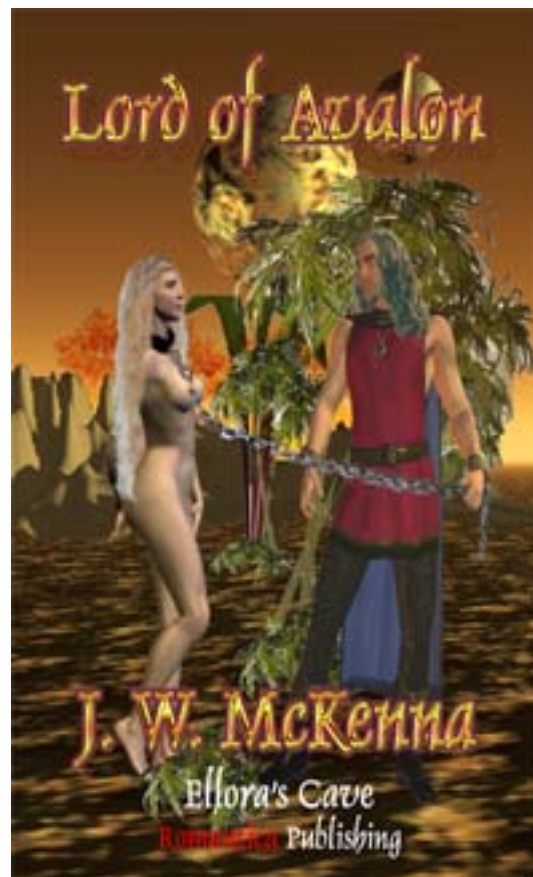




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## **LORD OF AVALON**

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**Warning:**

The following material contains strong sexual content meant for mature readers. LORD OF AVALON has been rated NC17, erotic, by three individual reviewers. We strongly suggest storing this electronic file in a place where young readers not meant to view this ebook are unlikely to happen upon it. That said, enjoy...

## Prelude

*Houston, Texas, September 2035*

Jack Baxter was surprised to see his wife kneeling naked on the rug when he came home from a long day at NASA's Houston headquarters. He rocked back on his heels, then quickly shut the door, afraid neighbors might catch a glimpse. He stared.

"Your breeder awaits, m'lord," Joyce said, fighting to keep the grin off her face.

Jack paused, then blinked, taking in the sight of his dark-haired wife. She still looked good to him after six years of marriage. Beautiful face. Great smile. Terrific sense of humor. And now she's greeting him naked. Naked! Her breasts were full and white, contrasted by the dark triangle of hair between her open legs. He felt his cock stir at the sight of her.

Sudden realization hit him. He cocked his head to the side. "You've been reading my notes again, I see."

Joyce looked up and grinned. "Yes, um, master."

"All right." He laughed and held up his hands. "Perhaps you can explain to me why the Avalonians turn you on so? It's not exactly a progressive planet, you understand."

She stood and approached him, kissing him on the lips. "I know. It's the raw sexuality of it. I mean, think of it—an entire planet where women are kept as 'breeders' for the ruling class!"

"Not all the women," he corrected, pulling her close to him with one arm, letting her feel the hardness of his cock. "There's the Noblewomen..."

"Oh, I know!," she said, dismissing them with a wave of her hand. "Still, doesn't that turn you on?"

“Well, sure, but I’m a man. We’re Neanderthals, remember? We get excited by girls in beer commercials. What makes a feminist like you all hot and bothered by this research?”

“It’s the secret fantasy of many women to be held and ravished by a handsome, powerful man,” she said, rubbing her nipples against his shirt. He could feel them like hot embers on his skin.

He raised his eyebrows. At 5-10 and 190 pounds, he didn’t exactly fit the profile of a ravisher. Nevertheless, Joyce loved him, he was sure. “So I guess this is your subtle way of telling me you’d like to be ravished tonight?”

She looked up and gave him a soft pout. “Oh, yes, there will be sex tonight, no doubt. I’m ovulating. But that’s not what this is about,” she said, indicating her nakedness.

