

## ***Survival of the fittest....***

Amanda could not remember the days when things had been different. Time seemed relative in this new world where only the strongest survived. These were dark times for the weak, but all that would soon change.

The darkness had killed them all; anyone and everyone Amanda had ever cared for. But they had tried to make the best of a shit situation; Amanda and her husband of twenty years; Tom had found a stately manor and lived peacefully for weeks, until last Tuesday. That was when everything had changed. They had come in the night. A hand tight over her mouth, Tom's throat cut beside her and she was dragged off into the night. She dreamed of it every single night and it still brought shivers down her spine. His dead, empty eyes.

A tear clung to Amanda's eyelash in the darkness as it played back in her head. They had raped her, many times over, fed her only on cold soup and stale bread. Her only comfort was the heroin that she had been forced to endure. The men were strong, some ex-military and they had dominated the women. They had sorted the women into fit and unfit; the younger girls some as young as twelve were undoubtedly the back legs of the new civilization, one in which Amanda would not be welcome. At forty-two, Amanda had been classified as unfit.

There was a moan as the rusty iron hinges of the shipping container opened, the natural mid-day light blinding Amanda momentarily before one of the taller, stronger and clearly more dominant men came into view. Amanda would have guessed that he hadn't shaved in at least two weeks as a fair beard was gathered around his face. He wore a ripped, chequered woodcutters shirt open on his hairy chest and Amanda noticed the rifle slung over his right shoulder. He must have comprehended this as an ever so slight smile of confidence cracked his face- he need not even reach for the rifle.

The other women around Amanda were weak, pathetic as she was but they lacked the defiant determination that was burning in her consciousness. They moved around at the sudden light, not unlike strange cave- inhabiting creatures, kept in the dark for years that had finally surfaced. They were the result of weeks, perhaps months of torture, abuse, hell.

The man reached into a leather satchel and withdrew a handful of four syringes. He held them out in front of him but they were instantly snatched away by the starving animals. The women transformed, their instincts taking over; hitting out and clawing at each other, fighting for their requisite.

Amanda stayed put in her place in the damp corner, watching with terror as three of the women fought for a single syringe. Blood dripped down the arm of one and she lashed out, hitting the other in the nose. Blood spurted from her nostrils and she reached up, wiping some away before diving on the woman, sinking her thumbs into her eye sockets until she screamed with pain and shuffled back into a corner. The triumphant victor stabbed the syringe into her arm and let her eyes roll back into her head. The third woman snatched it up and did the same with the remainder.

Two other men pushed passed and selected women from the darkness. They dragged them along the floor and Amanda saw one woman's head bobbing along the metal floor harshly and what little of a soul she still possessed died. The other woman mumbled psychotically under her breath, her arms clawing at the ground in resistance. Her hands grabbed hold of the shipping container door and she held tight, her face burning with determination. Amanda could see multiple cuts and even bite marks all up her arms, behind her ripped sleeves that had been stripped away for tying around her arms when jacking up.

The man pulled angrily at her but she kicked out with her legs, hitting him in the manhood. He dropped her instantly, clutching at his crotch and dropping to his knees. The remaining bearded man barked with laughter, his grunt of a voice echoing menacingly around the container.

"Bitch!" The man yelled, pulling out a serrated army blade and striding towards her slowly. Even in the semi-darkness the woman's terror was unmistakable. The man's eyes showed total hatred, any trace of compassion driven out by anger. He grabbed her by the ankle and slashed her from the knee down to the foot. A scarlet river trickled down her leg as the man dragged her back. She reached out, fumbling on the other woman's hands trying to hold on but failing, kicked out again and hit the man in the face.

His nose spurted dark blood and the man yelled out. He swung back a big black boot and brought his foot hard into her stomach. The woman let out a moan of agony but he didn't stop. He kicked her again and again until a small puddle of puke fell from her mouth. Battered, bruised and bleeding, the helpless woman was dragged off behind the shipping container.

The last man looked at each of the women as if to say 'try it' but the door groaned shut again, pitching them into almost perfect darkness save for small rays of light seeping through bullet holes in the side of the container. The rays carried dust across the inside of the container like a shit spectrum.

The darkness consumed Amanda, pushing in on her and making her small and afraid. She pulled her knees into her chest. The light rays might just have been enough to see the tear slip down her cheek.

Amanda felt a head knock hard against her knee as one of the women passed out. When Amanda went to push her head off her, she felt foamy drool around her mouth. The remaining females were either unconscious or dazed in a state extremely distant from their earthly presence. Soon Amanda was the only conscious one in the damp shipping container.

Time was liquid in the darkness but some time later she heard footsteps and as the door creaked open, Amanda let her whole body relax completely. She distantly felt her head collide with the steel floor and a throbbing sensation. Her eyes too began to sting as the light splintered through her heavily shut eyelids. She could hear two pairs of footsteps maybe, possibly one more. She heard one of the men say something and her ears heard it clearly but somehow the message was distorted on its way to the brain and all Amanda could make out was a muffled, absent command. She tensed her muscles in fear and prayed for an escape from this hell.

She felt the bodies of the girls around her lifted off the ground and maybe a minute later, she too felt a strong pair of arms lift her onto a shoulder and carried a short way before she was slumped down beside the others. Again her body took some impact and different aches criss-crossed around her body. She felt a stabbing pain from the inside of her stomach and thought of the life brewing away inside. A part of her wanted to rip it out with her bare hands.

At last, she managed to re-connect her mind and body and opened her eyes a fraction; a large black boot was a foot or so away from her head and another pair of feet not too far away. As the last body was dumped beside her, some of the impact shuddered through her leg, the distant man turned to leave but a painful, ringing voice close to Amanda yelled out;

“Oi, where you goin”?

A pause and then

“This was your idea. You finish it” and then his footsteps faded.

“Fine. Fuck you!” He yelled after the man.

Amanda could now hear, no- feel, the man’s heavy breathing above her. She heard the familiar sound of a gun cocking- the sound smashing into her skull as the hammer cocked with another painful ringing. The boots stepped a few feet forward and Amanda tried to roll onto her side but was restricted by the bodies of other women. She opened her eyes fully and looked around her.

A large rock lay above her head, arms reach away. Amanda made it her goal, her life’s ultimatum. She threw out her arm, her numb fingers reaching for the rock. She brushed it and her fingers fumbled for it, like insect legs until at last her fist closed around the rock. She looked up at the man who now had his back to her and was pointing his revolver down at the bodies.

A gunshot cracked the air and Amanda’s body shuddered. Then another and another. She felt the bullets disappear into the bodies around her, a horrible muffled sound that haunted her from then forth. She pushed with all her strength, felt her calves burn from the tension, and with one huge movement, pushed herself to her feet, swinging the rock in an arch, reaching its culmination as Amanda stood.

The force saw the man to the ground instantly and Amanda pounced on him, smashing the rock again and again into his skull until blood was dripping from the rock and passing over her fist like driftwood under a waterfall.

Amanda collapsed to the floor beside the remains of the man’s head; his skull cracked into pieces and his shrivelled brain a quarry under its destroyed protector.

She felt her chest rise and fall deeply; she lay there for maybe three minutes before suddenly getting to her feet, taking the rifle from the man’s shoulder and calling on the Gods for only one thing. To keep her legs moving.