply chose to keep their bad grades. It took almost a whole year to wear down one girl. She paid dearly when she finally realized she was going to flunk out the whole year unless she took one of my choices. She asked for other ways when she found out the first time that her being willing to do anything meant she had to do anything I wanted. Every six weeks, she begged for some other way than having sex to improve her grade. I held firm and she finally gave in just before the school year ended."

"I think I remember her. You had her for a full day at school."

"Yes, I did and I didn't regret doing that to her since I had to figure out a way to justify changing her entire grade for the whole year. She got what she paid for. I got what I wanted, so I didn't feel sorry about making her have sex with me several times during that day."

"I wasn't trying to spy on you that day. I forgot some papers at the office and heard you two going at it in the gym when I got there at about noon. It was just curiosity that caused me to find out who was using the gym when school was about over with. You really put her through the wringer and I wondered why at the time. You were quite creative, too, I noticed."

"I got some of the ideas from the porno flicks and some from watching you. Since I had the time and opportunity, I decided to try as many as possible. Most of them worked out quite well."

"Yes, you appeared satisfied. I noticed that she was too by the end of the day."

"Ah, was that while I had her suspended from the rings by her ankles?"

"Yes, you had her suspended upside down and sucking on you while you had her legs parted and your face buried in her snatch. I suspected then that you got that idea from watching me. I was amazed by what you followed that up with. I couldn't help but watch as you suspended yourself in the same way and then lifted her up and twisted her around so you could take her while swinging upside down. She had to wrap her legs and arms around you while you swung and pumped away at her."

"Yes, and it sure was messy. But she experienced an orgasm for the first time and was eager after that to stay the whole day as I had insisted on before for changing all her grades."

"Uh huh, I remember her screaming in delight when she had that orgasm. For a moment I thought you'd hurt or dropped her since I was busy pleasuring myself and wasn't watching. When I saw what really was actually happening, I began to gush and have an orgasm myself. She sure wanted to do the rings again after that. I remember you having the damnedest time convincing her to continue experimenting with other ways."

"Yeah, she sure did want to do it on the rings again. That was good for her, but not as good for me."

"I wondered about that. Was that the most difficult position you ever did?"

John replied, "I'd have to say that was it. I only tried it because I had plenty of time to spare in case it didn't work out at all."

"Was it your best day because of all those positions you tried out?"

"No, my best day was with one of the cheerleaders you sent to me. She couldn't swim and agreed to go twice to make up for that. She didn't even like standing in the shallow water."

"Good looking black girl? Had her own motorcycle?" Victoria asked.

"Yes, she was the one. I took her first in the pool to make sure she wasn't a virgin. As soon as I was sure, I let her scramble out of the water to the tiles where I took her again."

"Yeah, I remember how fast she got out of the pool. I don't remember you taking her twice, though."

"After we left the school, I followed her in my car out into the country. We stopped after driving up a dirt road leading to an abandoned farmhouse. We undressed and got on her motorcycle. She drove while I sat behind her. When I got an erection, she stood up and then settled back down on me. We just rode around on the dirt road and fields like that with every bump we took stimulating us all the more. I didn't have to do a thing to come in her twice before the ride was over and we went our own ways. I didn't even get limp in between, the ride was so stimulating."

"Then that's why you asked me to give her a bit more of a good grade. I thought it was because she showed how determined she was by overcoming her fear of the water and you were impressed by that. Now I know better."

"I was really tempted to buy a motorcycle after that, but I realized that most of the girls wouldn't know how to drive it."

"What was your worst piece of ass?" Victoria asked.

John answered, "The girl who bit me on my dick."

"I don't remember seeing that happen."

"She was one of my students and lost her head after we began. I just barely got her teeth apart before it was too late. Then she flailed out at me. I wound up tossing her in the pool and shoving her away from the edge each time she tried to get out until she cooled down and was nearly exhausted. Then I took her in her ass because of that. She screamed like a wounded animal when I took her in the ass and begged me to let her up in exchange for more sex on other days."

"Did you take her up on her offer?"

"I didn't trust her completely by then. Instead, I made her agree to take the entire senior squad on the football team."

"Did she?" asked Victoria.

"She did. I watched her take every senior on the team. Her grade still depended on completing my assignment. She might even have been responsible for helping the team reach and win the regional championship the first time. She sure didn't hurt their morale any though she didn't like being watched as if she was being graded, which she was. By the time she finished with the last senior, she could bump and grind with the best because I critiqued her performance so she'd do better with each succeeding senior. When she graduated, she became a stripper. I know that because she sent me a video of herself along

with a thank you note for changing her life since she was rolling in money as a result of what I'd taught her. Now isn't that one for the books?"

Victoria exclaimed, "Now I know who you're talking about! Boy, was everyone in town surprised at her taking that job! She was the last person most of us ever expected to go that way."

"Yes, she was. Because of her, I learned to watch out for other girls like her who might lose their nerve or panic while with me. I didn't accept any blow jobs from girls like her after that."

"Did you give any more girls to the seniors?" Victoria asked.

"Sure I did. I wasn't going to mess with what might be a successful incentive formula for winning the regional championship. Whether that really had anything to do with winning two more or not, I don't know. I was actually considering treating the juniors the same way this year to see if increased morale would get us to the state championship."

"Then that's why you don't care if the kids here have sex. You're trying to bolster their morale so we'll win."

"Partly for that reason and partly because we have to treat them as adults or they'll reject our leadership. Anyway, you and I wouldn't be able to stop them otherwise. It's better if we permit them to screw around and keep a loose control over them. They're not likely to rebel against us so long as we consider their needs."

