

The First Day

Thunder rumbled loudly and Polly groaned. Why did it have to start raining? But rain was a good thing...the gang wouldn't meet today, wouldn't go out into the park and no one would get hurt. What would they think of her wild dream though? Most likely laugh at her for coming up with such a crazy story, and harangue her worse than ever. Greg wouldn't be pleased at becoming a fish...no, it would be best not to mention it at all.

The thunder came again and she realized it *wasn't* thunder at all. Someone was pounding at her door.

Who could that be? She wondered grumpily. She lived alone in her tiny apartment, all she could afford after her parents kicked her out for running with the gang. No one could be at the door, it wasn't big enough to hold meetings.

"All right, all right, I'm up!" she growled when the pounding started again.

"Aaak, aawwk, iik!" was what she heard instead.

Her eyes slammed open in horror. A huge lump lay under the blankets and she cast them off hurriedly to see her horse body on its side with the legs in front of her. Dimly she noted how the golden coat matched her hair perfectly, the white hair of the tail neatly balanced with the tiny mane that ran from the shoulders to the human back. But she failed to appreciate anything else just then, instead she screamed!

It just couldn't be true! It just couldn't! Last night had to have been a dream, her mind chanted over and over again.

Her thick door burst inward and she looked up to see the man from her dream running in, pursued closely by Molly bounding with liquid grace and ease with the bottom half of a leopard. Polly saw a gray mist form at the corners of her vision, her eyes locked onto Molly's in horrified denial.

"It's okay! It's okay!" she hurried up to her. "It wasn't a dream, you're all right now."

Polly was surprised at the tenderness displayed, but she was grateful all the same. It allowed her to get a little better control of herself, the screams gave way to hyperventilating, which in turn gave way to sobs as she clung for comfort.

When she opened her eyes next, she saw the extreme displeasure on *his* face as he stood behind the pair, and she began to tremble anew.

"I trust you are finished." He spoke in icy tones.

Molly whirled around and bristled. "What did you expect you son of a bitch!" she snarled. "She woke up hopin' it wuz a dream! How could it not? But she found it wuz real! O' course she flipped! Anyone would!"

"You were much quieter." He pointed out.

"Well, I was gonna scream, till I fell out'ta the basket."

Molly admitted, glaring at the man with intense hatred.

Polly noticed that he'd dressed in a fine robe with matching Turkish slippers. For a moment she looked for his pipe but saw none.

"Well, that was more excitement than I wanted for the morning." He said. He sounded annoyed instead of angry, which Polly took as a good sign.

"I guess I should have expected this, you are correct about that." He admitted. "But I trust that this will be the last time this happens." He added warningly.

"That reminds me."

From the pocket of his robe he produced two keys with intricate wards. On the stem of one a silver horse had been inlaid on the gold. For the other, a silver cat.

"These are the keys to your rooms." He explained. "They are not sufficient to keep me out in an emergency, but they will keep anyone else from entering your rooms, period. I suggest you keep them close."

He handed the horse to Polly and the cat to Molly.

"Now then, let us get started on the day."

He turned briskly to go when Molly tugged on his sleeve.

He eyed her hand coldly until she let go.

"'Xcuse me." She said, struggling to keep her voice calm.

"But ain't we forgettin' sumthin'?"

"Your English is atrocious." He told her. "You are going to work on that. Very well." He sighed at her look. "What do you think I have forgotten?"

"How 'bout sum clothes?" Molly asked dryly. "I don' feel comfort-able walkin' 'round with jus me titties hangin out for you to gawk and paw at!"

Polly nodded her support at this sensible suggestion, thankful Molly had brought it up.

"I hadn't forgotten." He told her dismissively. "Most taurians have no need for clothes."

"We ain' taurians." Molly pointed out icily. "We's humans."

"Not anymore." He told her frostily. His eyes were as friendly as chipped ice. "You lost all rights when you started to prey upon the weak. If you want to earn those rights back, I suggest you learn to follow the rules closely. The more you earn my trust, the more I shall allow you to have. Betray that trust and I will leave you with less."