“So, then what?” Jack asked, puzzled. Like most men, he thought linearly – *woman naked, woman want to get laid*. Especially since they’ve been trying to start a family for months now.

“The story. It’s time you told me.”

“Ohhh, that.” He stared off into space. “But I haven’t written it yet.”

“Jack, you’ve been gathering notes for months! Ever since that ship started sending back data! I know you’ve plenty of material for a book. I want to hear it.”

Jack nodded. It was true. Ever since NASA’s first starship had reached the third planet around the star Cyrus eleven months ago, a treasure trove of information had come flooding back.

The planet that NASA named Avalon had humanoid life! The world buzzed with the news. Probes were launched that helped scientists get a close-up view of the planet. From the probes, a picture of the humanoids’ rather unique civilization emerged: the natives of Avalon were reasonably advanced. They had a fully-developed language, art, transportation and a community structure that indicated the civilization had reached the equivalent of 17<sup>th</sup> century Earth.

They operated under a strict caste system; the higher-ranking members ruled the society and lower-ranking members served those above them. Women could be equals, although those who weren't considered Noblewomen or free members of the upper castes were kept as "breeders" to serve the rulers of the planet.

Apparently, it had not always been so. U.S. scientists learned that the use of breeders had been instigated by high priests many years ago when inbreeding among the ruling class threatened the stability of their leadership. Too many offspring had been born demented, physically weak or with damaging genetic diseases. Without knowing for sure that inbreeding was the cause, the priests nevertheless managed to hit on a workable solution.

Their ruling literally saved the higher castes and it elevated the priests to a much more powerful level than before. Priests became the top-ranked Damons, the *de facto* rulers of the planet, supplanting kings. The breeder program grew and developed until it was institutionalized through the creation of "slave pens" for young women.

Jack had learned all this because it was his team that was responsible for transcribing the tapes of conversations, once the language had been deciphered. From them, he had developed a good overview of the society, but it lacked emotion and detail.

That had bothered Jack. The public hungered for news about the planet and he didn't think they were satisfied by the dry facts and statistics provided by NASA. So Jack began taking notes about the humanoids themselves: Who they were, what they ate, how they lived. From that, a story began to emerge—a story about a master and his slave. A story that clearly excited Joyce to no end.

*If she can get so turned on just by notes, he mused, maybe I'm onto something here.* He grinned down at his wife. "Fetch me a martini, slave, and maybe I'll tell you about it."

"Ohh. Yes, master!" She scurried off. He watched her ass appreciatively as she disappeared into the kitchen.

He mock-swaggered around the room, stripping off his tie as he made his way to the couch. He sat down heavily and placed his feet on the coffee table. He resisted the urge to thump his chest.

In the kitchen, Joyce mixed a couple of martinis as she thought about this mysterious planet. She'd read all the news stories, but it was Jack's notes that had really had excited her. When she had read through his latest batch of notes earlier today, Joyce made up her mind to find out more about her husband's book.

She remembered a science fiction story she had read as a teenager that had given her a similar reaction. It had told about a planet where all the women were submissive to the men and acted as slaves to them. The women, though locked up or chained, were well-tended and well-loved, usually by very strong and virile men. She'd masturbated many a night after reading some of the more steamy passages.

Now there really was such a world and Jack had the story locked up in his head. He'd been taking notes for months without writing a single page! She was determined to find out more. She wasn't above using her body as an enticement.

She grabbed her thigh-length silk robe that had been draped over a chair and slipped it on. Then she brought the martinis out to the living room. Jack's face fell when he saw she had covered herself.

"Hey, what happened to Slave Girl?"

"Slave Girl will return if you behave yourself." She handed him a cold martini. "First, you've got to tell me what you're working on. I only get bits and pieces. You use terms I've never heard of: *dal*, *ryne* and *capeks*, for example."

"Ahh. Those are measurements the Avalonians use. A *dal* is about a week, a *ryne* a year, a *capek* is about a foot."

