**Flesh**

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**Flesh: Sacrifice Ch. 03**

Daniella D'Annunzio stood in the shower behind the Oveja Negra, scrubbing her backside with a combination of soap and black "taqsa" powder. Apparently the chupika paste that Dani had so readily accepted the night before was not quite as temporary as she had believed at the time. Blended with some sort of dried berry -- the "chupika," Taksa Kuchu had happily explained -- neither sweat, nor water, nor soap were enough to take the dye off of one's body. Instead, Dani needed the right combination of ashes, dried plant leaves, and crushed nut shells -- and soap, plenty of the Oveja Negra's rough, powdery soap -- to take the handprint of some strange woman off her ass. It was a frustrating ordeal, one made even harder by the fact that, while the Oveja Negra did have running water, it didn't happen to have warm running water.

There were two showerheads in the outdoor shower behind the bar, and Dani -- as she had the previous morning -- dreaded the idea that either Summer or Taksa Kuchu were going to join her for a bath, something that seemed all too likely the happen the longer that Dani stayed in. This wasn't a single sex shower, either, so it wasn't at all impossible that Benitez himself might join her; after all, she'd spent the better part of the previous day with him completely topless, and he'd gotten a few quick peeks at her pussy on top of that.

Benitez would probably be the least offensive of the three, gender aside. Unlike the two other women, Benitez seemed to understand what Dani was going through, seemed to understand her decision to get as far, far away form the Oriente as possible. He didn't agree with her, and seemed disappointed by her decision, but he understood it. After he'd picked her up off the ground in Aya Pampa last night, he'd led her back to his assigned hut for the evening, fetched her her red bra, and even given her one of his button-down shirts to cover herself with. He'd gone back out to Summer, Taksa Kuchu, and the party outside, but he'd checked back in on her every now and then, and put no pressure on her to come back out and join the celebrations.

Taksa Kuchu, on the other hand, seemed annoyed with Dani, as if she'd wasted all her time in even getting to know her over the course of yesterday. She demanded a "why," out of Dani, and tried to argue her into playing Summer's role in some other Huaca village. And, after Benitez silenced her and told her to keep to herself, Taksa Kuchu huffed and puffed and acted angry around Dani the entire hike back to the Land Rover. Dani thought she could understand why -- Dani was rejecting the Huaca people as a whole, Taksa Kuchu's people. She refused to take part in a ritual that Taksa Kuchu would have easily volunteered for had it not required a non-Huaca girl.

Summer was somewhere in between. She was hurt, and felt disappointed, and was particularly stung by Dani's suggestion that La Iniciativa just go hunt for a willing prostitute. She'd expected this to be hard, as it had been with nearly every other girl she'd contacted for La Iniciativa so far. But she'd convinced herself that if Dani would just visit the Huaca, get to know them, get to see their lifestyle, then maybe she'd feel the same tug at the heartstrings that Summer had felt herself so long ago. Summer wanted to talk to Dani -- if not to convince her to stay, then at the very least to make her understand why Summer had to keep taking part in the t'ojsiy. But Dani would have none of it -- making no eye contact with Summer as they awoke that morning, having nothing but cursory conversation with her on the trail, and avoiding her gaze in the Land Rover's mirrors.

"Fuck it," Dani cursed, giving up the handprint. She wanted to get out of the shower before someone came knocking. She'd gotten the stripes off her front, and, more importantly, managed to scrub them off her face. The rough taqsa powder had been an absolute pleasure on the sensitive skin of her nipples, both of which still stung from having been rubbed raw. No one was going to see her bare ass anytime in the near future -- she could live with the handprint. Who's handprint was it anyway? She struggled to remember the names of the girls from the bathhouse. Kalli-Kalli? Miski Chupsi? Wapapa? She could picture the girl in her head, but she couldn't connect the image with a name.

She closed her eyes, and recalled the sensation of the girl's hand, covering in the thick, sticky paste, touching her bare skin. She'd been naked -- her panties surrendered, her loincloth tossed aside -- in front of a good dozen or so teenage girls. This girl -- Taruka? -- had run her hands up and down Dani's body, fingertips touching her forcefully, and with purpose. Tutakuru's hand had glanced along the outside of her pussy while he was getting her "bath." And Dani had been wet.

Dani had woken up that morning in Benitez's hut, finding herself alongside the sleeping Argentine doctor. For one quick moment, a discombobulated Dani D'Annunzio had wondered whether she'd slept with him the night before. She'd been drinking, after all. She was wearing one of his shirts. For an instant, Dani had thought about being with Benitez, and had wondered how he'd been in bed...before the course of the entire previous day had come flooding back.

Maybe. Just maybe. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if Benitez were to join her in the shower. She needed help getting the handprint off her ass. There could be worse things than seeing him as naked as he'd seen her yesterday. There could be worse things than having him see her naked one more time. There could be worse things that making love to someone as good looking as him in an outdoor shower.

Dani was turned on. And, though she hated admitting it to herself, she'd been turned on all morning. She couldn't look at Summer without some combination of lust and disgust, without getting turned on by the memories of the previous evening and hating herself for it. What Summer had done last night -- what Summer had been doing all these years -- was depraved and perverted, and Dani hated Summer for what the very thought of it was doing to Dani herself.

The brunette risked a glance outside the shower stall. No one was coming. And was she really going to do this?

She hated herself.

But for some twisted reason, that self-loathing only made her hotter.

