

# A Goddess Like We

By Paul Calhoun

Darius scanned the street for possibilities, brushing his hand forward to help stand his filthy black hair into even more obvious spikes. "Tourist." He said quietly to Yazin, not quite looking at the portly woman exiting a fast food restaurant across the street. The paper bag in her hand drew their gaze despite their attempts to keep from seeming threatening.

Yazin nodded, her brown hair – just as dirty – brushing her neck. The extravagance of any length of hair was a pain, but paid off in making sure that the emaciated frame and gaunt cheeks didn't result in her being mistaken for a boy. She needed people to know she was a girl; girls got more. She put her hand on Darius' arm. "Daughter. Let me." She said shortly. A girl no more than ten years old had left the restaurant and was hurrying to catch up to her mother.

"You did the last one." Darius said. "I need to pull my weight."

"You need to eat." Yazin replied. "You know I'll get more from her."

Darius sighed. It was an old argument and one that he'd conceded often enough. "I know. I feel bad." Yazin squeezed. "No problem." She slipped across the street, the humid breeze passing through the many holes in her shapeless dress – a conglomeration of rags she'd sewn together herself. She hurried down an alley, passing several box houses that were only a single step down from the abandoned warehouse she and Darius lived in. The beggars and thieves looked up, saw her, and went back to their misery. There was no gain in robbing or waylaying an urchin like her.

Yazin emerged a few yards in front of the woman, just as the portly foreigner turned a corner. She hurriedly spat on her finger and drew tear streaks down her cheeks. "So hungry..." She moaned. "Please, miss. I was someone's daughter too, once." She whined.

The woman had the look of a tourist who'd been stopped by beggars before. Despite this, she wavered and when she saw her daughter reaching into her own back, she shoved hers into Yazin's hand. "We'll share." She said shortly to her daughter, seeming to be almost as disgusted with her own weakness as the run down neighborhood she'd found herself in. It was rare to see a wealthy – or comparatively wealthy – tourist so far away from the clean bright towers and glitzy bars. Yazin and Darius hadn't expected a handout so early in the day but the added food was welcome. Usually they had to toe the line between being chased away by police as a public nuisance and getting too far from where the generous fat rich people would take pity on them.

"You're too good." Darius said when he saw Yazin coming back with a full bag. "We'd better get this all inside us before we go to school."

"I want to enjoy it." Yazin said. "Let's skip today."

"Are you sure?" Darius asked. Usually it was the other way around. He hated going, but Yazin often insisted. "Not that I'll miss it."

"I'm thinking that we don't need to go anymore." Yazin admitted as they ran back to their home in the back of the warehouse. "Not if they insist on putting us with the little kids. We know most of what they have to teach us anyway." She looked sidelong at Darius with a small smile. "It's your fault for not knowing how old you are." She added.

"I'm sixteen!" He said. "I think. Anyway, don't get all high and mighty with me, miss 'Fourteen today, Seventeen tomorrow.' They only started pushing me when you kept changing your mind."

"I forgot!" Yazin said. "I'm definitely seventeen. So respect your elders."

"Yeah, and you'll be fourteen when we get home and you need to be a 'poor little girl.'" Darius said.

The reason they were put with younger students was one neither of them liked to talk about. The reality was that malnutrition had left them not just skeletal but small in stature as well. Even the children from the poorest families were taller, with more flesh and greater muscle mass. Neither had developed much as they grew up, which was why Yazin was so insistent on dressing like a girl and wearing her dress. This she shed unselfconsciously when they got to the warehouse, washing off the worst of the grime with a tap that had been left on by mistake and switching from her 'begging dress' to her 'respectable dress.' A garment she'd found in a crate. She was very proud of it because it almost fit.

"I thought we weren't going to school." Darius said.

"We're not, but I'm not sitting in that thing while we have a decent meal." Yazin replied.

Darius wordlessly washed and changed to a mostly clean set of clothes. In truth he admitted her pride was well placed. They might be beggars, but they still had some standards. After a quick prayer of thanks for the unexpected bounty, they ate, savoring the heavy food. "Too many more meals like this, and you might actually get fat enough to have tits." Darius commented.

"Yeah, but it'll take more than that to make your meat grow." Yazin said.

"We should go east next." Darius said. "Deaf Felix says he heard a rumor about a big announcement from on high. That'll bring in a lot of people."

"Clergy." Yazin said dismissively.

"Not just them, but a lot of company men." Darius argued. "Easy pickings when

they're happy or surprised."

"All right, we'll try it." Yazin agreed. "Though Deaf Felix is about the last person I'd take advice from."

"He's all right." Darius said. "He just gets confused easily. This one he was very clear about. We'll do fine."

"Yah-huh." Yazin finished her piece of the pita wrapped meat. "He needs to find a new act. I'd say he needs to pretend to have no sense of smell, but he's already doing that."

"Deaf Felix is an idiot." Darius said, surveying the paltry group in front of the stage.

"We ran all the way here for a good spot..." Yazin sighed. "I got dirty again. What a waste."

"As if anyone's going to believe Theuvite." Darius agreed. "It's the same thing every couple of months. 'We have a god.' 'We incarnated!' 'This one's a real avatar.' We have more original routines." They turned away and almost ran into a man in a well tailored suit. His tie was blue with gold spiky haloes and he was carrying a valise. He was short for a well fed person, with shaggy black hair and an open face. He regarded them closely and Yazin tensed, ready to run.

"Excuse us." She said, trying to get past him.

He flicked a coin at them and Darius caught it. "What are the attributes of Anee?"

"Four-handed, open palmed, cosmic grace, forever pure." Darius replied.

He threw one to Yazin. "How would one know Anee if they saw her?"

"Do you mean apart from her having four arms, white hair, and almost no color to her skin?" Yazin asked sarcastically. "Knowing any god by sight alone is impossible. It is by their acts and speech that they are found, but the fact that Anee is said to possess hair that defies gravity is a giveaway if everything else isn't."

Paper money followed. "What are her virtues?"

"Purity and charity are obvious, but she is also known for loving animals and being as joyful as the child she appears to be while being as wise as the wisest monk." Darius said.

"Her number?"

"Four, duh."

"Her month?"

"August."

"The words when spoken that unlock the hidden font?"

"Gnosis i dynemeos. Tireo kala."

"How did you know that?" The man asked, staring at Yazin.

"We hear things." Darius replied, edging in front of Yazin as she backed away.

"Wait!" The man reached out and they backed away.

"We appreciate the charity, but we have to go." Darius said, letting Yazin escape further.

"I have a job for you." He said. He saw Yazin's expression. "Not like that." He looked around. "I can't talk about it out here." Those were the wrong words and the urchins were running before he could react. They were faster, nimbler, and desperate. Unfortunately, they were also clutching money and running from a man in a suit. A woman in uniform escorted them back to him. "Thank you officer." He said. Kneeling, he faced the struggling children. "Listen, it's me or the work gangs now. I know you have no reason to trust me, but I really don't want to hurt you or make you do anything you don't wish to. Will you just listen to me?"

Darius glared, but stopped struggling. Yazin took longer to calm, and a stout clip from the constable, but she settled. The business man accepted the money the officer had confiscated and the moment she turned her back, he slipped it back to them. "My office is not far away." He said. "There will be people all around for most of the trip and if you insist I can bring in my secretary and any number of other people from my organization. I don't want to rob you, rape you, bleed you, do experiments on you, or enslave you in a sweatshop. If I wanted those, I wouldn't have asked you all those questions. I need - I need help with something and you two are as close to perfect for the job as I'll ever find." He continued his reassuring monologue as they went into a glass fronted skyscraper. The teens balked at the elevator and he gave them a strange look. "It's fine."

"There's no one else in them." Yazin said.

"Sam, can you come over here?" A blonde woman slightly taller than he was approached. "Can you join us for a moment? The children don't want to ride alone. Project Anee."

"Oh, that's just fine." She smiled, trying to look reassuring, but seemed nervous.

"I'm Natali." The businessman said, pressing the button for the eighteenth floor.

"Yazin."

"Darius."

The elevator stopped and several people entered and left before it was their floor. Sam hesitantly touched Yazin's arm. "It's OK, dear. No one's going to hurt you." She followed them out and into a large cubicle space, through several halls and into a corner office.

"I wish I had my good pants." Darius said.

"Yeah." Yazin said. Natali sat behind a desk and gestured, but the kids stayed standing, casting glances over their shoulders.

"Can I get you anything?"

"Yes." Yazin said immediately.

"No." Darius whispered something in her ear and she nodded.

"No." She agreed.

"I'm not going to – let me explain. What I want you to do is dishonest. I admit it. But if you get caught you'll be no worse off than you are now."