"Why don't you just say so!"

"Because they're not exactly equivalent. I'm trying to be scientific—"



Joyce shook her head. "I don't care about that. I care about the sexy stuff. Like the relationship between this Lord Ry-dah or whatever his name is, and his slave, Jenya. You have to tell me about them!"

Jack nodded. Those names were real enough—taken right from the transcripts. In fact, that had started him thinking about a novel based on Avalonian culture. By taking bits and pieces from other transcripts and adding details about planet life, he'd begun developing a love story.

It had surprised even him that he could ever imagine writing something like that. Perhaps that was why he hadn't been able to actually start the book. Yet the story seemed to write itself in his head.

"Okay," he told his wife. "But you're going to have to encourage me."

"What? Kneeling naked on the floor isn't enough?"

"Come here, sit on my lap."

Joyce didn't need further encouragement. "Yes, master," she breathed as she settled in, her martini rock-steady in her left hand. She took a delicate sip.

Jack smiled, took a sip himself, then pulled aside her robe so a rosy nipple was exposed. It thrust out in arousal. He thumbed it with his free hand.

"All right." He leaned back, letting the story spill out of his imagination, sparked by the facts he had gathered over the last few months and fueled by the alcohol and his amorous woman. "This Lord Rydah, you see, was about to take possession of his new breeder..."

## Chapter One

Lord Rydah couldn't help but keep his ears pricked for the jangle of the slaves' coffle. Such lines regularly passed by his window on their way to their deliveries to wealthier Damons. He'd often paused to watch, with growing longing, the line of young, naked women as they shuffled past, guarded by two or three old warriors.

His envy would soon be put to rest. This very sun, the coffle would stop by his humble home. He had saved a portion of his salary as a scribe for many long *rynes* to purchase a young breeder named Jenya.

Rydah, a third-tier Damon, lived in Blethryn, the third-largest city on the planet Avalon. The youngest of five children, had grown up as a quiet and studious boy. He secured a job as a scribe, a noble but obscure profession among the ruling Damons. His task, which he had been performing for eight *rynes* now, was to edit and copy the texts of the priests so their words could be sent to other cities. Blethryn was home to the Cabal, the priest overlords of the society.

He bent to his task of editing the High Priests' documents, tongue peeking out of the side of his mouth, a small smear of ink on his ear where he had brushed it with his free hand. His hair swept dark and full across his head in the traditional style of the Damons. Hair reflected the standing of its wearer: long or bushy for the Damons, medium for the Craftsmen, shorter still for the Merchants and cropped close for the Laborers and Warriors.

Rydah reversed the bow of his back to ease his aching muscles. He'd really have to get a taller desk. His seemed to have been designed for a much shorter person. But that was a luxury to a man saving for a slave, so he'd put up with it. Now that his slave was paid for, he'd be able to afford some new furnishings. Among the first would be a cot for Jenya, he decided. It wouldn't do to have his breeder huddled on the floor with the crawlies, would it?

For another *hura* he worked, pausing only to stretch or wiggle the cramps from his fingers. Then, a faint sound drifted to his ears: the sing-song rhythm of chains in the distance, coming nearer. Lord Rydah smiled slightly to himself, then tried to pretend not to notice as the coffle arrived on his street.

The jangle stopped suddenly. Rydah hunched over even farther, relishing this moment that he'd waited so long for. Another smile slipped across his angular face.

There came three knocks on his door.

Sliding his chair back, the young lord rose slowly and walked with exaggerated casualness toward the door, as if accepting a slave was a common occurrence in his house.

Ho, hum, another slave—where shall I put this one?

He opened the weathered panel and peered outside, his face composed, though his heart beat rapidly in his chest. A toothless old Warrior stood outside, his slave whip held loosely in his right hand. >From the looks of him, he'd been away from the battlefields for a long time. Herding slaves was probably all he could handle now.

"Lor' Ryda'?" the old man mumbled.