Her nipples were still raw and sensitive from the taqsa powder, and they'd been at attention almost from the moment she'd stripped at Benitez's Land Rover the previous morning. As she touched them again now, for less utilitarian purposes (though perhaps utilitarian in its own way...), she gasped at just how sensitive they really were. A current of sexual stimulation shot through her body.

She hesitated.

What if someone were to come? What if Summer or Benitez or Taksa Kuchu were to discover what she was doing? The outdoor shower, while safely hidden behind the Oveja Negra, wasn't exactly a private place.

She hesitated again.

But...what if someone were to come? What if Summer or Benitez or Taksa Kuchu were to discover what she was doing? Would she stop? Would she be able to stop? Would any of them try to stop her?

She was back in Aya Pampa, strapped to the Y-frame, as the silver dildo penetrated her again and again and again. It wasn't Qaray Puka who manned the sex toy, but rather Summer Monroe, as Benitez and Taksa Kuchu and the Huaca all watched. In and out. Back and forth. Up and down. Dani wasn't sure how much more she could take.

She padded back over to the shower's door, opened it a small crack, and risked another glance out beyond. There was no latch, no lock. And, though she instinctually reached for the handle after finding the coast clear, to hold it shut on the inside, she pulled back. She turned her back, and under the cold stream of water emanated from the shower head, Dani began to touch herself. She glanced to the unguarded door once more, over her shoulder, but was quickly lost in her ministrations.

Propping herself up against far wall with her left hand, Dani spread her legs just slightly and found her clit with her right. There was no time for foreplay, no time for slow, lingering touches -- and Dani didn't need any of that anyhow. She was wet. She was turned on. And it wouldn't take long for her cum.

She was naked in the shower, dripping wet from head to toe. Her light-weight, ankle-length skirt hung over one of the shower's walls, on top of the simple tank top she'd worn out the swamps yesterday morning. Her red panties and matching red bra hung together on a half-banged-in nail turned makeshift coat hook under her bath towel. And yet, for some reason, Dani was still wearing the jaguar teeth and silver beaded necklace that Summer had given her at the Land Rover. It dangled around her neck, dripping water from the shower, as she leaned forward against the far wall of the shower.

She thought she heard something.

Was that someone behind her?

Should she look?

Should she turn around?

Should she stop?

Dani didn't stop. She didn't turn around. She didn't look. She didn't even hesitate in what she was doing. Her middle and ring finger were on her clit, rubbing back and forth, back and forth -- the same way Qaray Puka had done to Summer the night before. She moaned softly, thinking of the way she'd watched Summer be played with, the way that the crowd might have watched Dani be played with on the Y-frame. She thrust her hips against her hand, the same way Summer had bucked against the silver dildo.

Was someone in the shower with her?

Was someone watching her touch herself?

Was someone else getting off on the sight of her getting herself off?

Dani didn't turn around. She didn't even slow down. She'd been on edge since yesterday afternoon, stewing in her own juices. She'd been topless -- topless! -- in front of so many people. She'd lost her loincloth at least three times -- effectively rendering her naked at least twice. And even when she'd been wearing it, the jaguar print design as if she were some sort of jungle princess, her pussy had been uncovered, casually exposed by the slightest movement.

It was too much. Dani could feel the wave coming, and she let it wash over her. Her whole body quivered, her knees felt weak, and suddenly she needed the steadying effects of her left arm even more. She gasped for air, careful not to moan louder than the slower drip of the cold water against the cement. She shut her eyes. She bit her lip. And she rode her climax to its conclusion.

And she hated herself for it.

Slowly -- nervously -- Dani turned around inside the shower. She had sworn that she heard someone in the shower with her, but it had just been her imagination. There was no one in the shower with Dani, but the brunette hadn't quite closed the shower door all the way, and it had swung wide open. There was no one on the other side, nothing beyond the door but Bolivian jungle.

And maybe it was the lingering effects of being so naked for so long yesterday, but the idea of being watched only made it hotter for Dani. The idea that he hated herself for what she was doing only made it hotter for Dani. The fact that she imagined herself as Summer, strapped to the Y-frame, only made it hotter for Dani.

Dani shook her head and reached for the towel.

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The answer was still no. Dani wouldn't do it. She couldn't do it. As much as she might have fantasized about playing Summer's role, fantasies were different from reality. And the reality was that she was Dani D'Annunzio. She was from Vermont. She had a good college degree. She'd spent the last two years in the Peace Corps. She had a mother and a father and two little sisters at home. She had a life. And there was more to it than getting fucked by a bunch of Indians in rural Bolivia.

Summer was already packing for the next village. She, Taksa Kuchu, and Benitez were on their way due south, to Manqus Wasi. It was a two-day trip from San Eduardo, mostly by boat, through jungles and swamps. And given that Summer was scheduled to hit any number of little villages that spring, La Iniciativa needed to be on its way that very evening. Benitez was reloading medical supplies into his bag, counting out vials and needles and bandages. Taksa Kuchu was grabbing gifts and supplies for Chief Suwaqara and his people at one of the little storefronts. The Land Rover was already mostly packed up, as the threesome planned on driving four hours down some rural road that night with a canoe on the roof, camping out, and setting out for Manqus Wasi the following morning.

Dani had said her goodbyes, such as they were. It was awkward with Summer, and Taksa Kuchu couldn't have made her disdain for Dani's decision much clearer. Benitez was a bit better, but he quickly returned to his things, as if he'd already forgotten Dani had have come to visit them in the first place. Not that Dani really felt she deserved much more -- she'd only met these people last night, after all, and she'd shown nothing but disgust and disdain for the campaign all three of them had worked so hard on all these years.