"How dishonest?" Yazin asked.

"You know about our difficulties. I heard you talking about them outside. That's why I was drawn to you; you two seem to know more than most kids your age."

"We're older than we look." Darius said.

"We think." Yazin looked around. "This is Theuvite?"

"Yes. I'm sorry; I'm stalling." Natali shook his head. "We – I – want you to impersonate a god. Some fool downstairs claimed on camera that we'd succeeded. It's all over the news. If we give the bad news now we're ruined. Every investor will pull out. We need something to show the public."

Darius' mouth gaped. "Anee? You really did pick a hard one."

"Not really." Natali smiled. "Better someone who is normal sized rather than a giant, and who doesn't carry a flaming spear or throw thunderbolts. Anee is a goddess who is easier to impersonate than Bires or Rintosa. I don't expect you to believe me right now. You have no proof. Much like our investors." He opened his wallet and handed each of them a bill worth more money than they'd make in five years of begging. "Go home. Think about it. Come back in clothes you find respectable. Whatever. But come back soon or this won't work. I'll make sure security knows to take you here. We'll talk when you've made a decision. Don't come back at all if you'd prefer to be sure, but I promise you this: I don't want to hurt you. If this fails

and the truth comes out, I will do all I can to make sure that your identities will remain confidential. And if it succeeds." He leaned back in his chair. "There's a lot more where that came from. You know where to find me."

Darius and Yazin ran back to their home, taking several detours through allies, culverts, and across fields to make sure they weren't being followed. They put most of the money under a cement tile, but took enough to buy blankets and a dinner big enough to leave them feeling full for the first time they could remember. As they settled in, curled up together under the blanket with the sun setting behind the mountain, Darius brought up their plans. "Are we going back?"

Yazin rolled over to look at him. "I don't know. If you asked me that as we were leaving, I'd have been very sure I wasn't. What do you think?"

"I don't know either." Darius closed his eyes. "Imagine being able to eat that much every day."

"We can't make decisions like that." Yazin said.

"I know. It's why we ate so much we wouldn't be hungry. So we could decide without it getting to us." Darius looked into Yazin's eyes. "I don't think he was lying."

"Neither do I, but he doesn't seem very smart."

"He's desperate."

"You sound like you plan on going back." Yazin said.

"I guess I do."

"So do I." She rolled back over. "That was easy." She shifted backwards, pressing herself against Darius. "Imagine feeling like this every night."

Darius put his arms around her. "Yeah. You'd fill out enough to be worth cuddling."

"And you'd have enough on you to actually keep me awake with that." She pushed his manhood out of the way. "Go to sleep. Save your strength in case we have to run away."

"Yazin."

"What, Darius?"

"Imagine not having to worry about needing to run away." He sighed.

"Dreamer." She reached back and brushed his cheek. They fell asleep with her

wondering what it would be like to feel this good all the time. So good that they might even get beyond joking and - she shook her head as she felt him shrink again. He wasn't strong enough to keep it up for very long and she didn't have the energy to do anything about it. She was only dreaming.

The pair put on their best clothes and scrubbed as much as they could before setting out. They felt small as they entered the atrium, the lobby of the office building dwarfing them with its bright light and shining metal beams. They held hands and scurried for the elevator, glad to find it empty throughout the ascent to their suddenly open future. The morning had brought another first for them. They hadn't woken up hungry and had been too nervous to finish the leftover feast they'd bought the day before. Neither wished to take the lead, but Yazin found her voice first and asked the receptionist to tell Natali that they'd arrived. "Mr. Barker will be right with you." The man said kindly. They sat, their feet kicking in the air because the chairs were too tall for them. They had not ended their hand clasp the entire time, nor did they when Natali arrived and took them to his office.

"We'll do it." Darius blurted when he closed the door.

Natali looked relieved. "Thank you."

"You'll need to tell us what it is we're doing, though." Yazin said.

"Of course. Do you mind living here?" They shook their heads. The warehouse was a nice place out of the elements but the office space was snug and comfortable all the time with heat and air conditioning. It would seem like the height of luxury to sleep someplace they didn't have to worry about night visitors of various kinds or the building burning down because someone had bought the property for redevelopment but needed some quick insurance money. "Great. We'll set up space upstairs for you. I've been curious ever since I met you two. How do you know so much? Some things everyone knows about the gods, but you were so quick with your answers and temple secrets are supposed to be just that. It took our research staff months to dig up that phrase."

"We weren't born in the streets." Darius said. He shook his head. "It's too painful to remember."

"Oh." Natali said. It occurred to him who they might be. Images from the news returned to him. Fires, explosions. A revolution quelled and towns destroyed in reprisals. Temples crumbling. Children fleeing the war zone. "You've adapted very well."

"You get used to it or you die." Yazin told him. "We were lucky. We picked the right direction to run." Her voice was hard and he knew he wasn't getting any more answers.

"I'm sorry I brought it up." Natali closed his eyes and tried to gather his thoughts. "I'll see to getting the ball rolling. While you're waiting for your new living space to be readied, let's go see the doctor." They looked at each other in confusion and Natali explained. "You

seem healthy, but we can't take any chances. If you're missing inoculations you'll get them now. I'm sure you have parasites and those can be dealt with. I want you to be happy, but for purely selfish reasons our company can't risk having either of you ill for very long. That and we'll need to examine you for some other things that will have to be done. Come on." He got up and they went down to the fourth floor. A small clinic was present where the employees and their children in the corporate daycare went in emergencies. A nurse took them into a small examination room, at first looking like she wanted to see them separately, but when they refused to let go of each other she gave up.

"You'll need to take all your clothes off." She warned.

"It's nothing we haven't seen before." Yazin said, understanding her hesitation.

"Can you remember the last time we saw a doctor?" Darius grinned as he and Yazin disrobed.

"Yeah. It was when we drank out of that bottle that guy dropped as he was leaving the Red Gecko." Yazin smiled back. "We thought we were dying but he'd just spat out a tab into it and we got what was left."

The nurse tried to ignore how casually they talked about accidentally taking drugs. They were put on a scale, had their blood pressure checked. Blood was taken and Yazin almost fainted at the needle, but had to laugh back when she barely flinched at the nurse checking her vaginal health but Darius crying out when she did a prostate exam. "How old are you?" The nurse asked, frowning a little when she examined Darius' scriptum and penis.

"Sixteen, I think." Darius replied. "It's hard to keep track."

The nurse's frown deepened. "All right." She glanced at Yazin. "Have you ever ... had thoughts, played with yourself, that sort of thing?"

"If you're looking at me wondering if he's ever tried anything with me, he hasn't." Yazin said firmly.

"I'm usually too hungry." Darius said.

"When was your last period?" The nurse asked Yazin.

"I don't know. Maybe a year ago." Yazin said.

The nurse took some notes left. They were allowed to put their clothes back on and meet Natali.

"They're in remarkably good shape." The nurse was saying to Natali. "I doubt they'll grow any more - of course you *like* that." She added accusitorally.

"It makes things easier." Natali said. "I'm sorry if you find our business unethical."

They're far better off this way."

"No doubt." The nurse looked at her pad. "We'll do some more tests later when they've eaten and can handle the fitting. I know you're going to try to keep them thin, but they don't need to be starving. Your goddess can stand to be a little on the plump side. Not that you'll listen," she said to herself. "You'll want your goddess to look perfect and damn the consequences." To Natali, she finished, "There's a real sexual problem with both of them. Impotence and a lack of a menstrual cycle."

"Hey!" Darius was turning dark. "You don't have to tell him about that."

"It may go away when they're eating regularly." The nurse finished. "We'll let you know about the blood work, but looking at them I'd say they've somehow avoided the worst parasites and won't need more than a few flea baths to get rid of what they've picked up. No major diseases. They've done quite well."

"You don't live if you get sick." Yazin said. "What now?"

"It's around lunch time if you two are hungry."

Yazin and Darius looked at him with such obvious incredulity that he looked away. "Of course. Follow me."

Natali was evasive over the meal when they tried to learn more about what he wanted, telling them that they'd understand much better when he showed them. They wanted to know when he would and he eventually admitted that it could be as long as two weeks. "In the mean time, you can get used to living here." He told them.

"We're not allowed to leave." Darius concluded.

"Ah, no." Natali admitted, looking down. "Someone might notice."

"Two homeless children vanish off the street and nobody cares." Yazin said. "But two waifs coming and going alone from the most prestigious subsidiary of a very wealthy corporation and then they get interested." She stopped voraciously consuming everything they could give her to shake her head. "Not that we can really mind. If anyone cared about us, they might ask where we came from. We're better off being forgotten completely. Let the other beggars think we got picked up by traffickers or got shot by a rich person and had the murder covered up. That raises an unfortunate question, Mr. Natali." She said at length.