Unwilling to accept this, Polly reached out with one hand and lightly touched his pant leg, hating herself even as she did so. Hoping that the lessons she'd learned were still with her, she tried to look as woe-begone as she could. It was easy to do since she still had to look up at him, though now she wasn't too much below his chin.

He sighed in vexation.

"I suppose, since you were human once, that I accord you that custom." He agreed, snapping his fingers.

Polly felt the wonderful, *familiar* sensation of clothes again and looked down to find herself dressed in a cute brown blouse and white vest. Molly was dressed similarly, but with a red vest.

"Now, if you are quite finished." He said testily, "We can return to the matter of breakfast. You will have ten minutes to freshen up, then you will come to the kitchen where we will eat, and then go over your duties in detail along with a tour of the house."

This time he did turn and really left.

Polly got to her feet slowly, almost ending up on her face as her hooves sank in the uneven mattress.

On firm floor she found her footing better and she stood towering above her companion.

"Damn, girl." Molly said admiringly. "You've gotten tall."

Polly didn't know how to say thank you, so she flashed a quick smile.

This mute thing is going to be a real pain, she thought.

"Listen," Molly said much quieter now, her eyes taking in the door as if measuring it for potential spies. "We've gotta talk. Maybe tonight, since we now have keys. We gotta escape if possible."

Polly nodded slowly. Having a planning session sounded like a good idea.

"Okay, tonight then." Molly said, picking herself up and hurrying to the door.

"Best 'Freshen up' she said mocking Konner's voice. "'Fore pretty boy complains."

Polly nodded, wondering what more she could do to "freshen up" without being late. After all, the time allotted wouldn't let her even shower as a human, let alone how long it would take as this!

In the end she decided to wash her face with the thoughtfully provided rag. Toweling the dampness, she rehung it with more than her usual care, uncertain whether the room would snitch on her.

Meeting Molly in the hall, she noticed her companion's face seemed to have met the brush of an artist despite such little time. It practically glowed and Polly felt a pang of jealousy; she must look like such a mess.

"Ya look fine, sweetheart." Molly assured her, clapping her furry hand on her shoulder. She could just reach from her distinct height disadvantage, now standing at just over two-thirds Polly's height.

Polly smiled in thanks and together they both hurried down the hall, wondering which way led to the kitchens.

In the end it was thanks to Molly's nose that they found the room at all. It turned out to be a simple left turn at the main entrance, down past several doors and then a right into a

second hall and then the first right. The left door apparently was the main Dining room.

Through the double doors they found themselves in a space big enough to feed a restaurant. There were gleaming ranges, spotless pots and pans everywhere, more cabinet space than Polly had ever seen, two huge walk in freezers in the back and a walk-in fridge right next to them. Gleaming sinks and dishwashers stood open and ready to be loaded, while vast counter space invited use. On one, a small bookshelf stood carrying several dozen large cookbooks, while beneath that were maybe fifty magazines that Polly felt certain were cooking rags.

Konner was leaning casually on the counter waiting for them to arrive.

"I see you've finally found the place." He spoke without rancor or condemnation, and Polly breathed a sigh of relief.

"It's a big place." He admitted, catching a glimpse of her face.

"Yeah, much bigger than any flat I ever seen." Molly agreed, squinting hard at him. "Where, exactly, are we? There ain't a place like this in the whole city, is there?"

"Well, no. There isn't." He said with a slight smile on his face. "It once was a space on the wall between two such flats. I merely cast a spell to provide a hidden doorway here. It isn't on any map, so I can't be disturbed here. I have many enemies, after all, and will have more in the future. I wouldn't want them coming to my house and murdering me or my servants now, would I?" He laughed warmly at his own joke, but neither Polly or Molly joined in. The two women glanced at each other nervously, realizing that there must be more warlocks like him loose in the world.

"Well, let's get you some breakfast." He said, not picking up the shared look. "There is the pantry," he pointed to a pair of hand-carved doors that Polly discovered opened into another walk-in. This time the shelves were lined with dry goods and in the back was yet another door that she felt certain led to the cellar.

"Behind there you'll find the access to the food cellar." He said calmly, confirming her guess.