But it hurt her nonetheless. She felt that she'd made a connection with the babbling Taksa Kuchu. She liked Doctor Monroe on a personal level, and had found herself wanting her approval for some weird reason. And Benitez, well...in another life, another world, another time...she might have been attracted him. She might have found him smart, and good-looking, and calm, and funny. Even if she was just half his age, there had been a spark between them. He was doing something good in this world, doing something to make the lives of the Huaca people better, doing exactly what Dani had signed up for the Peace Corps to do, what she'd come all this way from Teguz to do here in Bolivia.

She wanted him to like her.

But La Iniciativa was busy. They were leaving tonight -- in only an hour or so. Dani, on the other hand, was having dinner alone at the bar inside the Oveja Negra. She'd be spending another night upstairs before catching one of the big yellow school buses headed back to Rurrenabaque. And then on to La Paz, New York, and little Cherryfield, Vermont.

"Chaqiska! Chaqiska!"

Dani heard the shouting outside the bar, and assumed that someone had caught sight of Summer in the streets. But, glancing out the window from her stool, Dani saw that it was not Summer, but rather one of a hundreds of little girls running around the Oriente named in her honor. Her mother, carrying another little girl in her arms, chased after her, calling out her name.

"Chaqiska! Chaqiska!"

She was very clearly Huaca. Even in Dani's short time here in San Eduardo, she could tell. The Quechua, the Benianos, the mestizos -- they all had a certain "look" about them. The Huaca were clearly cut from a different cloth. They were tall, they were athletic-looking, they had striking Eastern features about them. This woman was dressed in a simple skirt and a tight-fitting top, but Dani imagined her topless, wearing nothing but a loincloth, and it seemed natural to her.

The little girl dashed across the street, towards the Oveja Negra. But while San Eduardo may have been the capital of the Valle de los Reyes, it didn't have much in the way of motorized traffic, and the mother had little to worry about. Still, little Chaqiska seemed to be intent on getting away, and the mother looked like she was frazzled and had all she could handle in the other little girl in her arms. And so Dani, Paceña in hand, nodded at Chuy and, stepping outside the little bar, intercepted the runaway Huaca girl.

"Rap-hi!" Dani said playfully, offering "hello" to little Chaqiska.

The girl stopped running, mesmerized by the sight of the gringo in San Eduardo. No doubt her interaction with Americans - or anyone who looked like Dani, for that matter -- was fleeting.

"Dani sutiymi," Dani offered, using up the last of the Huaca she'd learned yesterday afternoon. "Imataq sutiyaki?"

The little girl giggled, and answered boldy, "Chaqiska sutiymi!" She then proceeded to launch into a question of her own, to which Dani could only offer a smile in response.

Dani had succeeded in allowing the frazzled mother catch up with her daughter, however. Out of breath, but offering Dani a thankful "gracias," she latched onto Chaqiska's arm and scolded her in their native tongue.

The little girl babbled back to her mother, and then pointing at Dani, instructed her, "Sutiyas 'Dani'!"

"'Dani,'" the mother repeated, offering another smile in Summer's direction. Looking first at Chaqiska, and then back at Dani, the mother introduced heself as Quri Qinti. And then, gesturing at the little girl in her arms, said, "Sutiyas Qapila."

"Qapila," Dani repeated, the name catching in her throat. She tried again. "Qapila."

Dani was frozen. She was out of Huaca words and phrases, and now that introductions had been made, she had little else to offer. But something had snapped inside her, catching her unexpectedly. She thought back to all the little Chaqiskas that she'd met in Aya Pampa -- the Hatun Chaqiska, the Tumpa Chaqiska, the Lunku Chaqiska, and any number of other just plain Chaqiskas. She looked at this little girl here in front of her, this Chaqiska. And she started thinking about all the villages that stretched along the banks of the Rio de los Reyes from here to Brazil, about the Huaca people living in communities no larger that Aya Pampa, about a people whose entire way of life had been profoundly altered and made better by Summer Monroe. Whether the curse had been real or just a self-fulfilling prophecy, the Huaca had been on their way to extinction; an entire generation of Huaca owed their very lives to a blonde biologist barnstorming her way through the Oriente. "Chaqiska," the Huaca had named their children. "Chaqiska."

"Qapila," Dani repeated one last time.

Bottle of beer still in-hand, and dinner sitting back on the bar, Dani rounded the corner outside the Oveja Negra, and found Summer stacking blankets inside the back of the Land Rover.

"I'll go," she offered excitedly to the blonde. "I'll go. I'll do it."

Summer was sure what to say. She stood in stunned silence for a moment, frozen in place, and asked, "Are you sure?"

Dani paused. "No, not at all." But she was. Or, at least, she thought she was. "I don't know. I just...I need to do it. I have to do it. Something about it just...I don't know...feels...right."

It was the truth. Dani wasn't sure about this. Not in the least. But she was going to go through with it anyway.

For the Huaca.

For the Chaqiskas.

For Qapila.

Really, what was it that she was sacrificing? A little dignity? A bit of chastity? Dani had masturbated in the shower when they'd gotten back to San Eduardo. And when it came right down to it, wasn't that all that Summer was asking of her? Wasn't that all that the Huaca were asking of her? Sure, there were more people there, more sets of eyes on her, and Dani herself wouldn't exactly be in charge. But it was more or less the same, wasn't it? She wasn't fucking anyone. The Huaca weren't raping her. She wasn't technically sleeping with anyone.