Darius stopped asked the question for her, letting her get back to eating. "How do we know you won't eliminate us when we stop being able to do what you need us to?"

"I-I..." Natali gulped.

"It's not your choice, is it?" Darius smiled coldly. "You can assure us all you want, but if someone higher up decides we're a liability, all your promises mean nothing. So much for

our fortune improving." He said to Yazin.

"Did you expect it to?"

"No, but we can still hope."

"Let's hope they don't change their minds." Yazin said.

"This is ours?" Darius asked when Natali was told their apartment was ready.

"All of it?" Yazin pressed when Natali nodded.

They'd been given a brightly painted, airy series of rooms. The lack of adornments made the place seem sterile and un-lived in, but the thick carpets and generic furniture was a huge step up from the warehouse. The three bedrooms each had an attached bath, though the middle one had the only tub and a much better set of fixtures. It wasn't long before the two teens pushed the beds from the other two into the third. "Why three?" Darius asked suspiciously.

"You'll see." He, Yazin, and Natali said at once. "Yeah, we get it." Yazin added.

There was a small kitchen in case they wanted something to eat when the corporate café was closed. The living room was right off one of the elevator banks, but Natali gave them each a plastic card and assured them that no one could stop those elevators on their floor without one and that only they and he had them, and that they'd be told if anyone else was given one. "We'll arrange for some new clothes tomorrow." Natali said.

"Oh, and just when I'd gotten these pants broken in." Darius said. Yazin poked him and he poked her back. "Thank you." He said.

"Even if what you want is probably dangerous and definitely unethical, possibly even illegal, it's better than anything we could have expected." Yazin said.

"If we can't leave, what do we do?" Darius asked.

"We can get you a computer if you're discreet. There's a television there and we can get you any movie or game you want. Books, cards, whatever." Natali said.

"We're used to active hobbies." Darius said.

"We usually spend most of the day walking around the city and mucking about with whatever we find."

"But that's a big fat 'nope' now."

"There's a gym." Natali said. "I've never used it but I think it has a pool."

"Hey, a clean pool." Yazin said. "I bet it's warm too."

"Sounds good." Darius replied.

"I'll see about finding you some bathing suits." Natali told them. "You'd better ... uh, that is--"

"You don't want us getting your pool dirty." Darius said. "Bath time."

"I don't know," Yazin said. "It's better than the river, but we actually have to wear something to swim."

"Showoff." Darius teased.

"At least I have something to --" Yazin had to duck a cushion Darius pulled off the sofa. "Careful. You might hit all this empty space."

They both went for the center bathroom, stopped, glared at each other, and laughed. "We're going to need more than a casual scrub to be worthy of their vaunted pool." Darius allowed.

"Yes, and it can be hard to reach my back." Yazin agreed. They bathed together, continuing their conversation in an attempt to understand – or at least feel less nervous about – their sudden rise in station. "I feel a bit like a concubine." Yazin said.

"It's a pretty pathetic harem that has only you--" Darius dodged a soap filled swat. "I was insulting myself too, you know." He added, working the lather into her shoulders.

"Oh yeah," she turned around and did the same for him. "You're not quite a eunuch."

"Why, Yazin! That was almost a compliment of my virility."

"Perish the thought." Yazin said. She closed her eyes and let the heat soak into her.

"Do you think we'd have been married by now if we hadn't had to run?"

"Probably. Is it bad that I'm grateful that we aren't?"

Darius started to dry himself off. "It depends why."

"I don't like living on the street, but I think we'd have been bored in our normal lives. Would you have been happy as a civil servant or a priest?"

"As happy as you would be as a priestess or staying at home." Darius replied. "Living hand to mouth until we're made the playthings of a multinational conglomerate doesn't appeal

either.”

“Yeah, but until now we’ve been free.”

“Do you want to run?”

Yazin bit her lip and then shook her head decisively. “No. This is all just too weird to walk out on. I want to know what’s happening. They’re watching the doors, anyway.”

“We can run when they trust us.” Darius grinned. “Let’s go see if he’s found something to help maintain our nonexistent modesty.”

“There’s no point in getting dressed.” Yazin grinned back. “After all, our clothes are as dirty as we were.”

“Shouldn’t those *children* be with their own?” An executive asked primly, looking with disdain at the laughing, splashing teens who were throwing the adults’ attempts at laps into disarray.

“They’re employees.” Natali said mildly.

“Them? They can’t be more than eleven or twelve!”

“They’re a bit older than that.” Natali said evasively.

“Well, they look terrible.” The executive groused.

“They haven’t had regular meals in a number of years.” Natali replied.

“Are they ... vagabonds?”

Natali looked at the executive with matching disdain. “They’re kids who haven’t been allowed to be kids. They’re also very important to the TheoGenesis program.”

“Vessels?”

“Something like that. Above your grade.”

“See here! Do you know who I am?”

Natali smiled and held up his badge. “Apparently you don’t know who *I* am.” He said, still not showing more than a socially acceptable amount of disgust at his employee, who mouthed wordlessly and scurried off. “It’s people like that who ought not to be promoted.” Natali sighed. “No imagination, no empathy. As if it’s profitable in the long run to use human sacrifice to try to get the gods’ attention.” He offered up a quick prayer to his own, who were

like most deities and responded very promptly to the kind of insult he was about to throw at a local goddess' feet. Despite his annoyance, he saw the benefit to keeping his charges' presence quiet even from the rest of the building. A private gym would be underway before the day was out. He was sure that the kids would be much happier with fewer ellipticals and more balance beams and swings. His heart warmed at the thought of how they'd react to a trampoline.

"How do I look in this?" Yazin asked, swishing her petticoat under the knee length pink dress over her white stockinged legs which shook as she remembered how to stand in heels.

"Like I remember you." Darius replied. "And me?" He turned around slowly in the dark pants, long charcoal gray coat and matching flat cap. His belt buckle shone and his white shirt peeked out from the buttoned coat.

"The way you are when I dream about our parents." Yazin said, her eyes as misty as his. They'd put together the outfits when Yazin joked how it was the first time in years since they had more than a 'good' set and a 'beggar' set of clothes. Darius had held up the hat and said he remembered wearing one just like it to a winter outing and she'd pulled out the stockings and said they were exactly the same as the set she'd worn that same day. They took a step towards each other and Yazin put her hand on his shoulder. He put his on her hip and their other hands clasped together. They danced to a song only they could hear, an echo from a past they'd almost forgotten. They stopped at the same time, time suspended in the moment of their locked eyes.

"Natali will be here in a minute." Yazin said.

"We should wear something more practical." Darius agreed.

When Natali arrived, they were in more modern, climate appropriate outfits, though Yazin continued to eschew figure hugging bottoms for a long skirt even though she'd swiftly re-learned the hair care techniques that made hers much more feminine than Darius'. He didn't need to say anything about it, understanding her lack of security in her femininity. After all, it wouldn't take a stretch for him to be mistaken for a girl as she was often seen as a boy if she failed to present herself forcefully as female.

"For what it's worth," Natali said as the elevator descended, "your blood tests came back negative for all diseases and predictable deficient in almost every nutrient."

"Surprise surprise." Darius said.

"We're going to do a full body scan on you now." Natali continued.

"Like the kind where they look inside us?" Yazin asked.

"Something like that." Natali replied.

“Why?”

“It’s part of what why I need you two to help me.” Natali said.

“More evasions.”

“Your break is almost over.” Natali assured them. “I hope you’ve been having fun.”

“You must be desperate if you’re willing to build us an entire gym just so we don’t meet anyone we’re not supposed to.” Yazin pressed.

“But you’re happy?” He asked.

“Yeah,” she smiled and puffed a little hair out of her eye. “We’re even getting used to sitting in place long enough to read.”

“The library never wanted to let us borrow books,” Darius explained, “and we didn’t have time to sit there long enough to read.”

“So you’re not lonely?” Natali continued.

“No. We’re used to just us.” Darius said.

“We like it that way.” Yazin added.

Darius waited outside the room, watching as Yazin lay down and was fed through a donut. “I don’t know if I can lie still for that long,” he said after she’d been slid back and forth several times.

“I don’t mean to pry, but weren’t you taught meditation?” Natali guessed.

“Oh, Jindren.” Darius said, invoking the god of mercy. “I haven’t done that in ages.” He took a deep breath and closed his eyes. “Being that calm is like lowering your defenses.”

“You have nothing to fear here.”

“Nothing to fear *today*.” Darius corrected. “I’ll try.”