"Now, I'm going to tell you about your duties here. I've already eaten, so you may make something for yourselves when I am finished."

"First, I will tell you a bit more about the layout." He said. "Upstairs you will find the upper entrance to the library, some smaller rooms and halls, and my room, which you will find little need to enter. Not," he said, spotting Molly's sudden intense curiosity, "because you will find some hidden tome or rock that will lift your spell from you, but because it is small, and I have no problems maintaining it myself. Feel free to poke around in there if you wish, just make sure to return everything to where you found it, or I will be displeased."

Polly shuddered, but Konner took no notice.

"Down here you will find the kitchen, lower library entrance, main entry hall, and some smaller halls, as well as the door to the backyard. You will not be able to leave by these doors unless I give my express permission." He added. "Though where would you go? Anywhere else, you will be monsters and almost certainly killed, or locked away in a lab, which is far worse than here, I assure you."

His eyes tightened momentarily, but relaxed into their normal frozen disdain. Polly wondered what he meant by that, but filed it away as important.

"Now, as to your duties. Have either of you cooked before?"

Polly shook her head; she cooked for herself, but mostly ramen and other packaged food that she could afford sometimes. Anything else and she would most likely burn it.

Molly stayed impassive until Konner's palm began to glow, though his face indicated amusement rather than anger. "I can cooks a meal." She snarled. "But it ain't fancy stuff."

"Good." The glow vanished. "You will learn, I have no doubt. There are many excellent books in there, and your palette will be a little more demanding of finer things than before. Part of the curse of the cat-folk, I'm afraid." He smiled. "So, you will cook for all three of us now. There will be just three meals a day. You may cook whatever you like for yourself and Polly. As for me, I require just a little toast in the morning with milk. For lunch and dinner, I will alert Polly to my wants, which I can assure you are not onerous."

"Polly," he said, turning to her. Polly shivered, wondering what she would do. "You will be my maid, as it were." He said. Visions of being fondled and used like the porn maids Greg had stashed away in his collection danced in her mind.

"Stop that." Konner scolded, his eyes tightening. "I am NOT going to take advantage of you in the manner you fear, so put that nonsense out of your head. You are going to clean my house for me, and when I wish to travel you will be my steed. There is nothing else I desire of you."

Polly froze, unsure how to take that. In one way, she felt relieved she wouldn't have him pawing her, but in another she felt slightly insulted and hurt; wasn't she good enough to paw?

He chuckled as she came to a sudden realization.

"No." He told her. "I am not, as they say, gay. I do like women in that manner, but you are my servants, and criminals to boot. You are here to see if you can be saved, not fall back into old habits."

"That will be all for now." He said, glancing upwards at the clock. "You are free to wander the house as you wish to become acquainted with its layout. However, I will warn you both that I expect lunch in two hours."

With a nod to them, he strode from the kitchen, seeming to forget them with no effort.

Both women glanced at each other, feeling flat-footed from the abrupt exit.

Molly came to first.

"Right, let's see about grub, then we c'n see about this place." She sighed. "I'd escape, consequences be damned, but I have a feeling doors or windows won't open for either of us, and I really don't want to see what else he'll do."

She shook her head, muttering "This guy could feed a city. What the hell does he need all this for?"

Polly shrugged, a little overwhelmed herself. She pointed to the fridge and freezers and they went to try and pop them open.

Inside, they found a surprising amount of food laid in already, from frozen fish to all kinds of meat, even duck and goose. In the fridge were fresh vegetables and salad, milk, orange juice, apple juice, (though no grape, Polly noticed), bowls of fruit, several cheeses, and jars of condiments lined the shelves. There were dozens of types of sandwich meats and lots of cold pickles.

On the wall towards the house there was an unopened door. This proved to be the pantry, built on the same gigantic scale as the freezers and positively stuffed full o boxed foods, dried and salted meats, dried fish and other non-perishable items.

"Crap." Molly shook her head. "This guy has everything. What do you say to some fish?" she asked.

Polly thought about it, and nodded. While not as appealing to her as it once was, she didn't see the harm in at least trying it out.