It was whore-ish, sure. Dani wasn't planning on taking any pictures, or sharing the experience with anyone back home. But, in much the way that her loincloth and toplessness had fit into the accepted norm yesterday, this had become the accepted norm within La Iniciativa. If she could do this one, horrible thing -- and really, was it that horrible? -- then would be making the lives of the Huaca that much better.

"Just once," she quickly amended the offer. "Just once. Let me try it once."

Benitez appeared from behind the bar, carrying his backpack and a pop-tent. Finding the two women together, and sensing something profound between them, he asked, "What's going on?"

Summer was grinning from ear to ear, a smile that was infectious.

Dani, too, was beaming.

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Sunlight streamed through the Land Rover's rear window, and Dani D'Annunzio blinked herself awake. She rolled over, took stock in her surroundings, and remembered where she was.

Which was, for all intents and purposes, nowhere.

The Land Rover was parked on the banks of the Rio Rosa, a tributary to the Rio de los Reyes for which the entire valley was named, which itself was a tributary to the Rio Beni (which, in turn, flowed into the Mamore, the Madeira, the Amazon, and eventually the Atlantic Ocean). They were quite literally at the end of the road, having bombed down well-worn dirt highways out of San Eduardo, and then less-maintained, narrow roads as the sun set, and then down twisting, muddy paths in the dark of night. Dani hadn't understood why they didn't just wait for the morning to leave, but Benitez had insisted that the best place to camp the following night was a full day's journey from where they'd put in. They'd be paddling upstream, but to hear Benitez describe it, the Rio Rosa sounded like a fairly lazy river without a terribly strong current, at least for much of their route.

Benitez was still asleep in the front, his seat completely reclined. He was snoring, and Dani guessed that was what had woken her up. But she had to pee, and the fact that the sun was now coming up over the horizon meant they'd be getting up shortly anyways. She had folded the rear seat down, and had stretched out in the bed of the Land Rover -- feet towards the front, head towards the rear. The tent was packed away, neither Dani nor Benitez thinking it necessary while they still had the Land Rover, and neither having any interest in erecting when the reached the river late last night.

Dani found the handle to the backseat door, and as quietly as possible, creaked it open and stepped out into the Bolivian jungle. They were surrounded on all sides by rain-forest, and even at dawn Dani could already feel the steam and heat of the day. She was wearing nothing more than a simple white tank-top and a pair of purple cotton bikini panties, but she padded barefoot out behind the car nonetheless.

Dani had packed light. She had her swimsuit, as well as a light, little cover-up dress, for the canoe ride. She a pair of khaki shorts, a button-down short sleeve shirt, and a rain parka. And she had two extra pairs of panties -- none so sexy as the thongs she'd worn in Aya Pampa -- and two extra bras. The jeans she'd worn last night, as well as her bra, had been shed before going to sleep the night before. And she'd probably packed too much anyways -- it wasn't as if she'd be expected to wear her Sunday's best up in Manqus Wasi.

Dani had debated whether her not she wanted to bring something to wear as pajamas while on the trip up to and then back from the little Indian village, but had decided against it. Benitez had already seen more of her than she'd intended, and he was on deck to see even more. The fact that she slept in the Land Rover with him in nothing more than a pair of panties and a t-shirt might have seemed scandalous forty-eight hours earlier, but Dani slipped out of her jeans the night before without much in the way of hand-wringing.

Only a few feet from the Land Rover, Dani squatted and peed in the "road." She had little interest in encountering a greensnake or a howler monkey or even the little hyla benianis that Summer had come out to the Oriente to study in the first place. Besides, Benitez was still asleep, and Dani couldn't start to get self-conscious or embarrassed around him now -- not with what was coming.

She'd been afraid that when she woke up that morning she'd be filled with self-doubt and second-guessing. But as Dani slid her panties back up her thighs, she found herself relatively confident and resolved to going through with this. She couldn't speak for just how confident she'd be as they got closer and closer to Manqus Wasi, but for the moment Dani was focused on the journey ahead of her rather than on the expectations she'd be forced to met in the Huaca village itself.

Summer and Benitez had decided to send Dani to Manqus Wasi first. The Chief, Suwaqara, was an old friend and relatively casual about the stricter rites and rituals around the t'ojsiy itself. The village's priest, Qallu Qallu, was -- in Summer's words -- "gentle." And Manqus Wasi was a good two days' trip from San Eduardo, meaning that Summer could hit both Qola Warmi and Kasaraku nearby in the time that Dani performed the ritual in her assigned village. Taksa Kuchu and Chuy would go with the blonde woman, while Benitez would go with the brunette; he had skipped Manqus Wasi the previous year, and thus the little village was overdue for its public health session.

Dani stood, closed her eyes, and gritted her teeth.

She wasn't looking forward to this.

She stepped back towards the car, and realized that this was a lie.

She was, in fact, very much looking forward to this.

She was a slut, pure and simple. That was the voice she kept hearing in her head. Her mother's voice. Her grandmother's voice. Her friends' voices. Her own voice. How could she not be, given what she'd agreed to do? It was the reason she'd gotten so wet in Aya Pampa, the reason she'd fantasized about being strung up on Summer's Y-frame in the river, the reason she'd masturbated in the shower out behind the Oveja Negra. She fingered Summer's necklace as she approached the Land Rover.

But so what? What if she was a slut? How different did that make her from countless other women back in the States? There was a girl she'd trained with for the Peace Corps, who'd admitted to sleeping with twenty-one different men while in college. And Dani wasn't even doing that -- it was just a dildo she'd be fucking. How different did that make her from your run-of-the mill adult dancer?