He lay on the fabric covered cushion that seemed to be unique to hospitals. He looked to one side at Yazin and then back at the ceiling when the voice ordered him to. He closed his eyes and made his breathing even. His spirit left his body, rising towards the light. He projected himself out – fighting against the current of memory that tried to drag him backwards into sights and sounds that he resisted in all his unguarded moments. Instead he forcibly propelled himself into a dispassionate analysis of his current situation. His life had taken an odd turn and was likely to get stranger. What he was going to do sounded blasphemous though he didn’t know. He’d stopped walking with the gods a few months after he and Yazin had escaped, the day he became positive that their fortune would not reverse and they had been

cast out completely. They had left him, and he'd grown to accept that. Now he was offered prosperity but at the cost of no longer keeping his back turned to the gods, but to show them the face of scorn. He would need to seek protection from other gods if he expected to survive.

"Darius? Darius!" Someone was shouting his name and he recalled himself in time to sit up before the tech could come in and try to rouse him.

"Are you done?"

"Yes." The tech looked as if he'd been trying to tell Darius that for awhile.

"All right." Darius slid off the platform.

"That's all we need." Natali said when Darius joined them. "Next time I see you, I'll be ready to show you what we need you to do."

"Finally." Yazin was looking over the tech's shoulder. "So that's what my insides look like. They're a lot more colorful than I expected."

"How do you do it? Seriously?" Yazin sat back as Darius smugly put his controller down. "I'm going to go use the rope rings. Call when I can have a turn to practice without you cheating."

"It's not cheating. It's not very creative, but it's not cheating." Darius grinned. "Fine, I'll stop using the same move over and over. Happy?"

Yazin settled back down. "All right, but no more of that stupid laser thing. Whoever made this game didn't play it enough."

"Or liked the robot."

Their rematch – in which Yazin was slowly taking the lead – was interrupted by Natali pushing a trunk into their living room. "It's time."

"Good! We were starting to get slow and fat with all this sitting around." Yazin scrambled up, followed by Darius.

Natali stood the trunk up so that it was taller than the teens and opened the clasps with loud thunks against the leather wrapped wood. He opened the front and the teens took an involuntary step back. "That's a really good sculpture." Yazin said. "The pose might be considered somewhat insulting to Anee."

"I'm not sure she'd appreciate being shown nude either." Darius said, his attention fixed on the anatomy of the four armed goddess. "Not these days. In fact, you'd probably get trouble from more than priests for such an explicit piece of art showing a girl her physical age."

"It's not a sculpture." Natali reached behind the floating goddess and showed how it was a flexible shell on a hook.

"You know," Yazin said. "The amount of detail shows how having four arms makes your body different."

"It's a really nice interpretation." Darius agreed. "So it's not art. What is it?"

Natali lay the goddess down on the sofa, her snow white hair pooled out around her body. Like the goddess, the icon's hair reached down past her hips and was very thick in places, seeming to move on its own and gather in places. Her rib cage was longer than a human's, with extra width partway down to accommodate having a second set of shoulders. Her skin was unnaturally pale as well and her face was round and angelic despite the empty eye sockets and open mouth, her small, soft lips a delicate pink. She was relatively undeveloped, with only a little more hip and breast than Yazin, though her rear was rounded more than the rest. All four hands had dark violet nails, as did her feet.

Natali showed them that the head was zipped on and there was another track hidden underneath the neck skin in front that went down between her small breasts. "It's a skin of sorts." He said. "Something we've been developing for priests who need symbolic avatars. In her case, two people get in and - wait!" The teens were desperately pressing the elevator call button.

"For what? Judgment?" Darius asked. "You want us to impersonate Anee. She may be kind, compassionate, and forgiving, but Fyodor isn't." He named her brother, a rash god of warriors and paladins. "Not to mention her parents." The patriarch and matriarch deities who were both well known for striking down those who insulted their siblings and children. "You may be a foreigner, but you're still here."

Natali reached into his shirt front and lifted out a medallion on a soft string of yarn. "I'm protected and I offer mine to you." He said.

Yazin looked at Darius, who tentatively examined the holy symbol. It was of a canine creature with its mouth open in a grin. "Coyote." He said after checking. He looked up at Natali. "This is your patron?"

"He is here." Natali said. "Our company has many alliances depending on where they operate."

"He's foreign."

"He's strong."

Darius nodded to himself. "Yes. Hiding those he favors from the wrath of his peers."

"I'm given to believe that he finds this project very amusing."

Yazin said, "Doesn't coyote only help as long as you entertain him?"

Darius nodded and squeezed her hand. "That's the challenge. He enjoys watching other gods be embarrassed. I feel bad about doing it to Anee, though. She doesn't deserve it."

"We don't intend you to harm her reputation. Only pretend to be her made flesh. Our company promised its investors and -"

Darius grinned. "Oh. Coyote isn't laughing at Anee. He's laughing at us. Your overlook a serious flaw."

Yazin caught on immediately. "We'll be fine until it's funnier for us to be discovered."

"Exactly."

"If we amuse him enough, though, our downfall will be temporary." Natali argued. "The scandal may make him laugh, and he will reward us for that by making sure we are placed well to make him laugh again."

"The playthings of a trickster god." Darius looked sharply at Natali. "You've done this before."

"Yes. He's an interesting god to ally with."

"Interesting." The teens had to smile at each other at that. "We like interesting, right?"

Yazin nodded sharply. "Very much. All right, Natali, we'll do it. Show us how."

Natali unzipped the front, showing them how it only went as far as the bottom of her extended rib cage. "It's mostly empty, but there are a couple of dividers to act as guides so that the front and back are in the right places." He said. "The back person gets in, then the front, and then you put on the arms, zip it up, and put the mask on. You can see here," he showed them a large gathering of hair near her neck, one of several, "this one is empty. The person in back hides their head in it. It looks solid from the outside, but it's a one way mesh. You'll see."

"Okay." Yazin took the skin from him and pulled Darius into the middle bedroom. Before Darius could close the door, Natali pushed the trunk in after them. "There are some clothes sized and fitted for her frame in there."

"Thank you." Yazin said. Darius closed the door and she put the skin down on their large nest-bed. "This is weirder than I could have possibly expected."

"Yeah, I had no idea what we were doing, but this..." He touched the skin. "It feels real. Nicer than ours."

"Anee never had to survive on the streets. It's all perfume and lotion for her."

“So are we doing this?”

Yazin let her dress fall to the floor. “We don’t have much choice.”

“You want to.”

“So do you.” Yazin observed as Darius shed his pants. “I’ll take the front this time, but we can take turns if they give us a good way to make you sound like me.”

“After this, I think they could probably get us anything.” Darius said. He fumbled with the skin and Yazin held the left leg so he could work his down. He found the guide strips and put his limb behind each one until he left foot was inside Anee’s. Yazin helped him with the right and he stood up to pull the loose fitting skin up to his waist. “Wait.” Yazin said as he hiked it further up and reached for the arms. “You don’t even know which pair you are.”

Darius turned around and Yazin climbed onto the bed. She couldn’t think of any other way to get in and turned around to slide in backwards. Darius held the suit open and stood still as she slithered down, her legs filling out the suit completely. Her feet reached the ankles and stopped, leaving her a little further up than him. “Feel that?” She wiggled her feet. “The front has inclines so I’m standing on tiptoe. Anee has to have dainty feet.”

“It also means you can comfortably take the top arms and I can fit into that wig spot.” Darius said. They shrugged on their respective arms, Yazin getting her hands in first. She pulled the zipper up as Darius finished getting his hands in. He held them up and giggled. “I have such girly fingers,” he laughed, holding out the nails with their purple polish.

Yazin picked up the mask and tried to put it on. “How does this work?” She grunted, trying to pull it over her head. The neck didn’t stretch and Darius looked over her shoulder.

“Is there anything that opens it?”

“Oh, here.” Yazin found a tiny tab and pulled it up, loosening the neck. She lined the features up over her own as Darius held the neck steady, then pulled the zipper down, tightening it across her face.

“Can you breathe?”

“Yeah, there’s no problem.” Yazin said. “The lips even fit over mine and I bet they’ll give us something to put on our teeth to make them pretty. How are you?”

Darius was nosing his way into the empty hair knot. “It’s all right.” Anee’s bun moved from side to side. “I can just about see over your shoulder.”

“Can you feel this?” Yazin tugged a little with her left foot.

“Yeah.”

"Good. Let's try walking around." Anee tripped over her own feet and sprawled on the enormous bed. Both pairs of arms levered her up. "One at a time!" She said. "Whoever starts walking has to guide the other. Now follow my lead." She crawled back and onto her feet, and her next steps were wobbly but held. "Good." She patted her side. "Just feel how I walk and copy me."