"I suppose you're right. If we tried to control them too strictly, they'd rebel against us. I can see why you're imposing so few rules now. You'll have my support in whatever decisions you make."

"Thanks, I appreciate knowing that. Hmmm, it appears that the Lizzars are bedding down finally. We probably won't be attacked until morning."

"Would you like some attention now?" Victoria asked.

John answered, "You've already been very attentive this evening. I haven't had the opportunity to explain some of my actions before to anyone. It was nice having someone listen sympathetically since I feel like I'm a bastard most of the time, even though I never use force."

"You're welcome. Still, would you like some attention? Or is there someone I might drop a hint to who you'd really like to have, now that I know you'd really like to have all of us?"

"I always welcome some attention in the way you're suggesting. Sure, go ahead if you want while I keep watch. The Lizzars might be bedding down, but that doesn't mean I'm going to trust them to stay that way. By the way, I believe that Tammy might be of a like preference to you. I just learned this the other day. Sorry I didn't tell you sooner."

"I've had my suspicions about her. Thanks."

"You're still trying to take care of me, aren't you?" he asked.

She replied, "Is there anything wrong with that?"

"Not really," he answered.

"Then tell me who you'd really like to have in particular. I like seeing you happy. I know that you wanted me in particular and you have me now. Is there anyone else who would really make you shiver in

delight?"

"You all make me shiver with delight when you give yourselves to me. If I were to say who I'd want in particular, I might not be able to stop myself from taking every girl in town. I don't want to monopolize all the girls and get the boys mad."

"I don't think that will happen. Except for Betty, Kitten, and myself, the other girls are making out with other boys as well as you. As far as Kitten and I, we're only making out with each other and you. I don't think you're exactly monopolizing all the girls in town."

"You're sure I won't be?" he asked.

"I'm sure. Now, who else do you really want to have? I'd like to help you stay happy and content. Consider it my effort to keep your morale up while we're in this dangerous situation."

"Now I hadn't thought of looking at it that way. Keeping up my morale, huh? Well, I guess I could admit that I'd like to have Michele and Melanie. They always turn me on when I see them."

"Sheesh, they're too easy. They both want you desperately. Far as I know, Michele's kept her virginity intact just for you. I could take your watch for you. Then you could spend the rest of the night with her."

"No, I'm not going to start abusing my position by trading off. It won't set a good example to everyone else. Next thing you know, someone will forget to take his post. Then we'll have Lizzars up to our necks in the town. I'll just have to wait until it's convenient for both of us to be with each other. Until then, I'll have that to look forward to."

"Suit yourself, then. I hope you get both of them. In a way, I envy them since they'll be starting off with someone who respects women and doesn't humiliate them just to be cruel. That's a far better start than I had. And you're a far better lover than Conrad was. I hope he winds up in jail someday where he gets a boyfriend to treat him like he treated me."

"You still hate him, don't you?"

"I won't lie. Yes, I still hate him and I hope he gets everything he deserves in the end."

John chuckled. "I think that's where he'll get it if your wish comes true."

Chapter 12

Victoria looked out over the plains where the Lizzar unit remained standing. She wished she shared John's confidence in the final outcome. Even though she knew the centaur reinforcements were due in another day at the soonest, she felt insecure about the two hundred town defenders facing at least four thousand Lizzars surrounding the town. Twenty to one odds weren't her idea of a good bet, even if the town defenders did possess superior technology over the enemy.

Victoria glanced down at Kitten sitting beside her. Kitten seemed secure in her ignorance of the true magnitude of the situation. Victoria wished she didn't know how fragile their superiority was so she could be nearly as blissful as Kitten. Some movement caught Victoria's attention. She steadied the rifle scope

she used to observe the far off Lizzars and tried to make out the cause of the movement. A moment later, she motioned to Kitten. "Go down and wake John. Tell him he better see this. It doesn't look good."

Kitten limped off quickly down the collapsed roof into the gym. She looked around where John usually slept and soon found him, but he wasn't asleep.

"Sorry to disturb you, Coach. Coach Larson needs to see you on the roof. The Lizzars are up to something."

Cheryl released John. Cheryl smiled, then asked, "Can we continue this when you get back?"

John replied, "Sure we can. I'm looking forward to it," as he left with Kitten.

As they walked, Kitten asked, "Coach, do you prefer older women or young girls the most?"

"I like them all, particularly if they're willing to go to bed with me," John answered.

"Well, I was thinking about who you would prefer for marriage, not just going to bed with."

"Marriage? To tell you the truth, I haven't even considered marriage, Kitten. I'm not implying that there's anything wrong with any of you, regardless of your age, or with marriage in general. I just think that I wouldn't be very faithful because I like all women and I like having them. I'd feel like a bastard giving vows one day and breaking them before twenty-four hours were past. That's partly why I haven't even thought of getting married."

"What about a group marriage? Wouldn't that work out for you? Then you could have enough wives to keep you satisfied."

"Kitten, I'm not sure yet how many women it would take to satisfy me enough so that I wouldn't go looking for more. Maybe I could settle down with several wives. If that was the case, I'd definitely consider you in the running to be one of my wives. However, until I decide to settle down, don't plan on wearing a wedding dress anytime soon with me wearing the groom's outfit."

"I'm definitely someone you'd consider? That's great!" Kitten exclaimed.

"Remember, I said if. Right now, I'm just not planning on getting married to anyone. Am I understood?"

"I understand you, Coach," Kitten said as they approached Victoria upon the roof.

"The Lizzars have some new equipment. Here's the scope. Tell me what you think they're doing, John," Victoria said.

John accepted the scope and gazed out at the Lizzars. It took only a few moments before he sighted in on one of the objects. He observed it for nearly a minute before he handed the scope back to Victoria.