It was the same conversation she'd had with herself since the previous evening over and over. It was the same conversation she'd continue to have over the next few days. Justification. Explanation. Rationalization. Whatever the underlying reasons, Dani had butterflies in her stomach, a nervousness and fear mixed with a sense of excitement and adventure. She wanted to get the whole thing over with, but she also hoped that the canoe trip would last forever; she was terrified of playing the role of Summer in Manqus Wasi's t'ojsiy ceremony, but she also couldn't help but fantasize about it.

Dani reached into the Land Rover, dug through her oversized purse-turned-travel bag, and fished out her black, one-piece swimming suit. Benitez still hadn't stirred, and so Dani didn't give a second thought to pulling her tank top over her head and slipping out of her panties. Still, she didn't linger in the nude, slipping into the swimsuit one leg at a time and pulling it up her body. She pulled the top up, and tied the straps behind her neck.

While it was a one-piece, Dani's black swimsuit wasn't a particularly conservative one-piece. Low-cut in the front, and open in the back, the suit accentuated Dani's tall, athletic build while showing off a good amount of cleavage. She'd hardly worn the suit in Gracias a Dios, at least after she'd been victimized by teenage Kwirku boys who'd thought it was funny to try and pinch her ass while she was swimming. Here, in Bolivia, Dani knew she could dress as daring as she wanted and be warmly accepted by the Huaca.

She pulled her cover-up out of her bag, a sunburst yellow cabana dress that was worn for modesty purposes to and from the beach. It showed off more leg than one of Dani's other dresses, but given that she'd spent the other day wearing nothing but a loincloth, Dani thought it would suffice for the trip to Manqus Wasi. She pulled it over her head, straightened it out, and then reached back into the Land Rover for her flip-flops.

Dani glanced out at the Rio Rosa. It was tempting to go down and dip her feet in the water, or the start the hot, Bolivian day with a quick swim. But Dani didn't want to risk it without first asking Benitez if it was safe; she was no more a fan of piranhas in the river than she was of snakes in the jungle.

Benitez was still slumbering peacefully, and Dani was hesitant to wake him up. Their drive, as they'd gotten closer and closer to the river, had been fairly stressful: poorly-marked and poorly-maintained dirt roads, puddles large enough to swallow the Land Rover whole, and overgrowth everywhere. They'd talked while Benitez drove, Dani sharing her own bucolic upbringing in Southern Vermont and Benitez talking about his own life in Argentina. He'd grown up in Córdoba, but moved to Buenos Aires for medical school, and ended up staying after he met his wife, Angelica ("Geli," he called her). She was a doctor, as well, and the two had been married for almost seven years, but Benitez explained that they had spent more time fighting than anything else. Thankfully, they never had children. After the divorce, he found himself wanting to some good somewhere in the world and wound up in rural Bolivia. The Huaca were fairly welcoming people, but it was only once he had hooked up with Summer that they allowed him to dispense medicine and inoculations, deliver babies and perform other public health duties.

Summer. Dani thought back to the blonde woman. Strong, determined, and oozing sex appeal, she belonged in a 1950's T&A film, not hitching from one little Indian village to next in South America. Their parting had been rushed -- Benitez wanted to get on the road as quickly as possible -- but Summer had had enough time to offer her gratitude, a couple of her own memories, and her advice. In a hushed tone, she told Dani that it was alright if she enjoyed herself; she may not have understood it at that very moment, and may have only been heading up to Manqus Wasi reluctantly and out of guilt, but the reason Summer kept doing what she'd been doing for all these years was because sex had never been quite so good as performing the t'ojsiy. More practically, Summer gave the girl a gift, a dildo so large that Dani would have a difficult time hiding it from Benitez on the canoe trip up. But then, Dani guessed that Summer didn't intend for her to hide it from Benitez. It was large, not quite as large as the qollqephichilu that Summer had been engorged upon in Aya Pampa, but an intermediate step up for Dani to practice with.

"What about...lube?" Dani had asked, embarrassed by the whole conversation. How was she going to keep Benitez from seeing it? How was she going to 'practice' while Benitez was around?

Knowingly, Summer smiled. "Do you need lube?"

She hadn't then, she doubted she would later, and she certainly didn't need any at that moment. Even standing in the jungle, fully dressed and more or less all alone, Dani was turned on and dripping wet. She fingered the necklace again as she looked at her reflection in the car window. All night, she'd had X-rated dreams, and the memory of them lingered somewhere at the back of Dani's mind as well as between her legs. She hadn't pulled her gift from her purse the night before -- it was too late, and she was too embarrassed anyways -- but Dani found herself contemplating a quick go now. She did have to practice, didn't she?

Benitez stirred, and Dani knew she'd have to wait.

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The day was long, but relaxing. It was easy for Dani to forget where she was heading and why, surrounded by the sights and sounds of rainforest and accompanied by the charming, good-looking Argentine doctor. Benitez did most of the heavy paddling, but Dani was apparently a stronger paddler than he'd been expecting, and they made good time. Dani talked, Benitez pointed out wildlife, and they shared breakfast (and lunch, and snacks) requisitioned from San Eduardo and the Oveja Negra. The water was, in fact, safe to swim in -- at least, so long as they kept a look-out for alligators -- and cool, clear, and a refreshing break from the sweltering Bolivian heat.