Molly looked incredibly pleased, going to the fridge and pulling out one of the huge pieces of fish (it turned out later that it was a whole yellow tail tuna, but Polly didn't know her species of fish too well). Setting it on the counter, she eyed the cookbooks thoughtfully.

"What do you say we try one of these, eh?" she asked.

Pulling a rather large volume from the shelf, she flipped through the pages until she found a recipe she liked.

Polly helped as best she could, hunting through drawers and things to find spoons, knives and other utensils for them, but with only one arm, she felt useless.

Molly eyed the knife wistfully. "Fat lot of good this'll do us getting out." Was all she said.

It wasn't long before they had two large steaks basted and placed in the oven to cook.

There came a ring from a little bell under the sign marked LIBRARY, and she realized the master was summoning her.

She turned to Molly with a feeling of dread. She found sympathy in those green eyes.

"Better go, hon." She said quietly. "Don't want to make him angry."

Polly nodded, licking her lips fearfully.

She stepped into the hall, feeling a moment of panic: which way was the library?

She wasn't sure, but thought that it couldn't too far.

She went back to the entryway with its strange clock. A memory of Konner pointing at the hand-carved walnut doors drifted into her consciousness.

Feeling as if she was taking another chance, she grasped the gold handles and pushed them down and open.

She walked in with a feeling of triumph, spotting the small bookshelves on either side of the gargantuan fireplace.

Just inside the door she stopped, wonder and amazement filling her.

She found herself dwarfed by the two story room that arched gracefully up into a rotunda frescoed with dragons and elves and fairies and humans with awed faces looking at a tall, thin man with a long white pointy beard that stretched nearly down to his broad black boots, a white staff blazoning in one gnarled hand, a leather tome in the other titled (in gold lettering) Knowledge.

Beneath the wizard's watchful blue eyes were shelves and shelves of books, scrolls, etchings, and short clay tablets written in strange alphabets and runes.

The shelves vanished out of sight on the left in endless rows. Looking right she found herself confronted with a cherry wood desk so wide she thought she could drive her crappy Ford Pinto across it.

Stacks of papers and books were neatly organized, nearly obscuring the sight of Konner working laboriously over an old leather book, translating the text onto a spiral bound notebook like what you would find at Office Station. The sight of such ordinary paper seemed so out of place she simply stared. Where was the wrinkled sheepskin parchment? The magic eagle quill?

Konner looked up from his work and met her eyes. She found herself staring into two Earthen orbs. She felt as if she could drown in them, as if they were twin pools of quicksand.

"I'm pleased to see you arrive promptly. Please let Molly know that I would like a corned beef sandwich and a plain glass of water. Tap is fine."

He bent back to his work, dismissing her.

She shook herself free of the spell and returned to the kitchen.

When she got to the kitchen, she found Molly peering through the clear glass door at the lit interior and the dishes inside, her tail twitching with her silent, patient vigil.

Polly knocked politely on the counter to announce her arrival.

"What'cha want, doll?" Molly asked, never taking her eyes off the fish. "I've got to keep a close eye on this, we're just about perfect on it. This oven cooks a lot faster than I'm used to."

Polly mimed eating a sandwich, but gave it up as a bad job when she saw Molly was frowning at the reflection.

"Bastard wants'ta eat, eh? What 'bout sum arsenic?" she grinned nastily. "Or cyanide? Be pleasant, eh? Ah, well. He wouldn't die, the jerk. But what does he wan'?" she asked.

Polly mimed a sandwich again, making sure her reflection would be easily seen, but nothing either. Molly still looked baffled.

Casting about in desperation, Polly noticed a small magnetic dry erase board on the fridge. She blinked, had that been there before?

Peeling it off the fridge, she quickly wrote Konners instructions and turned to find Molly removing the fish from the oven. Polly stood back to watch her work, amazed at how dexterously and precisely Molly placed the pan on the rack and quickly add some cilantro and lemon juice. Polly couldn't see a wasted drop anywhere.

"All right." Molly sighed, turning around and holding her hand out to seize the board. "Let's see, sandwich, huh? All right, doll, I can do that."