"Well, do you know what they're up to?" she asked.

"Yes, I do. Call a meeting in the town square. In particular, I want Ben and Betty in attendance."

"How soon do you want the meeting?" Victoria asked.

John answered, "Sometime in the next ten minutes or so. This is really important for us to discuss."

"Amandalee, get hustling and notify everyone. You, too, Kitten. You can notify everyone in the school

while Amandalee covers the rest of the town," Victoria said.

The two girls left immediately. Victoria watched them leave, then asked, "It's not good news, right?"

"No, it's not. We're going to have to pull back our defenses when they move those up. If we don't, they'll overrun us," he answered.

"Can we hold them off if we pull back?" she asked.

"Certainly, but it's going to take planning and teamwork. They haven't done anything I didn't anticipate for our situation. I'm only surprised it took them this long to come up with that solution. I better head for the town square. I'll fill you in on what's going to happen as soon as I have a quick talk with Ben and Betty before the meeting."

"Well, I can have one more car ready in a few hours. That will give us five. That's not enough to carry everyone," Ben said.

"It's not a matter of carrying everyone. It's the books that have to be saved so we can win the war. Even by pulling out all the fiction titles and the stuff on how to become a millionaire or lose weight, there are far too many books of value to save. We can't choose the best one from some of the topics where we have more than one source of reference. That's because some of them show different perspectives and details of the processes. We need as complete a picture as possible to recreate those processes. Essentially, it appears that we're going to have to load up the cars with the most important books and have the drivers standing by to evacuate those so the centaurs will have them. If we're overrun, we'll have to destroy the rest," John said.

"In that case, I'll pick out the best drivers and have them park near the front doors so the cars can be loaded."

"That sounds good. Betty, how are you progressing on your condom bombs?"

"We've got about a hundred of them made. I suspect that one of them is only going to incapacitate one or two Lizzars at most. If we toss out enough of them in one place, we could probably concentrate enough chlorine gas to make it deadly," Betty answered.

"Begin putting everyone of your people to work on making more. We're going to need all the ammunition we can get. Keep an eye on the wind direction so we won't gas ourselves when those are used. Let's have the meeting now that everyone's about here."

"We'll use everything then, John," Betty said.

John shouted once, "Okay, listen up! The Lizzars have something new they're going to try soon. They have ramps that I suspect they're going to push against our defensive slopes so they can reach the top without climbing. When a ramp gets within throwing range, we'll have to stop it from reaching the town by cooking the Lizzars moving it with Molotov cocktails. That might slow them down some, but it won't stop them with all the troops they have. Once we run out of Molotovs, everyone is to fall back into the school. Anyone who is blind or injured will already be at the school. I don't want our strategic withdrawal anymore difficult than it has to be. Snipers are to concentrate on Lizzar leaders first until they get into the town. Once they reach the town, any Lizzar going near the generator gets a bullet or an arrow. Just be sure that you don't hit the generator and do the job for them. However, sooner or later they'll wise up and just cut the wire or smash the light bulbs. When they do, then we'll toss some flares out into the

streets to keep them visible until the moons rise.

"Okay, battle instructions for the school. We've got metal covering the windows and cement in the cracks which limits enemy access to the doors. However, they might wise up and bring one of their ramps up into the town with them to reach the roof where many of us will be firing down upon them. If they do, then whoever is guarding the doors will have to do it on their own without overhead fire because we'll be busy repelling the Lizzars ourselves.

"Mostly, it will be us inside the school. Possibly Sub-commander Freia will detach a few of her warriors to stand with us, but they need more room and they can't all fit inside. If the town's about to be overrun, her cohort will head out of town onto the plain where they'll have freedom of movement. Hopefully that will draw off some of the Lizzars facing us. As well, some of our people will leave in the cars to draw off the Lizzars. I know the Lizzars will want them because we'll make it appear that we're evacuating all the books in the cars. We'll conveniently drop a few fiction books for them to find and pick up as the cars go past. If they take the bait, the cars will be followed by a lot of what's facing us. The cars will go slow enough to make it appear that the weight is slowing them down and that it's possible to catch them. Freia's cohort will be escorting them part of the way, so the cars won't be able to go too fast without leaving her warriors behind. If it all works out right, then it will look like the cohort can go faster than the loaded-down cars.

"Well, that's our plan. Some of it might sound to you like it won't work. Some of it sounds like it will. We won't know for sure until we try it. Get with your section leaders and find out your specific tasks. Good luck to all of you. The meeting is now over."

John walked away with Cheryl quickly catching up to him. "Are we going to finish now or do you have to do other things?"

"I've done all I can for now, Cheryl. We'll finish as soon as we get back to the gym so I can get some sleep afterwards before I go back on duty."

"Is it true that you would consider marrying a fifteen-year old?" Cheryl asked.

"I haven't placed any age limits on marriage, Cheryl. However, I'm not planning on getting married right now. Like I told Kitten, I like women and I like having them. For that reason, I wouldn't be very faithful to anyone I married. I just can't resist having sex that's offered to me. That's not going to change if I get married. Is that an honest enough answer for you?"

"Well, Kitten said if you were, you'd consider asking her. Do I fall on your list for consideration?" she asked.

"Cheryl, I sure as hell consider you in the running. You're one of the best around. I'd have to be a complete idiot to say otherwise and lose getting what you've got to offer me."

"Thanks, Coach! I needed to hear that!" she exclaimed.

"You're welcome, Cheryl. Would you mind answering some questions for me?"

"Sure, Coach. What do you want to know?"

"I'd like to know why Kitten and you are suddenly asking about marriage."