At lunch, during a lull in the conversation, Dani told Benitez about the dildo Summer had given her. She was reclined in the front of the canoe, propped up with her back against the Argentine's duffel bag, and facing backwards. She munched lazily on a cold empanada salteña as Benitez continued to paddle.

The doctor, to his credit, didn't bat an eye. "Fairly sensible," he conceded, and offered her some time alone in the tent that night if she wanted. He'd been traveling with Summer for too long, Dani thought to herself -- this has all become normal and mundane to him.

Dani nodded her head red-faced, taking Benitez up on his suggestion. "Sensible," she repeated to herself, and took another bite of her lunch.

Wherever they were going, Benitez seemed to think they were making excellent time. Unlike the day before, when he'd rushed her into the Land Rover and sped off down the road to make the most of the lessening light of dusk, he was more relaxed and upbeat about their progress. He checked off indiscernible landmarks known only to him along the way, checking his watch every now and then to make sure that the canoe was on schedule to Manqus Wasi.

Dani was in just her swimsuit as the sun began to drop toward the horizon. In fact, she'd been out of the cover-up for much of the afternoon, tucking it away once she'd decided it was easier than taking it off and putting it back on for her more and more frequent trips overboard and into the Rio Rosa. She'd scan the distance for caymans and alligators, look to Benitez for the thumbs-up, and slip over the side of the canoe and into the clear, clean water for a swim. She'd been back on board for the better part of an hour, and had no plans to put the dress back on, when the Argentine pointed out that they'd reached their destination

"We're here," he announced.

"How can you tell?" Dani asked.

Benitez grinned. "The spires."

Dani didn't see anything. At least not at first. But then, in staring at the tree line directly in front of her, forms began to take shape. Walls. Windows. Doors. Scattered bricks. A crucifix. All overgrown by the jungle. It was a church. Or, rather, it had been a church once upon a time. The interior had been gutted, the roof had long since disappeared, and the difference between outside and inside was now a purely academic discussion. Strangler figs and vines covered most of the standing remains, and an assai palm grew up and through one of the open windows.

"It's beautiful," Dani breathed. And it was, if partly in a spooky sort of way, catching the orange light of the sunset the way it did.

"Santa Teresa," Benitez said. "The Spanish built it a long time ago."

"How long ago?"

"Long, long ago."

"Is there a city, or a village, or people around here?"

Benitez shrugged. "Not anymore."

It was, according to the doctor, one of his favorite places in the Oriente, and one of the primary reasons he'd regretted not going with Summer to Manqus Wasi the previous year. Collapsed in parts, and standing in others. Overgrown here, but not over there. The church might not have compared to the finest Catholic cathedrals and missions that speckled the rest of the continent, but there was a beauty in the way the jungle had reclaimed the church for itself.

They pulled their canoe up along the banks in front of the church, and began to unload their supplies. Benitez had his duffel bag, his back-pack, the tent, and a few boxes of medical supplies. Dani, meanwhile, had just her oversized handbag. And, reflecting on the fact that she'd spent the better part of the day in her swimsuit, and would probably do so again tomorrow, she began to regret bringing as much as she did. Dani shook her head at this thought -- she'd succumbed to the half-naked role of Summer Monroe more quickly than she'd expected to.

"So this was just...here? Trying to convert who, exactly?" Dani asked.

Benitez didn't know. "I imagine it was the Huaca. The only community anywhere near here now is Manqus Wasi." He pointed to a series of scratches in the stone wall, graffiti carved by an unknown artist. "Those are definitely Huaca designs, but there's no way for us to know if they were done ten decades ago or two centuries."

The Huaca, like the Inca, had no formal writing system, no pictograms or glyphs like the Mayans to the north. But they had their own icons, their own designs, as Dani had witness painted on the canvas of Summer Monroe's white flesh. Here, in the remains of Santa Teresa, the Huaca had claimed the ruins as their own, the church literally covered in repeating patterns of Huaca hagiography. Over and over and over again, Dani saw a highly stylized Huaca sun, and -- causing a bit of a smirk on the brunette's face -- a similarly stylized open vagina.

"The two most important symbols in Huaca myth," Benitez explained. "Western myth opens up with, 'Let there be light,' but the Huaca believed that the Earth, Sipusiki -- represented by the female genitalia -- was first. Only then did the 'inti," or sun, a god named Taytaku, begin to appear. He worshipped her from afar, passing high overhead each and every day, traveling across the sky. Finally, she 'opened' for him, welcoming him down, and the two copulated. And then from that union came all life -- the trees, the animals, the birds, the fish, and the first Huaca man and woman, Apucha and Hatucha."

Benitez made eye contact with Dani. "It's this union that the t'ojsiy represents. It's why Sipusiki's climax is so important to the Huaca people."

Dani nodded. She'd be playing the role of Sipusiki. And Taytaku would be represented by an inanimate silver sex toy. That seemed to make sense.

Benitez erected the pop-tent inside the former sanctuary of the former church, right smack in the middle of Santa Teresa's crumbling remains. He gathered some wood, and in little time had a small fire going outside the tent for them to heat their dinners over. It was still too warm to really need the warmth of the fire, and, in fact, Dani's skin was so hot and sticky that she contemplated going for another quick swim. It was like a perfect summer evening camping in New England, and only one thing could bring Dani back to the task at hand.

"If you want some privacy," Benitez offered, "I can go for a walk?"

Right. The dildo. The Huaca. The sex rite. The orgasming in front of a crowd. How could Dani have forgotten?