She went to the pantry and refrigerator, pulling out what she needed. Quicker than Polly could think "knife!", she'd made a towering sandwich and whisked it onto a clean plate. The plate she placed on a serving tray along with a glass of water.

"You take that to the bastard, then hurry back here, and we'll eat." Molly's eyes gleamed with her excitement.

Polly frowned, again noticing the sudden shift in accent in the other woman, but did as she bid and hurried into the library.

"Thank you, Polly." Konner said.

Leaving him to his work, she hurried back to the kitchen where she found Molly had already set two plates for themselves across the kitchen table. Polly glanced around for the chairs but didn't see them.

"Don't bother." Molly said, catching her glance. "They ain' any. I looked."

"Not bad." Molly said when they were finished. "I guess the recipe there was right about the paprika."

She gave a satisfied, toothy smile. "Now, to clean up!"

Polly moved to give her a hand. She turned on the sink and immediately heard a hissing, spitting sound. Polly whipped around to see Molly's eyes turn to black and her fur stand out.

Polly leapt back, afraid of being struck.

"Sorry." Molly gasped. "I...I don't know what came over me! When you t-turned on that w-w-water!" she stopped, overcome.

Polly frowned, then realized. She snapped her fingers. Molly looked at her.

Using the white board, she explained what she'd figured out.

"You think the cat instincts are making it so I don't like

water." She read thoughtfully. "You know, I think you might be on to something, Polly." She glared again at the sink, then grimaced and walked to it like she was walking to the gallows.

"Let's get it over with." She said.

Polly immediately dove into the soapy side, determined to try and make the experience as pleasant as possible. But before she could get her hands past the first dish..

Ring! Ring-a-ling!

The bell to the library went off again. Polly glared at it, then looked helplessly at Molly.

"It's all right, girl. Go on and see to th' bastard." She drawled. "I got this."

She turned back to the sink while Polly hurried out the door and down to the library.

She quickly collected Konner's dishes and returned to find Molly arm deep in soapy water with a scowl on her face and her tail lashing the table in her irritation.

"Dammit, I don't mind b-b-b-baths when I was human." She bit off.

Polly shrugged, not knowing what to say to her newfound friend. Instead, she simply took her place to dry. Opening and closing the cupboards let her find where most of the dishes were located. In addition, she found mixers, toasters, pots, pans, skillets, and other cooking paraphernalia of every description, some she was familiar with at least but some that she couldn't make heads or tails out of.

Before they could make any further move, the bell for the library rang again.

"We'll go together this time." Molly decided.

Together the two returned to the library to see what Konner wanted.

He hardly glanced up when they entered. He finished writing a last portion of his work and set down his pen.

"Molly, thank you for lunch, it was delicious." His voice was calm and polite.

"Polly," he said, turning to her. Polly felt her heart skip a beat. "Today I would like the house dusted. Not only will this keep you out of trouble, but it will satisfy your curiosity about the house."

He leaned back into his chair and looked sternly at them. "Now, I understand you will have a desire to leave this place. I will allow only one escape attempt before I start punishing you. You may try any way you wish, but know that it will be the only time I will be so generous. You have literally nowhere to go anymore. Who will ever be able to turn you back, but me? Should I decide to do so at all; in time you may find life here pleasant."

Fat chance. Polly shuddered at the thought and Molly looked downright ugly under her fur.

"Well, perhaps not right away." He said unperturbed. "But

for now, I will let you continue on with the chores. I shall inspect the house upon the hour of six, and I expect the work to be complete by then. Also, Molly, I will expect dinner to be at seven, and both of you to be in attendance. That is all."

With that speech, he waved his hand dismissively and bent to his work once more, which Polly could now see was translating the text of some ancient tome onto his pad.

Leaving him to his work, the pair went out into the hall and looked bemusedly around for a closet or anything they could use to dust with.

"Well, there might be a broom closet or something further down one of these halls." Molly said morosely, looking about.