Cheryl answered, "We were both asked by other boys to marry them. We both feel that we'd rather have you if we actually have a chance. Kitten especially, since you've taken care of her since Steve died."

"You'd both rather take a chance on me asking you someday, huh? I wish I'd known that before I answered either of you. I think you're both throwing away excellent opportunities to have a good home eventually."

"I think you'd provide a good home when you decide to marry. I'm willing to wait until then, even if it takes years. If nothing else, I'll be more of a woman for you by then."

"I already consider both of you to be women," John replied.

"Sure, but I'll have bigger tits by then for you to play with. At least, I hope I will. I don't want you to be disappointed in what you get."

"I'm not disappointed now."

Victoria watched John walk up the incline toward her in the twilight. He said nothing about Kitten kneeling before her with her head against Victoria's sex. "John's here now," Victoria said.

Kitten pulled back and smiled up at Victoria. "Good, now I can treat him while he watches."

"I don't think he'll refuse you. John, nothing much that's new has happened. They've got a few more ramps out there is all," Victoria said.

John took the rifle scope from Victoria and gazed out at the Lizzars as Kitten suddenly stimulated him with her tongue. He didn't object as pleasant sensations emanated throughout his brain.

"The cars are loaded with books and completely fueled up. Betty got an electric power line over to the gas station so they won't have to hand pump anymore," Victoria said.

John said nothing about seeing what appeared to be more Lizzars out on the plain than were there before. "Is everyone in position?" he asked.

"Yes, we're all set. I hope this works. Is there any sign of the reinforcements?" Victoria replied.

John glanced out toward centaur territory. The failing light made it too difficult to see any signs of reinforcements. "It's too dark to see out that far."

He glanced back at the Lizzar units that the centaurs would have to break through. The Lizzars were just as thick there as anywhere. He wasn't sure, but they appeared to be thicker in some places as if anticipating an attack from the centaurs. Their behavior only increased his suspicions that someone was actually advising the Lizzars and not just leading them on to more blunders. He felt sure it was Paul's handiwork as Paul was the only person John knew with tactical knowledge. Even so, John still hadn't caught sight of any humans anywhere near the Lizzars. Of course, that made sense to him. They'd keep their human advisor away from the battle to keep John from launching a counter attack to either kill or capture him.

"Thanks for letting me do you. Would you hug me some?" Kitten asked.

John reached around her with one hand as she turned so her back was against his chest. Her hands grasped his hand and placed it on her breasts. He went ahead and fondled her nipples as he stood watching the Lizzars.

Victoria looked at Tammy Childer as she saw to one of her patients. She waited until Tammy moved away from the boy, then she approached her.

"I've heard that you owned some interesting books back on Earth. I wish I'd known before. We might have exchanged some to read," Victoria said.

"You know about my books?" Tammy asked.

"I was told very discreetly by someone who's not bothered by that sort of thing."

"That's good to hear. After learning about the threats the other day, I've been afraid. Does John know who was involved?"

"He has some idea. I don't think he'll let anything happen. So far, he's protected me."

"Then you're?"

"Yes, I am. I'd like to arrange something with you later when it's convenient," Victoria answered.

Tammy nodded. "I'd like that very much."

John saw the Lizzars advance just as darkness settled over the plain. The generator fired up and lights from the town filtered out onto the plain to further confirm the Lizzars' advance. He hollered, "They're advancing! Everyone keep alert! Snipers, hold your fire until they're well within range!"

Sub-commander Frea hollered, "We're ready, John!"

John shouted down, "Dennis, are you ready?"

"Yes, Coach!" Dennis replied.

John shouted back, "Put the ramp out and get going! Good luck to you all!"

Freya's cohort dragged the ramp down the slope and stood beside it on both sides while the five cars drove down. Their headlights on, the five cars lined up in a V-formation while the cohort galloped along in front and behind them as they went out toward the Lizzar units between them and centaur territory. Closer and closer, they approached until two forces were soon less than a football field's distance apart.

Freya and three other centaurs raised their double-barreled shotguns and aimed as they continued to shorten the distance. Thirty yards away from the enemy, she and the warriors opened fire. The high-powered slugs struck the unit facing them, mowing down the first two ranks in the center. Another blast from the shotgun wielding centaurs struck down more Lizzars before the Lizzars scattered, forgetting completely their discipline. Other centaurs approached with their spears held out in an almost impenetrable thicket of spear points and their swords at the ready. The shotgun wielding centaurs quickly reloaded with the car headlights providing more than enough light for them to see what they were doing.

Freya shouted, "Column formation!"

The cars drove forward aligning themselves behind Freya's vanguard and the ram car while the rest of the centaurs formed two columns, one on each side. The ram car's angled bumpers shoved the dead and dying Lizzars to the sides as the formation continued to advance through the remains of the Lizzar unit

toward another.

As they moved slowly forward, Lizzar units on both sides struggled to reorient themselves and attack the flanks of the centaurs whose spears were momentarily farther apart. Before they could reach the centaurs, the centaurs were sidestepping as they realigned themselves flank to flank to deflect the new threat.

The shotguns blazed through another Lizzar unit. Then they fired once more. Frea nervously glanced around at how her unit was being surrounded. She judged the time was right. "Fifth Cohort! Charge!" she shouted.

Frea and the other shotgun bearing centaurs opened fire once more with two successive blasts to open a path. Then she led her force quickly away from the cars toward centaur territory.

Momentarily surprised by the turn of events, the Lizzars stood staring at the new situation as they faced two units instead of one. Then seeing that the centaurs appeared the greater threat, the Lizzar units surged toward them.