She swallowed nervously. She didn't want to do this. No, that was a lie -- she didn't want Benitez to know that she was doing this. There was an attraction between them, a spark that Dani couldn't quite deny. She knew that she felt it -- she wondered if Benitez felt the same. Rather than a cold, hard dildo between her legs, Dani might have preferred taking the Argentine doctor by the hand and leading him to the tent.

It had been months since Dani had been with a man. Come to think of it, it had been almost a year. Ten months ago, maybe eleven, she'd just happened to be in Puerto Lempira when a threesome of Australian back-packers had breezed through town. They were site-seeing and surfing and just meandering through Belize and Guatemala and Honduras. Dani joined them for drinks and -- oh God, it had been so long THAT time since she'd had sex back on a trip home back to Vermont -- one thing had led to another, and Dani had ended up wrapped around one of them in a cheap, weather-worn cabana on the beach.

But Dani wasn't that girl. She'd never really been that girl; as much as she'd craved physical attention that night in Puerto Lempira, she never would have made the first move -- she had to thank her Aussie one-night stand for that. No matter how emboldened she felt by the nature of her mission to Manqus Wasi, she was simply incapable of doing what she wanted to do with Benitez. And so, meekly, she accepted his proposition.

"Okay," she said.

Dani enjoyed her fire-warmed masaco de platano, but conversation slowed. Benitez, who'd been so casual about everything having to do with the Phancha and t'ojsiy to that point, seemed almost as unnerved as Dani herself. And the doctor's discomfort only amplified Dani's own. They made small talk, but after a day of free-flowing back-and-forth, the stunted stories and observations seemed forced. Both Dani and Benitez were focused on what Dani planned on doing that night.

And so, once dinner was through, and Dani had knocked back three bottles of beer that had been allocated to her for the trip, she smiled weakly at Benitez, and disappeared into the tent. "Don't go far," she told the doctor.

"I won't," he assured her.

Zipping the tent shut, Dani realized they she'd have no way of knowing whether or not Benitez actually took the walk he'd promised her. Leaving aside the fact that they were on the Western edges of the Amazon Rainforest and Dani was a bit fearful of what or who might emerge from the jungles, she still hoped that he remained seated at the campfire; as utilitarian as this particular exercise was going to be, Dani was nonetheless excited by the Argentine's proximity. The thought of him turned on, erect, at the idea of her getting herself off in the tent...well...that only made Dani more turned on herself. She hoped that he could see her silhouette, peeling itself out of its swimsuit, flickering in the campfire light against the nylon walls.

Dani extracted the dildo from her handbag. It was big -- that much Dani was certain of -- though not so big as the qolqephichilu Summer had been impaled upon in Aya Pampa. Dani shuddered at the thought of something so large between her legs. The dildo was plain and smooth, maybe a good foot in length and at least two, maybe two-and-half inches in diameter. It was silver, or at least covered in a layer of silver, giving the effect that it had been plucked from one of a naughtier display cases at Tiffany's (Dani pictured Summer giving it to her in a long, narrow, baby blue box). It was without packaging, which meant that it: a) was locally made, and b) had most likely been used previously. There was nothing that Dani could do about this latter point -- she doubted that Summer would have had a dildo laying about that she hadn't put to good use herself. And anyways, it seemed clean enough -- Dani's own fingerprints were all she saw on the dildo's polished surface.

The brunette was naked inside the tent, her swimsuit kicked to one side. She lay back on the scratchy blankets Benitez had gathered for her back in San Eduardo, resting her head on one of the pillows he'd scrounged, no larger than those one might liberate from a commercial airline. She spread her legs, and then, with the silver toy in hand, slowly inserted it into her warm, wet, and welcoming pussy.

The sensation was instantaneous, almost as if Dani's juices had a chemical reaction with the silver. She moaned softly, not quite loud enough to be heard over the crackling of the campfire outside, but enough to express just how deeply satisfied Dani felt at having something between her legs. She had no need for foreplay, no need to "warm herself up." The silver beads on the necklace Summer had given her - the necklace she hadn't taken off since two days earlier - brushed against the girl's bare skin, seeming to kiss it sexually and sensually. Her nipples stood straight out, just as they had been poking through the top of her swimsuit all day. Her pussy was wet -- dripping wet -- and she'd been forced to cross and re-cross her legs uncomfortably through dinner, her body knowing full well what pleasures awaited it for dessert.

Clutching the hilt of the dildo in her right hand, Dani used the butt of her palm to rub against the top of her slit, grinding her clitoris as she plunged the toy into the folds of her sex. She arched her back in overwhelming pleasure, lifting her ass off the ground as she did so. She ran her hand through her hair with her left hand, playing with it, feeling her fingers slip through it. Her right wrist moved rapidly back and forth, playing with the dildo and her own clit at the same time, and built in both speed and force.

She was sweating. Which, given that she had been in the tropical lowland rainforests of Eastern Bolivian for the better part of the past few days, was nothing new. But she was perspiring even more heavily that she had been earlier in the evening, her body's own temperature out of control, and the stuffy environment inside her little nylon bubble helping things not at all. She wished that she was back outside, back in the Bolivian night -- or, at the very least, that she'd left the door flap open for even the smallest of breezes. But, her skin moist and sticky, Dani heroically carried on.

Breathing heavily, and gasping for air, the brunette squirmed and wriggled about on the rough, woolen blanket. She bit her lip, trying to keep herself from making too much noise. Which, all things considered, was ridiculous, given that Benitez, even if he was still within earshot, knew exactly what she was doing inside the tent. A low moan. A soulful exhalation. A soft, but high-pitched whine. Dani was lost in herself, lost in her movement of her right hand.