Polly made a 'Let's go and see!' motion with her hands, and the two trotted down the plush red carpeted halls. Along the way they passed dozens of paintings, some of landscapes and some of animals. Polly felt faint when she realized the paintings were actually moving! She couldn't believe it, and she watched a whale breaching the water and swimming gaily about its home for a few minutes before Molly tore herself from it and dragged Polly away.

At long last they found a broom closet. Grinning like schoolgirls in relief, they hurried to the closet found inside two dozen dusters ranging from thick fluffy tail-like ones to actual store-brand dust catchers. There were two vacuums hung on hooks and beside them on shelves were batteries and charging units.

"Wow." Molly said, impressed.

The pair got to work, dusting the numerous tables, paintings, armor sets, chairs, electric candelabras, light fixtures and mountings. Polly lost all track of time as she worked.

Yet she didn't lose track of her wits, making mental maps of all the rooms they found and uncovered, as well as all the windows. There were only two exits in the entire house, the main door that they entered in, and a smaller backdoor on the far side of the house. They tried to open this, but found it wouldn't respond to any of their efforts while neither wanted to risk damaging the door and suffering further punishment.

"I'll say this for the bastard," Molly grudgingly admitted. "He's made it so's anyone would be too afraid to try *anythin'* bad."

Polly nodded fervently in agreement.

Cleaning the house continued until half-past four and they wearily headed for the kitchen for a rest before dinner. It hadn't been the state of the house that took them so long, but simply its sheer size. It had to be larger and roomier than anything Polly could ever remember being in her life, and that included the trip to the county museum!

There were plenty of oddities about the house besides the

paintings. The suits of armor would seemingly change positions, though neither of them could catch them moving at all. There were rooms full of strange object that would be more at home in the museum. Each item neatly labeled with a warning describing what curse or spell associated with the objects. Cursed chairs, magic spoons, a enchanted rake that apparently harped in the full moon out of tune, were just some of the curiosities they uncovered.

"This place is like some sort of occult museum." Molly commented as she dug around the pantry for something to eat.

Polly nodded. Both of them were tired, but she still caught the slight shift in accent from Molly again.

Curious, she thought. Then put it from her mind for the present; after all, the Hammer actually attended university before he made the campus too hot to hold him, and he'd done his best to bury his past behind him when he came to them. Perhaps Molly had something similar.

Her friend decided to make a simple spaghetti, pulling several boxes of the hard noodles and placing them on the counter.

She looked thoughtfully at the cookbooks before shaking her head no.

"I've cooked 'paghetti 'fore." She said.

It didn't take long for the noodles to boil and the tomato sauce to heat. They prepared three plates, then Polly took one to the library for Konner but found him just closing the doors behind him.

"Ah, Polly." He said when he caught sight of her. "Dinner, eh? Excellent. Please bring it into the dining room. Yours and Molly's as well."

He left went up the stairs towards his room while she stood there in surprise at the invitation...weren't servants supposed to eat alone in the kitchen or something?

Catching herself, she hurried to the dining room with its long oak table capable of supporting thirty diners at least. Placing Konner's dish at the head of the table like she'd seen in the movies, she hurried to the kitchen and relayed his instructions via the whiteboard.

Molly frowned. "Huh, I ain't expectin' that. Well, I guess we see, won' we eh?"

She put down her fork and piled some extra spaghetti on her plate, then the two of them went to the dining room.

Konner was already waiting for them when they went in, though he certainly had the longer walk. Polly wondered for a moment if he'd simply magicked himself back into the room, but then she wondered why he would bother. Likely whatever he needed to do upstairs hadn't taken long.

"I'm glad to see you are both doing well. I must say the house has never looked better."

His tone told Polly that he was being sincere, and she

dipped her head in mute acknowledgment. For an instant, she hoped that he would give her back her voice, but that hope sank and died quickly.

"Well, now that you've had a chance to look around, no doubt you are planning your escape." He didn't sound annoyed at the prospect; rather irritatingly cheerful.

"I won't bother asking what they are," he continued, "As that would ruin the whole point of the thing, wouldn't it?"

And he laughed. Polly smiled weakly and Molly just ground her teeth.