Dennis gave the Lizzars a few moments to forget the cars before he gunned the engine and gave a turn signal to the following cars. He peeled out from where his car stood almost motionless and angled to one flank of the centaurs not far ahead. His angled bumpers soon impacted with Lizzars trying to surround the centaurs. Lizzars bounced off both sides of his bumpers while the other cars followed close behind him.

Gail, beside him, tossed out a book through the open portion of the roof above the back seat. "Well, there goes *Will Fight Evil For Food*. Let's see, what's next? Think they'll like *Witness Protection*?"

John watched intently from his command post as the events unfolded. He resisted saying anything that might affect the morale or confidence of those around him as he saw the centaurs and humans struggle to get through the Lizzar units. Elsewhere around the town, the Lizzars continued to advance on the town. Only the one sector with the centaurs and cars wasn't advancing.

Frea shouted, "Fifth Cohort, square formation!" as she saw her unit being cut off by Lizzar units closing the gaps among themselves to present a solid wall of flesh. Her warriors fought their way into a square formation that faced in four directions. With their spears pointed out and their swords ready, they faced the advancing Lizzars.

Frea ordered, "Advance by steps! One!"

Those warriors beside her moved forward. Others stepped sideways or backwards as they resumed moving toward centaur territory, determined to fight their way out no matter how slowly. Behind them lay several dead centaur warriors who'd failed to reach the formation. Others, though wounded, had reached the formation and were supported by their comrades as they slowly advanced.

Dennis gunned the engine once more as his car plowed into more Lizzars. As he passed through them, other Lizzars pounded away at the car with their iron swords and spears. In a few places, the weapons pierced the metal of the car, but not where it mattered. At most, it was unnerving and scary to hear all the clanging and banging as dozens of Lizzars tried to no avail to stop the cars. Dennis and the drivers behind him kept their pace steady and the distance between them small as they continued toward centaur

territory.

Shots were fired by some of the snipers as they spotted Lizzar leaders urging their troops forward toward the town. Among the formations, multitudes of Lizzars struggled to drag ramps forward over the plain.

Freya saw the Lizzars scatter before she pulled the trigger on her shotgun. She held off from firing as she stepped forward some more. "Four! One!" she hollered while the centaurs took two more steps toward their goal.

Illuminated by the headlights, Dennis could see the last of the Lizzars in front of him as he pushed forward through them to freedom. Gail swiveled around in her seat and fired her pistol point blank at a Lizzar who had managed to climb on top of the car and was trying to spear Dennis. The Lizzar toppled off the car with a bullet in him. More shots could be heard coming from the other cars as they dealt with Lizzars who were climbing onto them.

Then Dennis broke through the last of the Lizzars. He flashed his lights to signal the other cars. Dennis said, "I hope they're all doing as well as us."

"I think they are. We still have some Lizzars on top. Keep it steady and I'll shoot another one," Gail said.

"How's your ammo?" he asked.

"Not bad yet," she answered.

John watched the cars break through while the centaurs were still surrounded. He couldn't tell much about their situation without any direct lighting on them. Only the occasional shotgun blasts coming from the centaurs kept him informed as to their continued survival.

More sniper shots rang out as more Lizzar leaders were spotted. Sometimes John could spot a Lizzar unit halt in confusion until another leader took over. The Lizzar advance was ragged as a consequence. Not all of them would reach the town at the same time. He wondered if that was an advantage or disadvantage. He hoped it was to the town's benefit.

As he surveyed the battle, he realized soon enough that the Lizzars were gradually pulling their units back into alignment. The lead units were halted often enough, while new leaders took over, for the lagging units to catch up. He knew for certain that the Lizzars would be attacking nearly simultaneously on all sides of the town. There would only be enough time to toss a round or two of cocktails before the bunkers would have to be abandoned.

A few last people ran about the town putting the finishing touches to some traps and other defenses. John watched them disappear into the school minutes later leaving a deserted town in appearance.

"That's the last of them on us!" Gail exclaimed.

"Good! I can see two cars on my side. Anyone on your side?" Dennis asked.

"Yes, they're both there. They're still getting rid of Lizzars on them."

"Can you help them from here?" he asked.

She answered, "I'll try." Gail climbed over her seat onto the books and stuck her head up. She aimed her pistol at the nearest Lizzar on the car beside hers. She fired twice, striking the Lizzar in the leg with her second bullet. The Lizzar fell only to become snagged by his foot in the open roof. He hung upside down while his armor sagged down toward his head. "Ease over toward the other car. They've got a Lizzar hanging by his foot."

Dennis turned the steering wheel slightly and bumped against the other car. The Lizzar screamed out briefly before Dennis turned away from the other car.

"You got him!" Gail exclaimed.

She aimed over the car beside her and steadied her hand as she lined up on another Lizzar. The car bounced as she fired. The bullet hit the Lizzar's chest armor and ricocheted off into the air. She squeezed the trigger again to hear only a click.

Gail wiggled back into her seat. She looked for ammunition for her gun.

"I'm out, Dennis."

"Take mine then."

She drew his gun from his holster and crawled back over the seat onto the books. She fired two shots at the Lizzar on the other car. Her second shot hit the Lizzar in the thigh, dropping him onto the car roof opening. Another shot was heard coming from the car he was on. His body jerked once and then was still.

"I think they finished him. He's not moving even though he's still on top," Gail said.

"I hope so. Well, at least we all made it. See if we're being followed," Dennis said.

Gail glanced back through the dust in the town's direction. The town's lights barely gave enough light for her to distinguish what direction any of the Lizzars were going. It took her a few moments before she said, "I think some of them are following us."

"Good. How far back are they?" he asked.

"I'm not sure," she answered.