She daintily stepped around the bed and went towards the closet. "Taking small step is good anyway." Her hair said. "Anee is supposed to be very shy."

"I never thought I'd like having this." Anee said, grabbing the full length mirror and hauling it out of the closet they'd put it in, her lower arms helping after a moment. She stood it up and walked around in front. "Aren't we lovely?" She smiled. The goddess that was reflected was thickly built in places, but for the most part quite slender, especially in the arms and legs made extra toned by Yazin standing on the heels in front. Her upper arms touched her face and hair, pulling the eyelids of the mask over the ones of the girl in it, and basking in the feel of long, soft hair as well as smooth pale skin. Her lower arms felt up her sides and then cupped her breasts. "Hey!" She said, swatting at them and provoking an intra-goddess slap fight.

"They're mine too now." Darius said.

"I'm in front, so they're still more mine than yours. However," she grabbed her round behind with her upper arms. "Delicious. Oh!" An erection grew from her labia, sticking out and ruining her deific loveliness. "Put that back in." Her lower arms complied, but in a way that made the girl underneath the mask blush, though the goddess only showed it by her eyes going wide. "That ... may not be a good place for it." She whispered.

"Problems?" Darius teased, but he found a way to tuck himself up, which though it still pressed against Yazin's back, was still a lot less awkward.

"You've grown." Anee said.

Her lower arms touched her breasts again. "So have you."

Anee firmly stepped away from the mirror and with a little pushing got herself to turn around to face the trunk. "Let's see what Natali gave us." She smirked, knowing Darius couldn't see her expression as her lower arms opened the trunk and her uppers looked for things. "Here we go." She said, taking out the smallest pair of pink silk panties she could find. Anee was smooth and hairless, so nothing would show around it. She could have chosen something less girly, but she was in front and Darius needed a reminder that they were a girl.

It took less work to get Darius to move correctly and she swiftly stepped into the panties and pulled them up. As she looked for other things, she caught her lower arms feeling her butt and the lines of the underwear. The next thing out was a bra, which neither of them had any experience in. Between them, however, all four arms managed to figure it out, though the upper arms kept the lower from doing more than a single sweep over her boobs.

Her lower arms went for a pair of skinny jeans, but her upper arms clutched a cami and a dress to her. "I'm in front. I want to wear this."

"Fine! But you don't need to be so girly. We'll look like a girl no matter what."

"I know, but it's nice." Darius didn't argue any more as she slipped the cami over them and then the dress. It was dark blue, had a hemline above the knee and was made of something sheer that whispered when she moved. The four diaphanous loose sleeves kept her arms tangled for a minute as both pairs tried to go into the same set. She smoothed down the dress and her upper arms lifted out a pair of low heeled sandals.

"I'm not sure..." Darius said, but lifted her feet to slide them in. Two steps had her sprawled back on the bed and she kicked the shoes off. "Later." He said firmly. "I know I need to learn, but we can go barefoot. Natali is waiting."

Anee levered herself up on all four hands and when she was standing again she flicked her hair back. "I guess." She huffed. All four hands went for her hip, and she laughed softly as they clasped.

Being in close quarters was nothing new for Yazin. She and Darius had slept pressed together for years and even with their warm apartment they continued to do so. They'd become comfortable with each other, living together, working together, knowing each others' strengths and preferences. Having him pressed against her back, bound to her naked body under the goddess skin was a big change, and now that they were having regular meals, it meant that he was having ... thoughts. He might pretend it was just the beautiful body of Anee that they inhabited, but it was a polite lie that they both accepted. It was mutual agreement that kept their focus on survival, but now... Yazin wasn't sure whether she enjoyed his sometimes tentative and sometimes bold advances. Neither of them were ready yet, and suddenly being thrust into a place where they could think about such things was more uncomfortable than the tight skin and false face that still felt a little stiff when she smiled or talked. On the other hand – and she would never admit it to Darius – she was warming to having Anee's small breasts, her subtly wider hips, and the derriere that was the main reason she wouldn't mind being in back. Anee might be underdeveloped, but she'd gotten further through her puberty than Yazin had, despite being physically younger.

Darius understood most of this, and like Yazin would never be so rude as to say it out loud. Her body pressed against his awoke feelings he hadn't contemplated in years. The possibility of romance and more. In truth, his penetration had been because that's what he thought she meant. He'd never have tried to do something so brazen if he hadn't thought she was asking. Even having his penis pressed against her back was something he had to work to ignore and it didn't help that the incline that made it possible for her to easily fit the upper arms meant that his shaft was mostly between her buttocks. None of that, however, was as enchanting as simply being in contact with her like this. Sharing her movement, her identity, even her breathing. It was almost like he was her even though she was now Anee. He knew it had to be as distracting to have him reminding her with his hardness and his breath on her neck, syncing up with her own as he did his best to match her every step and swing. Of course,

there was also the terrible, blasphemous, scandalous behavior of a man helping to impersonate a goddess. Working with Yazin to bring the gentle, wise girl deity to life sometimes struck his theological side so hard that he forgot his titillation entirely. Other times his boyish, impish rascality in having everyone believe that he was a beautiful, pristine goddess made him so giddy that he wanted to hug Yazin with the goddess' arms and tickle her until the goddess begged her traitorous lower hands to stop.

Anee's upper arms moved, but fell back to her sides when one of her lower hands confidently went for the door handle. She was pleased to find that her body moved even more fluidly even when she started adding a little swing to her step, a bounce to show off how pretty and natural she was to Natali. The man jumped up from the sofa the moment she opened the door and seemed at a loss for words as she approached, head bowed and four hands clasped piously. "All blessings upon this house." She intoned, then looked up and smiled beatifically as her upper hands spread and her lowers remained clasped. "I thank you for giving me life in the land of mortals." Anee's upper hands smoothed her skirt down and her lower hands helped keep her steady as she sat down on the sofa. Her stately, noble demeanor broke when she tucked her skirt forward and tried to cross her legs, eliciting a yelp from her hair. At that, she dissolved into giggles and looked up at Natali, her pink lips pressed hard together to keep from bursting into immoderate laughter.

"You two are marvelous." Natali said. "I wish I'd brought the cameras so we could start on publicity photos immediately. We thought it would take longer for you to get used to it."

Anee sprawled on the sofa, abandoning her pretense of propriety. "Thank you. We're kind of surprised ourselves."

"I don't think we plan on taking it off immediately," her hair said. "You can go and get your stuff if you want."

"I think I will. This is a great 'starting' look for you." Natali held out a small case. "I almost forgot. Anee's eyes are usually the same color as her nails."

Anee took the case and opened it. She swallowed. "I - I think you'll have to think of a reason I have terrestrial eyes that change. I'll take the teeth but not the eyes." She started to shake and her lower arms encircled her, removing the white caps but not the contacts. "Don't ask, just believe me."

Natali took the case away wordlessly and left, his expression showing understanding.

She held herself for a moment before something occurred to Darius. "You know," Anee's lower hands tapped her chin and she pretended to snap at them, giving him the chance to stick the teeth in her mouth. "We were interrupted when he came in."

"Oh!" Anee smiled. "And now it's fair."

"Totally not!" Darius laughed. "This is much more of a handicap than it needs to be."

"We'll see." She slid off the sofa, her lower hands surprisingly being the ones to hold on to her hemline so that when she reached the floor she was still decent. Her uppers tucked the skirt between her legs, but when she tried to go cross-legged again, Darius balked. "What? It can't be that bad this way."

"I'm just stiff is all."

Anee giggled and her upper hands patted her hair. "I know. I can feel it."

"Yazin!"

"This is what you get for doing all agility and no stretching." Yazin chided him. Anee's upper hands picked up a controller and her lower hands took the other. They were part way through their fifth round when Natali came back, hauling a camera with him.

"This is so much better!" He exclaimed. "Can I do a video of this? A goddess playing a video game against herself will make every front page." He set the camera up and Anee nodded imperiously, more interested in her game than the visuals Natali was concerned about. What neither the man nor the camera saw was how occasionally her skin would stretch when the teens tried to lean in opposite directions while playing, the dress hiding that and making it seem as if she was sitting calmly using two pairs of hands to play both sides of a popular combat game.

"Perhaps," Darius said when Natali said he was done, "this is not the best game to showcase. Anee might be better depicted playing something less violent."

"I disagree," the goddess said to herself. "We're still supposed to be young and Anee's wisdom is often contrasted with her youth. Enjoying something like this while also showcasing a mind able to oppose itself so effectively is perfect."