"But now, enough of mirth." He said, switching to his usual businesslike manner quicker than a striking cobra. "We must look to the schedule you will both keep. I will not allow any deviation from it; we are trying to break your bad habits, after all."

"In the morning, you will both awaken before six, there are alarms now for each of you. You will both be washed and bathed by seven and ready for breakfast at eight. I will take it here in the dining room, Polly. Molly will cook. Then after breakfast you will both clean this house until eleven-thirty when you will make lunch. It may differ as to whether I will take it in the dining room or the library, and I will alert you accordingly. After lunch and washing up the dishes, you will both come to the library where you will each have a series of lessons laid out for both of you. I will not tolerate dolts in my house, so be warned! I will be testing you regularly and if I find you are slacking it will not go well for you. After your lessons there will be an exercise period down in the cellar where I have an exercise room. It is unlocked so if you have a problem I suggest you work it out down there. Dinner will be held at seven sharp. I doubt for the present it will be fancy, as I have very small wants when it comes to my meals. You may have the remainder of the evening until ten for whatever you wish to do, but bed will be mandatory at that time. Are there any questions?"

Molly opened her mouth to furiously protest but Konner silenced her with a cold look.

"I am not going to bend." He warned them. "You are criminals, but for that you might not be unsavable with the right discipline and training. Remember that."

Polly shivered, her fingers touching her throat before she could force her hand back down to the table. He certainly had a way to enforce his rules over them!

The rest of the dinner was silent; none of them felt like talking now. After a tense half-hour the plates were gratefully taken by Polly to the kitchen. At that point she wanted out of that horrible room more than anything.

"This is bullshit." Molly growled as she carried her own dish right behind her. "We're 'posed 'ta learn a lesson from this asswipe? The dickface ain't even a cop!"

Polly shrugged in partial agreement; he wasn't a cop but as

far as she was concerned, he was something far worse!

Putting her friend's grumbling from her mind, she put the dishes in the dishwasher followed by the pot. Molly helped her with the silverware and she pushed the door shut. Neither of them ran it, for what was the point with so little in it? Instead, they opted to head down to the exercise room a little early.

No one was about when they made it down the cellar elevator at the rear of the house and switched on the lights.

"Wow." Molly said, impressed.

The cellar stretched the full length of the house and was divided into just six rooms. One room seemed dedicated to a large pool and hot-tub area, while another had an indoor tennis and badminton court, an exercise room with weights and treadmills large enough for a taur to walk comfortably on, a wine cellar stood behind another door with twelve barrels of wine and ten of beer, but also had nearly forty boxes of soda in all flavors. Oddly, there wasn't a diet drink to be found, but they both opened their preferred drink and sipped it gladly, grinning at each other. The last two doors turned out to be storage rooms.

"I see you made it down all right." Konner remarked as he walked down a set of stairs the appeared right beside the elevator.

Those weren't there a second ago, were they? Polly asked herself in confusion.

"The 'vator wuz a nice touch." Molly sneered.

"Yes, I made it just for your needs." He said. "Recognizing the difficulty Polly was going to have."

Molly blinked, glancing at her in surprise and chagrin.

"Oh, right. Forgot 'bout that."

Polly felt puzzled, what were they talking about?

"Horses can't go down stairs." Konner explained. "You could go down backwards, but that would be more than a little awkward." Polly frowned, realizing that there was far more to being a centaur than she thought.

Konner didn't give them any instructions but sat in the weight chair and proceeded to do lifts.

Not knowing what else to do, the two girls considered the instruments available to them then simultaneously went for the treadmills.

There were three of them, one was the size that Polly remembered from the high school gym, but the other two were much larger affairs with a flat deck that stretched at least three times as long as the human treadmill and seemed very sturdy.

Tentatively Polly took the larger of the two and found to her delight that the machine supported her weight easily and seemed surprisingly comfortable to stand on.

Turning it on proved no different than any of the other machines that she'd stepped on before, and she set the pace to a

comfortable walk.

A glance over showed Molly choosing a slightly faster speed, though not by much.

Polly trotted for a while then walked, then trotted again. When she'd finished the treadmill, her time read forty-two-and-a-half minutes and her distance was over twelve miles, leaving her a glow of accomplishment. She'd never taken track in high school, but she felt now she could win any marathon she chose.