"Okay, I'm going to signal a halt. Keep a sharp lookout." Dennis pushed on the car horn three times to signal the halt. He braked and the other cars followed suit. As soon as he had his car stopped, he asked, "Well, any Lizzars around us?"

"We're clear," Gail answered.

Dennis opened his car door, stepped out, and looked back at the pursuing Lizzars. Then he glanced at the other cars before hurriedly getting back inside and closing his door. He blasted his car horn twice and put the car in forward. Beside him, the other four cars moved out once more.

"What could you see?" Gail asked.

"They're about a hundred yards behind us. We'll lead them off a few miles before we turn the tables on them," Dennis replied.

The ramps approached within thirty yards of the town. Molotov cocktails arced out into the night to explode or shatter among the Lizzars shoving the ramps forward. Dozens of fires soon illuminated the plain as hundreds of Lizzars found themselves fleeing for their lives from the infernos that temporarily engulfed two dozen of the ramps.

Another round of cocktails arced out to fall among the Lizzars at other ramps. They too went screaming in agony away from the burning ramps. Some of the ramps caught on fire as well.

John saw that there was time for one more round of cocktails. He hollered out loudly, "Throw one more and evacuate!"

More Molotovs streaked through the sky to splatter against new targets. More Lizzars faced fire, the only thing they couldn't defend themselves against. The plain was eerily lit up while part of the Lizzar advance was thrown into mass confusion even as the rest of the ramps reached the slopes.

The human defenders left the bunkers and ran for the school while the enemy ramps moved into position. Around the town, the other ramps received new Lizzar pushers to shove them into place. Sniper shots continued to be heard as Lizzar leaders were slowly picked off whenever they could be spotted.

Frea heard the explosions of the Molotov cocktails. She knew the town was being besieged at last. Her unit was still struggling forward and unable to help.

Dennis switched off his lights and pulled ahead of the other cars. The other cars doused their lights so he could turn around ahead of them without being observed. He was driving back to use his car's ramming ability to its best advantage. He swung wide to the flank to avoid a collision before he turned back toward the town.

John sighed with relief when the last of the kids reached the school. One was being helped by two others after being wounded by a thrown spear. The Lizzars were already pouring up the ramps into the town after hurling several hundred spears ahead of them. It didn't take the Lizzars long to find the first set of traps and lose a few dozen troops when they fell into pits and impaled themselves. Other Lizzars found the paths around the pits only to face the next set of defenses.

Dennis picked up speed as he approached the Lizzar units surrounding the centaur cohort. Gail shoved the tape into the stereo and placed her earplugs into her ears and then more earplugs into his ears. She turned up the volume as his speed approached close to seventy miles an hour.

Freya heard the sounds of music. She fired two blasts from her shotgun at the Lizzars to guide the car toward her force. She shouted out, "Two...Three," as her force continued to advance step by step.

Dennis turned on his headlights at nearly the last possible moment as he approached the Lizzar units surrounding the centaur cohort. The spotlighted Lizzars were surprised and terrified as they saw the ram car bear down on them with no time to react or get out of the way. Dozens of Lizzar bodies bounced off the angled bumpers into their comrades as the unit was slashed by the car that was going close to ninety by then. In the ensuing panic, Lizzar troops blundered into the waiting spears on one flank of the cohort.

Dennis saw clear space in front of him and slowed down after breaking through the last Lizzar unit. He turned the lights off before putting the car into a wide turn so he could charge on the cohort's other flank and relieve it from the pressure it was facing. He gunned the engine and picked up speed as he raced toward the Lizzar units once more. Turning the lights back on, he adjusted his angle and stepped on the accelerator to push the car close to eighty before he hit the first Lizzar troops.

More Lizzar bodies thumped against the angled bumpers and were tossed into the air. They flew outward to smash against their comrades inflicting more injuries as their chest armor and weapons became missiles. More panic set in among the Lizzars facing the cohort. Anxious to escape, they foolishly engaged the centaur warriors or turned and ran into their comrades, blocking them from helping the few who were fighting.

John observed the centaur cohort once more as it was lit up by the single car's headlights on its passes through the Lizzar units. He watched in a mesmerized state at the Lizzar bodies. Bodies were thrown into the air. At the same time, other bodies plummeted onto others. Some bodies seemingly flew as if in slow motion. The rain of Lizzar bodies was throwing the Lizzars into confusion.

"How are they doing?" Kitten asked.

"They got back just in time. I think Freya's going to make it out without too many casualties," he answered.

Freya saw that the Lizzars in front of her were thinning. She shouted, "Fire shotguns and charge!"

Two blasts from four shotguns thinned the Lizzars in front of her unit. The centaur warriors wheeled about within the formation and followed her in their charge to open space. They slashed out to the sides with their swords while their spears kept the front relatively clear. Some Lizzars, impaled on spears, were carried forward along with the charge.

Freya led her force at full gallop away from the Lizzars until they were far enough away to slow down and not need to immediately defend themselves once more. Dennis saw that her unit was free. He honked his horn once before heading back out to rejoin the other cars that were still trailed by more Lizzars.

"They made it. Best I could tell, Freya lost about a quarter of her force," John said.

"The Lizzars are getting cautious about our traps in the town," Kitten said.

"I can see that. They're not used to fighting our style. I guess we'll just have to teach them the hard way."

"Well, you are a teacher, so I guess you're right."

Below in the town, the Lizzars no longer ran. They walked and looked where they stepped for fear of more traps. Even that was to their disadvantage as they became easy targets for snipers and archers who fired at anyone on a safe path.

At one place, nearly a dozen Lizzar troops were trying to pick broken glass out of their feet. In another, more Lizzars thrashed on the ground in agony from having stepped on water balloons that activated dry acid which then ate at their flesh. In their haste, they tripped to the ground where their bodies came into contact.