Anee yelped as she nodded, Yazin unready for Darius' unconscious show of agreement pushing against her neck and making her head move a little with his. "You're right." Her lower hands grabbed the sofa to help herself up.

"Is there anything else you need?" She asked Natali.

"We need some stills and then tomorrow we'll set up the photos we'll publish next of you getting out of the incarnator. We can say it was being checked for proprietary information and that's why the pictures of you in your new home came out first."

Anee went back to her 'pious' pose. "Like this?"

"For a start."

Anee sat, she stood, she looked over her shoulder. By the end of the shoot, the teens felt like the people on the ads in store windows. "At least he didn't make us show off in more than

one outfit." She said to herself, quietly so he wouldn't get any ideas. When he picked up the camera, she held out an upper hand. "One thing!"

"What is it?"

"Can you get me a swimsuit that will fit this body? I didn't see one in the trunk."

Natali looked doubtful. "That sounds risky. I'm not sure--"

"It may be necessary. And some workout clothes. Please?" She did her best 'innocent little deity' face.'

"All right."

"Do gods wear swimsuits?" Darius asked.

Anee shrugged and settled down on the floor again. "You're the theologian."

"It's a private pool. I don't see why we can't swim naked. It's just us - that is, our body. There's nothing immodest about being nude when you're alone."

Anee smiled and picked up the controller again. "Maybe, but do you trust them not to have cameras everywhere? The professional stuff may need something bigger, but I think they'd use a regular security camera if it meant putting out something good."

"A goddess swimming in the way people did in mythical times would be a great shot." Darius agreed as Anee started another game against herself. Yazin could hear Darius' amusement. "The media will try to stick sex into anything, and it is our duty to keep people from the temptation of seeing a goddess as pure as we are naked. So it's our body now and we don't let people see it without clothes?"

"When it's avoidable." Anee said. "I suspect we'll get stuck eventually."

They didn't need to say anything to each other for Anee to bathe and go to bed. Both wanted to stay together as long as they could, to get used to moving as one and helping each other. It became a game to go through the motions with no sign that she was more than one goddess incarnate seeing to the daily needs of a mortal body. This broke occasionally, like when Darius needed to brush his teeth or when Yazin did as well and had to remove the caps. Anee felt a little silly in cartoon character pajamas, as if even a young goddess ought to wear something less mundane to bed. She curled up, drawing her knees to her chest and hugging herself with both pairs of arms. Both woke up in the middle of the night, but the close, tranquil warmth of the other lulled them back to sleep swiftly. When they got up, however, it was well past time to consider some of the issues of being a gestalt deity. "I'm hungry and I need to pee." Darius summed it up.

Anee sat, leaning on her hands with her legs open. "That's why they haven't been letting us eat too much and been promoting our exercise." Yazin observed. "So we stay skinny and fit the skin."

"True. So what do we do?"

"We can't go down to the cafeteria like this. We haven't become public yet."

"I meant the mechanics."

"I know. I'm thinking."

"We can try..." Darius said doubtfully. Anee's lower hands explored inside her panties.

Her upper hands pulled them out. "Our goddess has the right things in the right place for me. We'll check you when I'm done."

Anee sat on the toilet and Yazin had no difficulty. When her lower hands went back between her legs, she moved to stop them. "They're my girl parts too." Darius said. "Or would you rather I go like this?"

"You're right. Stay away from mine, though." Yazin replied. Darius freed himself and went. "I haven't thought of a better place for it."

"Neither have I. When I'm in front it's going to be even harder." He put himself away and they went to the kitchen. There was enough there for a small breakfast. Yazin insisted Darius slip out of the wig to eat, but she still ended up having to clean her neck off when they were done. "I'm sorry. It's a really awkward angle."

"That's all right. Maybe it's a good thing. That way we take it off at meal times and that's when we switch. We'll skip it for now, but I'll let you get in front after lunch if we decide to put it back on."

The clothes she'd asked for were waiting next to the elevator and Anee pounced on the opportunity. "Do you have to pick the most revealing thing?" Darius asked as Yazin pawed through the tight shorts and one-pieces to find a tiny bikini trailing string from the pre-tied knots.

"Why not?" She asked, lower arms working themselves out of the pajama sleeves so she could push her pants down as her upper hands removed her top. Her upper hands slid down her body and pulled her lower hands up to give Darius permission to touch their breasts. "Don't you love being me?"

Anee's lower hands went further up and tickled herself under the chin. "You're feeling better about this today. You wanted to be girly yesterday, but I think you're really trying to get me excited now."

"I've enjoyed being Anee from the start, but it's taken some time to get used to having you hot and close." Yazin agreed. "I - I'm still not quite ready but I'm entertaining the thought that we've always wanted to, now we can, and if we're going to be this close we ought to admit we're having that kind of fun with it along with all the other ways."

Her lower hands went down again and squeezed. Her upper hands did the same with her rear. "I know you've always had a little bit of envy for the tourist women who wear so little."

"We may have to be very proper in public, but this is a party goddess when it's just us." Yazin smiled with Anee's face. Her upper hands stroked her hair. "I know you want it. I can feel it."

"That's so unfair." Darius complained as Anee picked up both pieces of her swimsuit and put them on at once.

Anee patted her hair again. "I don't need to feel you to read you and you don't need to either." She giggled. "It makes it easier though."

"I'd do that even if you'd picked the one piece or the shorts."

"That's why I'm no better off than you are." Anee went to the small pool that had been built for them and carefully descended the short steps on the shallow end. She was slow to go deeper and contented herself with soaking and floating around for awhile until she suddenly felt the urge to dive. The impulse came so swiftly that neither teen knew who started it, but she suddenly leapt forward and went under, speeding across the pool so swiftly with the confident stroke of her four arms that she almost crashed into the opposite wall. She held on to the cement lip and shook her hair out. "Your breathing is good?"

"Probably better than yours if we're face down." Darius said.

"Aww." Anee mock pouted. "So much for floating peacefully on my back." Her lower arms splashed her face and she flailed with her uppers to try to hit herself in the back. "No fair!" She dove back underwater and struck with less energy back to the shallow end. "It's a good thing Natali isn't here or he'd insist we lounge in a deck chair and show off our bikini body."

"Good point. If we want to get a good workout, we'll have to change to gym clothes, do our routine - whatever it is - and then back to something presentable or he'll want pictures of swimsuit Anee and workout Anee. It's one thing to have some shots to show the goddess is getting used to mortal life, but that would be objectifying."

Anee climbed out of the pool and padded back to the clothes drop. "We'll put everything away later."

After a quick shower, she changed to the tights and T-shirt they found in the box and

went to the small gym. "We need more rings." She said to herself when she jumped and pulled herself up, shaking as only her upper hands had a place to grip to lift the unaccustomed weight of her goddess body. Her lower hands reached and with a jerk she lifted herself up enough to let go and give them a chance to swing. Her lower arms had a little more strength and got herself moving enough to swing to the rope, which all four could grab, though she missed her timing slightly and her lower hands had to scramble to keep herself from sliding down. Despite the protestations from her hair, her next stop was the mat where she stretched and went as far as attempting to do a split, which got part way down before she took pity on her male portion and told him they'd work on it more every day.

Feeling ambitious, she stepped up onto the grid of narrow balance beams an inch above the ground. The goddess lost track of time as she swayed and lost her perch several times before she took some slow steps along, losing her place again at the first turn. Her balance was broken as much by her lower arms as lag from Darius. She was grinning and laughed freely when she made it from one end of her route to the other. "By the way." She said to herself. "That's sort of how you're supposed to walk in heels."

"Oh. We should try that again soon."

"Do we have time?"

"You can see the clock better than I can."

Anee looked up. "I think we can spare five minutes."

Darius didn't need to be told and Anee walked confidently to the trampoline. Her bouncing felt strangely more intimate than many of the other things she did as a single person and the shared laughter was richer than usual. To her surprise, she made a high arcing dismount and kept her feet on the landing. "At the rate we're going, we may never have to take this off." Darius said.

Anee gave herself a double hug. "Would you like that?"

"I don't know, would you?"

"I dunno, what about you?" She teased herself.

Her lower hands tried to tweak her nose and her upper hands grabbed them. Soon she was on the floor rolling around wrestling herself and laughing at how silly the goddess must look. Four hands tickled parts of her body, and her eyes were bright with tears when the elevator bell sounded. She froze, looking at the door, and then got up in a whirlwind of limbs, making it into her bedroom just in time to close the door as the elevator opened. "Be right out." She called, not wanting to be caught in her tights when Natali arrived. Darius gave a token grumble as she selected a full skirted dress, though he got in a little teasing when Yazin decided to wear more utilitarian undergarments. Her second attempt at heels went somewhat better and she only wobbled a little in the low heeled black shoes as she left the room. Her lower left hand scooped up a brush on the way out and she met Natali as she was getting some of the

tangles out of her thigh length, supernaturally unruly white mane. She was almost bouncing when she stopped in front of him. "Hi! Oh, I mean," she smirked and clasped her hands, bowing slightly. "Blessings upon you."