Molly did much farther, racking up twenty-three miles, but her fur had become damp and she panted heavily.

Poor Molly, she must be suffering under all that fur. Polly sympathized, but what could they do?

By now Konner had finished his weights and took to the treadmill. Partly to stay as far away from him as they could both went to the weight rack and selected a pair of dumbbells.

Polly grabbed the first that appealed to her, the set of fifteen pounds. She could manage those easily enough for a couple of sets she reasoned.

Expecting resistance, she pulled up like she normally did with hers at home. A crash and thud announced the striking of the ceiling and the return to ground floor of the flying weight.

Everyone stopped and looked at her. Polly flushed red with embarrassment and mouthed an apology, stooping to pick up the errant weights.

How could they have done so much damage, they're so light I think their hollow.

"Next time, choose a more suitable weight." Konner said casually. "You're a member of the centaur race now, and they have much stronger physiques than normal humans. If you normally lifted fifteen pounds as a human, for example, at say, fifteen reps a set for three sets, you should do sixty pounds for the same effect."

They stared at him as if he was nuts. He chuckled.

"Try it." He urged.

Polly returned her weights and doubtfully grabbed the sixty-pound weights.

The cool metal of the bar pressed into her palm, the knurling providing an excellent grip as she slowly drew them up, vowing to let them drop when they got too heavy.

Both came off the rack easily, almost as if they were hollow too, and she examined them suspiciously.

Konner laughed and returned to jogging. Molly grabbed the eighty-pound weights and looked incredulously at Polly. Shrugging they started doing sets of curls.

They pushed themselves a little, wondering what they could do with their new bodies. To Polly's surprise, she could lift more weight than Molly could for longer, though Molly definitely had the edge in grace and acrobatics. She could spin and twirl and leap higher, farther, and easier than Polly and always land unhurt on her feet. Polly took three spills and gave up with a

smarting flank.

After seven chimed, they left the weight room. Konner bid them good night and went up the stairs.

"Well, what'cha like to do, hon?" Molly asked her, looking out her cat-like eyes.

Polly looked around the cellar. She'd have really liked to have taken a swim, but she didn't have a swim suit yet and she wasn't about to swim naked in case Konner came back down.

The badminton and tennis court seemed to have better possibility and she pointed at it.

"Tennis, huh?" Molly looked slyly at her. Her tail twitched in excitement. "I ain' gonna say no to that!"

Polly glanced at her in surprise, wondering what she could mean. What did Molly know of playing tennis? It wasn't exactly a sport that she could picture the heavily tattooed and pierced woman playing. In school tennis had been the sole province of the Ivy-Leaguers, those whose parents were rich enough to guarantee them a free ride to university. Though the school had insisted the sport was open to anyone who was interested, the snobs ensured only one of their own through intimidation or their ridiculous "initiation ceremonies".

Polly had made it in because of Greg, back when he was the coolest kid in school. She'd remembered how quick they'd been to dump her from the team when he left the school, though and the memory of it rankled.

They walked into the room and found all the supplies neatly hung on the wall beside the door. Soon they had a lively match going.

Molly proved far better than Polly expected; her cat body gave her exceptional footwork and control at the dives and leaps necessary to catch some of the outside corners.

Polly, by contrast, felt big and ungainly on the court, though she managed to maintain a respectable score through her fair skills.

"Damn, girl." Molly said admiringly after a half hour of remaining tied. "You're pretty good at this. How long have you played?" she asked eagerly.

Polly shrugged, feeling exhausted; she couldn't remember a more strenuous day in her life. She thought blearily and came up with three years. She held up the corresponding number of fingers.

"Three years? That's really impressive." Molly smiled. "Bet'cha feelin tired, though. C'mon, let's hit the sack."

Polly followed her to their rooms where she bid her good night.

Brushing her teeth, Polly settled onto her soft bed for the night. The last thought in her mind was that Molly had forgotten to speak with her like she'd wanted to earlier. She found herself asleep before her head even hit the pillow.