"Wind's right to release the condom bombs at the station, John," Ben said.

"Do it then," John replied.

Ben cut the kite string that stretched from the roof of the gym to the roof of the gas station. Condom bombs fell from out of the darkness onto more broken glass. The condoms broke. Their contents mixed, releasing a small cloud of lethal chlorine gas that hovered against the ground and swept slowly through the Lizzars. Gasping and choking, the Lizzars fell twitching to the ground while the cloud crept toward more of their unwary comrades as it cleared a swath through them.

"Yeah! Take that, you refugees from a luggage factory!" Ben shouted.

At the doorways to the school, desks blocked the Lizzars from entering after they opened the doors. Their attempts to shove the desks aside met with sharp spears that came through small openings to thwart them. Above on the roofs, snipers and archers kept the Lizzars from getting enough troops at the doorways with any success.

Even with hundreds of Lizzar bodies lying about, the town was soon swarming with a thousand or more live Lizzars checking the wrecked buildings for defenders. Once they found the other buildings empty, they turned all their attention toward the school.

Dennis turned on his headlights and pressed down on the accelerator. He sped up and plowed through the rear of the Lizzars trailing the other cars. He passed between the cars, slowed for his turn, and then accelerated once more to charge at the pursuers.

Molotov cocktails plunged down from the roof of the school onto the Lizzars milling about below. Dozens were sent fleeing into the night aflame. Despite that, other Lizzars surged forward to take their place as soon as the flames died out.

"We're out of Molotovs, John," Ben said.

"In that case, we'll just have to fight with what's left. How's the wind? Can we throw more condom bombs down at them?" John asked.

Ben answered, "No good for our people down there."

"Then we'll just have to do it without those. Cheryl, go around and find out how our ammunition is holding out," John said.

On the roof overlooking the front doors, a girl screamed as a thrown spear pierced her lower abdomen to travel upwards through her body. She staggered back, twisted about, and then fell from the roof. Though dead, the Lizzars hacked away at her body for a minute.

John shouted, "Tell everyone to keep away from the edges! Don't give the Lizzars any easy targets!"

Cheryl returned. Her face was ashen. She said, "We're almost out of bullets and arrows."

"Doesn't look good for the home team, huh?" John asked.

A flurry of spears arced up onto the roof. John stood still as they fell around him without hitting him. A few screams and cries of pain came from others not so lucky. John pulled his pistol, aimed down at the Lizzars, and emptied it, noting with satisfaction that each shot had hit one of them. He calmly reloaded and emptied it once more, getting more hits though some hit on chest armor.

John said, as he reloaded with his last ammunition, "Cheryl, tell everyone to use what they have now. Then they should throw back the spears the Lizzars are giving us."

John fired as Cheryl ran to pass on his instructions. He calmly holstered his empty pistol and said, "Okay, Kitten. Let's throw some spears now."

John picked up two nearby spears. He drew back his arm and launched one, then the other in quick succession while Kitten quickly began gathering more spears to hand him.

Cheryl returned a few minutes later. "Everyone is out of bullets and arrows now."

Ben shouted, "They're getting in the front door!"

John said calmly, "Cheryl, tell everyone to begin falling back to the gym."

Cheryl ran down the broken roof into the gym while Ben shouted to the teenagers still on the rest of the school roof to fall back.

John threw more spears until Kitten had none to give him. "That's all, Coach."

"Okay, help the wounded down to the gym so Tammy can see to their wounds. I'll be along soon."

Frea quickly estimated the odds facing her as her unit caught up with the Lizzars trailing the cars. She ordered, "Spear charge!"

The cohort lined up and then ran at full speed toward the confused Lizzars who found themselves between two enemy units. Scattered about so they couldn't be run over as easily, they were in no position to resist the oncoming cavalry charge of Frea's Fifth Cohort.

The cohort threw their spears when they closed to within throwing range and followed up with their swords as they threw themselves into a melee with the Lizzars. Hand-to-hand combat broke out as the Lizzars tried to regroup and present a strong front. They were too late. The Lizzars facing the cohort cracked from the spears and crumbled completely from the swords.

Frea's cohort passed through the Lizzars, leaving a path littered mostly with Lizzar bodies. Quickly, they caught up with the cars to resume their responsibility as the armed escort. In very little time, they outdistanced the pursuing Lizzars.

John felt the spear hit his shoulder. He fell and tumbled down the room into the gym. Around him, others quickly responded to his plight as he was picked up and carried away to be treated. Ben rushed down to his side.

"Take over, Ben. Don't let them get the books. There's still too much good stuff in the library," John said.

"We'll burn them first!" Ben said.

"If you have to. We'll just have to make do with what we saved," John said.

"They're almost to the library!"

Ben ran toward the library. He shouted, "Burn the books! We can't let them get the books!"

Teenagers ripped out pages and then struck matches to some of those after twisting those into small torches. They tossed the makeshift torches into piles of discarded books as they retreated from the rear of the library toward the door. By the time they reached the doorway, the back of the library was becoming an inferno. Smoke, heavy and gray, poured out toward them.

"Okay, everyone fall back to the gym! We'll hold them off there!" Ben ordered.

Someone asked, "Where's our reinforcements?"

Though he didn't really know, Ben shouted, "They're having to fight their way through, I imagine!"

"I hope they arrive soon!"

Someone asked, "What's the matter? You late for a date?"

There were a few strained laughs as they withdrew to the gym, some of them assisting the wounded.

"Where are the centaurs Frea left with us?" Ben asked.

One teen replied, "They stayed behind to hold back the Lizzars. I don't guess they're still alive now."