Natali laughed and bowed back. "All honor, lady." He gestured to the elevator. "Everything is ready for your awakening." Anee joined him and they rode up, exiting and turning several corners to reach a brightly lit laboratory. Amongst the scattered equipment was an open fiberglass pod with the imprint of a four armed person in the foam that filled it. "We're almost ready to take the shots. Uh..." His cheeks turned dark. "Gods don't generally incarnate in modern girls' fashion."

"That's fine. Where can we change?" She asked.

"Well, that is ... at the end of the day ... they don't wear anything when their bodies first form. Where would it come from?"

"The same place as the body itself." Anee said, crossing her upper arms.

Her lower arms gestured as Darius made a soft point to Yazin, who repeated it in character. "I believe that the traditional garb of my station should be available in any case."

"Yes, lady." Natali said, only half in jest. He left and after some arguing returned with a long, diaphanous vestment that shimmered when the light caught it. "Luckily this was already done for a shoot we're going to do at a temple later. Will it do?"

Anee took it and frowned. "It's a little sheer. A layer beneath is traditional."

Natali sighed. "We're not going to get as much publicity this way."

Her lower arms crossed since her upper hands had the dress. Her sharp glare had Natali sighing deeper and going to find a simple, loose white smock that wouldn't be obvious under the vestment but would maintain her modesty. Since the lab was full of cameras, Anee found a nearby empty office to change in. The under-dress had arm holes, but the vestment was open at both sides, making her happier she'd insisted on the layer underneath. Since the whole point was for those parts not to show, she kept her own undergarments on under the dress. She had to laugh at how her lower hands were as interested in swishing the robe as her uppers. "Do you think we might be intimidating him?"

"I hope so. We look the part and as long as we act like a goddess, even Natali seems to go along with it." Anee swept back into the lab and gracefully accepted Natali's assistance in settling herself inside the pod and arranging her clothing to fit in with her. When her arms and legs were in their proper place, Natali closed the lid. "There's going to be a lot of lights and so on since we're filming this like it's the real thing." He said. "Can you pretend to be disoriented when we open it up?"

Anee rolled her eyes. The 'dizzy with hunger' routine was one of the teens' oft used means of getting something to eat, an act which often was tinged with reality. "We'll manage."

She said. To herself she murmured, "If all else fails, you can just start acting on your own and that should make us very unsteady." She felt her lower arms twitch, wanting to reach up to squeeze her upper hand, but Darius held their pose.

There were lights and sounds of machinery. At one point their foam bed rocked. Anee closed her eyes and let herself drift, taking the opportunity of a nap that would make her groggy when it was her turn to do something. The pod opened and Natali was standing over her with one of the scientists next to him. Anee opened her eyes and deliberately missed her grip the first time she tried to pull herself into a sitting position, spilling some of her hair into her eyes. She took Natali's offered hand and Darius produced a catch in her step as she tottered out. "Where..." She blinked several times and her lower hands brushed her vestments as she reached out with her free upper hand. "Is this the mortal world?"

"Yes, your worship." Natali said in a quietly respectful voice.

Anee smiled kindly. "Miss' will be enough if you feel the need." She tripped again - Yazin's doing - and Natali held her up. "This body you've made for me is not quite what I am accustomed to." She looked at her nails. "Though it is a very good approximation." Anee pretended to peer at a reflective console. "Yes. You've done very well. My eyes will take adjusting to. I guess you can't do everything." She brushed her hair back. "Everything important is here." She linked arms with Natali, becoming more confident. "I am eager to begin my ministry."

"Your transition may have weakened you, miss." Natali said as she continued to hang on to him. "Perhaps you ought to rest."

Anee yawned and her lower hands pretended to need to steady her on a wall. "Yes. I fear I do." She tried to look surprised. "In fact, I think I may be hungry."

"We've arranged for everything, Miss Anee. Let me show you to your suite." They left the room and Natali gestured that the cameras were off.

"Good?" Anee asked, letting go and stretching, her upper hands flicking her hair out of her face.

"Very good, miss." Natali smiled back. "You're a natural."

"Thank you." She said with a little bit of her 'goddess' tone. Her lower hands swished her dress again and she nodded at Darius' silent suggestion. "You'll want pictures of me walking around and getting used to my new abode." She linked arms with Natali again. "We may as well start now."

The woman with the camera followed them into the elevator, taking frequent pictures of Anee being guided around by Natali. There was a completely real stir of surprise when she entered the café and she was actually glad of the many people who insisted on taking pictures with her as she ate. It meant she could easily replicate a strained look of grace and hard fought serenity at the fuss and her own continued weakness at being newly incarnated. The sheer

volume of self-important managers who thought they needed to be seen with her taxed her own patience, but it also meant she didn't need to actually eat that much and so she didn't feel bad that Darius had none. Of course it would have been simple to eat with one set of hands and be social with the other, but she was saving that for later. It would be better for the goddess to seem a little clumsy at first, having to actually use muscles to control her limbs rather than pure will. Darius whispered things to her that helped keep her in character; things Anee would say or tell stories about.

When she felt – and apparently looked – ready to collapse, Natali solicitously took her away and whisked her to her apartments, which she made a show of examining while looking very pleased. The angles made sure that only one bedroom door was ever shown, and Natali said they'd pass off the triple bed as a precaution in case she had trouble sleeping naturally and thrashed around. She was drooping visibly by the time they were done and didn't need to pretend when she crawled under the covers and went to sleep despite it being only early afternoon. Darius wasn't quite as stressed and only dozed as Yazin recovered.

When Yazin woke up, she took the mask off and with Darius' help, they removed the Anee skin. After bathing together, Darius found the notes Natali had left about cleaning the skin, which was simple and done quickly before they had lunch. Darius' fidgeting as they ate was more than enough of a sign of what he was thinking about, and as soon as they were done Yazin got into the back part of the skin and was helping Darius into the front. He was unsteady on the inclined feet and Yazin held him with one arm as she zipped up the front of the skin with her other hand. "By the time you're done, you'll be a lot better in heels." She suggested.

He smiled at that, and they sat down so he could put the mask on without losing their balance. The mask's lips and cheeks felt strange, though the warmth from Yazin's face hadn't quite left it and it was still supple. Anee sat with her upper hands on the bed with her shoulders back and her lower hands on her hair as Yazin nosed into the space in the wig. She had an almost comically confused expression as she faced the mirror, then broke into a shy smile. "I look just like you did."

"That's the point."

Anee got up and they replayed the previous day's balancing practice as Darius learned how different it was to be in control and in the front. Yazin knew he was getting the hang of it when the goddess started sneaking looks at herself and touching her breasts and the penis hanging from her vulva. Darius hadn't tucked himself away at all when he put the skin on and her lower hands went to her hips as her upper hands got more distracted. "Oh." Anee said. She smiled sheepishly. "I should put that away."

"Yes." Yazin said. "Then figure out something to do with your voice."

Trying to push himself forward and into the suit's belly left an unsightly bulge, so she then attempted to push it back and somehow wrap the suit's labia over it so it would stay. This lasted a couple of steps and then Darius swung free again. She walked over to the wardrobe and as her upper hands kept trying to push it back between her legs, she selected the tightest pair of spandex boy shorts with her lower hands. When the organ was back inside again, she

put them on and pulled the underpants up until they were clinging to her rear and outlining her now totally female looking sex. "There. That should hold it." Yazin said. "We'll have to find something to wear under the skin next time. Maybe if we discreetly say something to Natali he'll have an idea."

"Until then, no swimming." Anee said sadly. She became cheerful again at the thought of being allowed to pick their outfit and chose skinny jeans and a low cut T-shirt. The next half hour was spent with both teens getting more and gigglier as Yazin tried to get Anee to sound like her and failed completely. "This may not work." She said at last, flopping down on the sofa.

"Another thing to ask Natali for. I'm sure they'll have something."

Anee touched her breast and sighed. "It's not so fun when they don't have yours in them." She said.

"So it's not about the boob, it's about the girl who enjoys it being touched." Yazin risked licking the back of Darius' smooth, alabaster neck. "You don't sound surprised."

"No. I kind of figured it was more about teasing you." Anee smiled. "So you *did* enjoy it."

"When you weren't too incessant, yes." Her lower arms hugged her.