Though no less turned on and excited than she'd been in the shower the previous afternoon, Dani found tonight's orgasm more elusive. The blanket was scratchy against her back. The heat was nearly overwhelming. Even the smell of Dani's own pussy soon permeated every cubic inch of the tent. But none of these were the problem, exactly; though she'd never used a dildo before, the toy was having the desired effects on her body. Despite the exquisite sensations her cunt was enjoying, and sharing with the rest of Dani's lower body, she found herself distracted, drawn outside the tent in thought, and chasing after a climax that was just out of reach.

Dani would spare no effort, however. It had been a long time since she'd been bedded by the Australian back-packer, and it had been a longtime before that since she'd gone home with one her high school classmates that she'd run into back in Cherryfield. Neither partner had been particularly poorly endowed, but neither possessed the length or the girth of the little, silver lover she now found herself with. For that matter, Dani might have had to go all the way back to Chris Duse -- to whom she'd lost her virginity to in Weinstein Hall -- to remember a time she'd felt so full, so totally engorged. She continued to jackhammer away at her pussy, forcing the silver dildo in and out of her still-dripping slit.

She wondered where Benitez was. It had to have been ten, fifteen minutes since she'd first entered the tent. If he'd left her alone, as he'd promised, there was a good possibility that he'd already returned. She whined again. Was he back? Was he seated at the campfire? Was he listening to her soft mews, listening to her whimpers?

The very thought of the Argentine doctor took Dani to the next level, and her strokes became longer, stronger, deeper, and more forceful. She closed her eyes tightly, and pursed her lips, panting and gasping for air all the while. Her whole body was covered in a sheen of perspiration, and Dani might have been slipping and sliding in a puddle of her own sweat if she had been lying on the bare nylon floor. She arched her back again, lifting her buttocks in the air -- the same buttocks which were still adorned with the yellow-orange handprint from a teenage girl in Aya Pampa whose name Dani couldn't remember. She bit her lower lip, doing her best to hold in a deep-seated primal squeal. But this was the jungle, after all, and Dani had become some sort of wild animal, and she proved to be incapable of holding back as a massive orgasm wrapped itself around her very soul. It started in her clit, as her climaxes had the entire course of her life, a dull, pulsation giving way to more noticeable throbbing, which itself exploded outward and sent sparks of sexual release shooting through her body. Her pussy tightened around the dildo, squeezing her silver lover in a vain attempt to extract its cum. It felt as if electricity crackled between her thighs, as if her very insides had been laced with some sort of drug that slipped into her bloodstream through her pussy, as if the depths of her sex were on her fire. She called out, offering nothing but gibberish and a high-pitched series of uncontrollable yelps. She screamed loudly at her release, cumming fast and cumming hard, like a quick descent from a roller coaster's highest peak.

No matter how far Benitez had wandered from Santa Teresa, there was little doubt that he'd heard her exultations, little doubt that he was now fully aware of her rapture.

Dani had a difficult time remembering an orgasm so intense or fulfilling. She was drenched through and through, inside and out; her hands, her thighs, and the dildo covered in pussy juice, her hair and skin soaked in sweat. The smell of sex hung in the air inside the tent, and a horrified, red-faced Dani D'Annunzio knew full well that she'd have to air it out before allowing Benitez to come in for the night. The girl extracted the dildo and sat up, crossing her legs Indian-style. She ran her hands through her sweaty hair, and wiped perspiration from her forehead and beneath her eyes. Her naked chest continued to heave up and down, gasping for air after the most intense cardiovascular workout Dani had put herself through in weeks. Her nipples were still at attention and rock hard -- adamantine -- and her body flush from the orgasm.

Dani gathered her long, flowing brown hair into a ponytail, and then weakly slipped one rubber-kneed leg at a time back into her black bathing suit. As she got to her feet, hunched over, and pulled the cups up over her breasts, she found that she could hardly stand. Instead of tying the swimsuit's straps behind her neck, which seemed like it would require a reserve of energy that Dani just didn't have at that point, the girl decided to just hold the top in place with her right hand. She bent over and slipped the warm, slimy dildo beneath her blanket, making a mental note to stash it away that night before Benitez came across it. She unzipped the tent's front flap, and exited into the night.

Benitez was not tending to the fire, and was, in fact, nowhere to be seen. Mostly relieved, but at least partly disappointed, Dani padded barefoot through the crumbling remains of the Spanish church and down to the river's edge. The canoe was exactly where they'd left it, the supplies mostly still in tact between the two seats. Though it was dark, and perhaps dangerous, Dani desperately wanted to go for a swim. She was hot, overheated even, and the warm, jungle air offered her no respite. Benitez had told her earlier that evening that he'd never seen an alligator or a cayman along this particular stretch of the Rio Rosa, and Dani decided that, given her current state, that was reassurance enough for her. But, mischief twinkling in her eye, and her swimsuit not entirely all in place, Dani glanced nervously over her shoulder and slipped out of the black, nylon/spandex blend suit, dropping it into the canoe and stepping carefully into the river.

She was being needlessly naughty, she knew, but forgive her if she should be feeling over-sexualized at that particular moment. She rationalized the action by telling herself that the suit was dry, and that there was no need to get it wet; that she just wanted to feel the cool, calm waters of the Rio Rosa against her bare skin. And maybe, just maybe, she hoped that Benitez might join her for a quick skinny-dip beneath the waning crescent moon.