Ben and the teens reached the gym doors and squeezed through the barricade to join the rest of the people inside the gym. Ben turned and looked down the smoky corridor for the first Lizzars to attack. Around him, others watched nervously for the Lizzars to assault them once more. A stillness filled the air.

Someone asked, "What's happening? Are the reinforcements here now?"

"Quiet! We can't hear what's going on!" Ben hollered.

The gym became deathly quiet save for occasional coughing from the wounded. No one moved. Most held their weapons against their bodies so they wouldn't clank them into anything. Some smoke filtered through the barricade to then swirl momentarily before being drawn upward through the broken roof and

out into the night sky.

John staggered over to Ben's side, a bandage already covering his wound.

"You shouldn't be up," Ben said.

"Up, down, it's not going to matter much in a few minutes. Can you hear anything?" John asked.

"Not yet. The fire might be holding them back for now."

"Good. That helps. We need the time to reorganize. They hurt us bad," John said.

"How bad?" Ben asked.

"Last count I got was twenty boys and fifteen girls dead. I shouldn't have put so many out on the lower roof. We're still figuring out how many wounded. Probably most of us."

"Shhh! I hear something!" Ben said.

Clawing sounds faintly came to their ears. They looked around, then Ben shouted, "They're on the roof!"

"Everyone fall back to the pool!" John shouted.

Before he could cross the littered gym floor, Lizzars reached the gym roof and charged down it. A Lizzar leader shouted, "Take them alive! We must have their knowledge!"

John shouted, "Don't let them..." when he was suddenly tackled by two Lizzars. Then a third threw himself on top as John struggled to free himself. His vision blocked, he couldn't tell how well anyone else was faring. Another and another Lizzar took hold of him before he quit resisting.

Chapter 13

John stood groggily, his wound open and bleeding again while several Lizzars restrained him. Around him, others were similarly restrained by two or three Lizzars. A Lizzar leader walked into the center of the huge circle the prisoners were held in.

"Where is your leader? Which one of you is Coach Weaver?"

Ben sneered, "I am."

"Bring him here!" the Lizzar leader ordered.

The Lizzars restraining Ben shoved him forwards. More Lizzars moved quickly to assist them against his struggles.

The Lizzar leader held his sword at the ready. He nodded to the Lizzars holding Ben. Quickly, they took hold of his legs so he couldn't resist anymore. With two to each arm and leg, Ben relaxed as he looked at the Lizzar leader.

"Time to kill me, huh?" Ben asked.

The Lizzar leader said, "That would be too easy. You'll still be a fine slave in the mines."

"Well, that sword in your hands doesn't look to me like you intend to let me live," Ben said.

"You shall live, but you'll not produce anymore leaders." The Lizzar leader reached between Ben's legs as Ben suddenly realized what he was in for. He tried to wiggle free to no avail. He felt the Lizzar's short clawed fingers take hold of his privates, stretching them up from his body before the sword flashed once to sever them. Ben screamed in agony at his loss while blood spurted from his wound. Cynthia fainted on seeing her husband emasculated. The Lizzar leader threw them on the floor and stomped on them. Then he ordered, "Take them away!"

The day broke with the prisoners forced to walk deeper into Lizzar territory while surrounded by armed guards. Aside from a few bandages, they had nothing left. Kitten and Victoria assisted John to walk. Victoria kept one hand pressed on John's bandage to keep him from bleeding to death. Cynthia was restrained by two boys and forced to march on after her husband bled to death along with several other seriously wounded. Their bodies were hacked apart by the Lizzars following them after being left behind by the surviving prisoners.

John mumbled.

Victoria said, "Hush! Don't talk! Just listen! Whatever happens, don't admit to being who you are. Ben took your place while you were too groggy to know what was happening. They didn't kill him, but they cut off his manhood. Now he's dead."

John jerked slightly as he tried to understand. He mumbled, "My manhood?"

"Shut up, I said! Don't talk! We've all been captured. What's left of us, that is," Victoria said.

"How many?" John asked hesitantly

"Sixty of us are still alive. The others are dead," Victoria said.

Kitten noticed another girl fall on the ground. A boy checked her quickly, then shook his head and moved on. Before Kitten could utter a word, Victoria said, "We've been overhearing them talk with each other. They intend for us to work in their mines and produce more slaves for them. Our bodies are better suited than the centaurs for working inside the mines. From what we've heard, each male is responsible for working in the mine during the day and taking care of as many women as possible at night to get us all pregnant."

Kitten said, "You'll like this part. The Lizzars noticed you're hung. You get to have more women than the others."

John mumbled, "How many dead?"

"I'm not sure. Just concentrate on staying alive. Maybe we can escape, but we need you to lead us," Victoria said.

Dennis drove up to the town. He looked at the scattered Lizzar bodies littering it. Smoke still curled

upward from the library.

"You don't think they're all dead, do you?" Gail asked.

"I don't know. Stay in the car while I check inside the school."

Dennis left the car with the engine running. Drawing his pistol, he carefully made his way through the bodies to the entrance. He almost gagged upon seeing the hacked apart centaurs left behind. When he reached the gym, he had to count the heads to determine that not everyone was accounted for. By the time he reached the car some minutes later after checking the roofs, his stomach was completely empty.

Gail asked, upon seeing his sickly color, "Are they all dead?"

"No. Most of them must have been captured. I found what was left of forty-two of them."

"Was the Coach dead?" Gail asked.

"I didn't find him in there. He must be a prisoner, too. From the looks of it, the library burned before the Lizzars could capture it," Dennis answered.

"Then it's up to us to give the centaurs technology since they can't read yet," Gail said.

"And to free our people," Dennis added.