

Meerkat Matriarchs

by Lorraine Gailey

Rebellion meant a look in the eyes, an inflection of the voice, at most an occasional whisper. Myra had reigned as the dominant female in this mob for almost 5 years so she recognised the signs easily. She sighed. Her next litter was due soon, so her fighting skills would be compromised but she had held her own in similar circumstances in the past. Her bigger regret was that she needed her eldest daughter Mary's experienced help to raise these pups, but now she would have to evict her from the mob... again.

This would be the third time. Of all her daughters, Mary attracted the attention of the occasional roving males most frequently and was more cunning than the others in slipping off for illicit assignations. Myra felt no remorse about what she would have to do when Mary's pups arrived. There was only enough food in her territory to feed one litter, and she would make sure that litter was hers.

Mary gave birth a few days later, and the ensuing fight was swift due to her weakened state. Myra's partner Martin took no part in the fight itself – that was not their way – but he stepped in to ensure that their daughter was chased far from the mob. By the time he returned, Myra had done the necessary and there was no sign of the alien pups.

The mob around them had watched the cycle unfold with the same intense, alert vigilance that kept them safe above ground and helped them stalk and catch their prey.

Each rebellion meant a possible shake-up to the hierarchy, and from each attempt their daughters learned a little more about their own chances of a take-over in due course. Mary would be vulnerable on her own so it would be weeks before they knew whether she would reappear to seek readmission to the mob.

They knew that if she survived, she would be accepted back thanks to the value she brought in terms of her strength, skill and experience. She would have moved one step closer to ultimate dominance, which would mean change for everyone including Martin who would not mate with his own daughter.

For today, however, the rebellion was over and they could relax back into their familiar ranks and go about their busy daily business.