Anee pulled the neck down on her top and lifted a breast out of her bra. "It's good to be able to explore it."

"Take your time. They're more yours than mine now." Anee felt the nipple and examined her mammary closely, pushing it back into her top guiltily when the elevator bell rang. She made sure her shirt was straight and got up just as the doors opened.

She waved with her right upper. "Hi."

"Oh, Darius..." Natali sounded hesitant.

"Yeah, that's one thing I needed to talk to you about." Darius said in a very 'goddess' way. "I appear to have developed a masculine voice. Could you arrange something that turns this voice into my proper one?"

"I - maybe, miss." Natali said, still sounding unsure.

"Also, I require a rather ... intimate appliance." She looks down and her upper hands clasp. "Ah, I find myself growing something decidedly unfeminine. If there is a way for my male portion to be bound in something that helps to combine it with the female section..." She trails off, unable to finish the thought.

"I think I understand. That may be easier to arrange." Natali shakes his head. "Have

you seen the comments yet?"

Anee shakes her head. "I - I'll break character for a moment - we didn't grow up with computers and most people we meet online who might seem friendly would also be the kind of people who passed us on the street without even looking our way when we were hungry. It's hard to forget that."

"You - Anee - will need a profile that you should post to occasionally. We can have our own people do most of it, but it would help you keep up with events if you checked it occasionally." Natali went to the computer they rarely used and opened a news site.

Anee seated herself in front and held herself so her hair bun could read over her shoulder. After a few minutes, she was giggling with both voices. "I'm glad to see most people think I'm real." She said acerbically. "How nice of them to deign to believe their goddess cares enough to come to them."

"We'll be shutting up some of the rumors today." Natali said. "It's time for your first public appearance."

"Oh no! And me sounding like a boy!" Anee said.

"Yes. I'm afraid you'll have to switch back today. I understand the desire for equal practice, but we can't fix your voice with so little notice and ... if something were to slip out in the other way it could be disastrous."

"I'll be right out." Anee promised, getting up and skipped back to her room.

"That's a shame." Yazin said as they got out. She put her hand on his. "We'll try again when he's got the things we need to do it right."

Darius held the skin open for her, but something made him drop it and again there was the mutual understanding right before they both moved for the kiss. There was none of the teasing or the flowering lust they'd felt as their sex drives had been awakened after their literal starvation. Only a pure understanding of the other, a desire in each to let the other know how much they cared. Yazin was glad to cover her blushing face with the white Anee mask that betrayed nothing of that shy joy except the little smile that the goddess kept as she dressed in Yazin's preferred method of a high waisted ankle length dress with a fitted bodice, pantyhose, and pumps with a moderate heel. The hose made them both feel good, and even Darius agreed that for her first outing, the goddess should be fashionable, feminine, but sensible. She followed Natali to the elevator and to her surprise was whisked to the ground floor. There were reporters and camera crews on the steps outside and she gave them a four-handed wave before she was helped into a limousine.

"The 'daily life' photos we took of you in the apartment two days ago were a sensation." Natali explained. "So we 'convinced' you to do a small event. Tickets were given to a select group from the press, and the rest were disseminated by lottery to those who your sister of fortune favored. You'll walk on stage, sit down, some of our marketing people will make

speeches, and then we'll set up a table and you sign photos for your adoring followers.

"Okay." Anee said, resting her hands in her lap. "Is there anything else?"

"There may be clerics." Natali said, looking nervous. "There are rumors that some of the faithful were coerced into giving their tickets to priests of her – your faith."

Anee smiled. "I look forward to meeting with my devoted servants, though I shall be firm in admonishing them against such behavior towards those whose tickets they took. They cannot act so selfishly."

"I knew you'd know what to do."

Anee's lower hands moved up a little to hold her belly. One of her upper hands stroked her hair to acknowledge the affection. She was all business when she got out of the car; waving, smiling at the crowd on either side of the barriers. On a whispered suggestion, she stopped in front of a little girl who was about to fall over the fence she'd climbed. Anee smiled softly at her, gathered her into her arms, kissed her forehead and handed her back to her astonished father, her lower hands clasping his arm as he accepted the girl. "Children are a greater blessing than gods. Watch her carefully." Everyone was so focused on the girl that no one saw her sway a little on her heels and one lower hand steady her on the barrier she was reaching over. Darius again accepted that Yazin was right to pick a loose, long skirt for the occasion since it kept people from seeing her occasional catch or the twisting of her ankle when they didn't quite get their step right. Darius was getting better, but it would take him a few more tries to be totally graceful in heels.

Anee was bright and cheerful as she swept into the crowded room, separated from the small audience by a stanchion and velvet rope, though the private guards were more of a deterrent. She ascended to the low stage and sat in the center, flanked by Natali and several men and women she didn't know. Her smile became soft and sleepy as she let the speeches flow over her, uninterested in the false boasts of the executives. She kept her hands clasped together the whole time, Yazin and Darius enjoying the secret romantic gesture as they tried not to shift impatiently. It was easier to do so together than it would have been if they'd stayed apart; they could draw strength from their close contact and the budding love they were exploring.

Anee almost missed her introduction and couldn't help a tiny yawn as she stood in her pious pose and bowed. "Thank you. I look forward to meeting those who were so fortunate and so eager to see me today." The table was set up for her and she nodded her thanks to Natali when he pushed in her chair for her. She crossed her legs at her ankle and smoothed her skirt with her lower hands as she greeted the first person in line. To make sure nothing untoward happened there were guards flanking her a step behind and the visitors were given a choice of photos for her to sign which were stacked another small table just as they reached her. She fell into a pattern of saying something gracefully benevolent and shaking or clasping with her upper hands while her lowers signed the pictures. Yazin felt bad for Darius and would have switched but then her arms would have been crossed vertically and that wouldn't have been nearly as graceful or natural.

It was almost a surprise that she was through over a third of the 'supplicants' when the first cleric stormed onto the stage, his short beard bristling. "You are not Anee." He accused.

"I am pained at your doubt." She replied sadly. "It is because of these untrusting times that I chose to heed the call of these cunning engineers of corporeality."

"But not those of your sworn priests!" He countered.

"It is regrettable that the powers of sorcery were declared anathema four hundred and sixty-eight years ago." Anee said, discreetly signing the photo. "And that my priesthood would be so callous as to take away the opportunity of a common person favored by the gods to meet me." She shook her head again.

The cleric was shuffled away, but they were less than two thirds through when another got up the pluck to argue. He was dressed in the traditional robes of a higher ranking vicar. "It is wisdom to question an unlooked for and unlikely gift coming from those you do not trust." He said.

"That is true." Anee replied. Darius whispered something that Yazin tried to say. "Rash ptvh hva kmv mbtsr 'em sh'eryv ptvhym vlla shmyrh."

The priest bowed and departed without his signed picture.

The final one came near the end. "I have spoken with my colleagues and there is hope."

"Āsā nirāśā kē li'ē saṛaka para pahalā kadama hai." Anee replied.

"Yes, it is."

"You must know you can be harmed before you accept a risk. I make no judgments. Only declare who and what I am." Anee smiled and held out two signed pictures. "For your friend who left swiftly."

The last cleric didn't bow, but took Anee's hand with a smile that mirrored hers. "I admire your consideration."

Anee was exhausted when she got back to her apartment, and collapsed on the sofa. Her lower hands massaged her belly as her upper hands went to the back of her neck. "Thanks for the words." She said to herself.

"You did most of the real work." Darius replied.

"Your hands must be cramped."

"They are."

Anee looked over and saw a small box on the coffee table. She picked it up and opened it. " 'Let us know if this helps. Thanks for doing so well today - Natali." She lifted out a slender gold choker with a tiny medallion that had an open chip on the inner side. She handed it to her lower hands and Darius ducked out of the wig to try it on, both of them guessing what it was for.

"Does it - yes it does!" Darius giggled in Yazin's voice. "We're going to have a lot of fun with this."

"This too." Yazin held up what looked like a thong with a woman's slit sculpted on the outside. On the inside was an impression of a male member. "Now you won't be as curious about mine."

"Of course I will." Darius said. "Yours is real. Though I've been really tempted to touch our shared one more."

"Now you won't have to."

"That's a shame."

Yazin's cheeks turned dark under the mask. "Is it?"

Darius kissed her neck. "Of course it is. Not that we've gotten that far, but I hoped..."

"When we do, I'll be very glad to let you."

"Good."

"It's not quite time for bed. How about a swim?"

"Together?"

"Of course."

The goddess ran, laughing with two voices, for her bedroom and her array of swimsuits. Naturally she picked the bikini and dove into the pool a few moments later, heedless of the dangers, knowing that she was in perfect harmony with herself.