Rydah nodded gravely, trying hard not to grin.

"I'm deliverin' you' breedas, m'lord." He gave a stiff bow.

Rydah looked beyond the man to the slaves. He counted seven in line, each woman chained to the collar in front of her, their hands handcuffed together in front of them. He could see the sheen of sweat across their bodies, their naked breasts heaving with the exertion of their journey through the streets. By Rand, they were lovely! As they shuffled in place, the soft tinkle of their breeding bells sounded pleasant to his ears.

Going down the row, the lord spotted Jenya second from the end. "Thank you, bring her in."

The man turned and unlocked Jenya's collar chain from the women on both sides of her. The last woman in line was quickly rechained to the coffle. The guard led Jenya by her chain to the door, the little bell between her legs announcing her presence.

"Wait," Rydah commanded. He had noticed that Jenya's feet and legs were covered with dust and mud from the streets. "She's too dirty. Would you mind taking her out back and fastening her to the slave ring?"

"A' course, m'lord." The old guard bowed again and moved away.

Lord Rydah closed the door and smiled behind it. He'd wanted nothing more than to drag her in and start the breeding process immediately, but that was not befitting a lord.

He would force himself to wait.

Rydah returned to his desk and sat down. He worked for another *hura* before the twitching in his groin made him push back his chair and stand up.

It was time.

He strolled past the kitchen to the rear door leading to the courtyard, eager to see the young woman who would become the mother of his offspring. The long *rynes* of waiting fell away with each step. He opened the door and stepped out into the bright Cyrus sunshine.

Jenya was standing quietly, facing the stone wall, a four-*capek* section of chain leading from her neck collar to the ring. Her eyes were downcast. Rydah saw that her wrist restraints had been removed. Nevertheless, she kept her hands loosely clasped in front of her as an obedient slave should.

If she heard his approach, she gave no notice. She remained motionless except for the slight puckering of her nipples. Sweat dripped between her breasts.

Lord Rydah paused to take in his new beauty. Some Damon could afford several breeders and have houses full of children. That he could only afford one made his purchase all the more sweet.

Jenya was an exceptionally good-looking woman, with an oval face surrounded by golden-blond hair and a strong jaw. Her breasts were large, but not overly so. His eyes swept down the slender plane of her stomach to her wide hips, ideal for birthing. His eyes were drawn to the small bell that hung below the triangle of downy hair and announced her every movement. The bells were designed to bounce against the clitoris to stimulate the breeders so they would be ready for their masters' cocks at any time. His gaze traveled lower, to her sturdy legs that could work many *huras* on her feet and easily support a child in her belly.

He was glad that he had recognized her beauty early, so many *rynes* ago.

Rydah reached out to touch her shoulder and felt her tremble. His eyes fell on the small "V" that had been branded onto the skin of her upper left arm. In a few suns, a representative from Syminton would come out to brand an upside-down "V" just below to make an "X," indicating she was no longer a virgin and was, in fact, now the property of a Damon. Rydah turned her body slightly and observed the small six-digit number branded on the upper curve of her bell-shaped bottom.

If she ever ran away, the brand would trace her back to him.

But where would she go? Slaves only ran away when they were mistreated. The punishment for a runaway slave was not pleasant. Still, Syminton had cautioned Rydah to keep her chained up for a while, until she could be proved trustworthy—or until her belly swelled with his child. That seemed to settle even the restless ones.

He stepped closer and brought his hand up to her chin. She didn't resist as he raised her face to his. Her blue eyes were wide and questioning—and a little fearful.

For the first time, Jenya studied the face of her new master up close. She had seen him from afar, of course, as he stopped by to check on the growth of his slave. She had been afraid of him then. But now, standing before him, she saw something in his eyes that calmed her.

"It's all right. Don't be afraid." Rydah unlocked the chain from the ring, letting it hang down between her breasts, almost to the floor.

"Would you like to use the privy?" he inquired.

She nodded shyly, her eyes downcast.

He pointed to the small structure and watched as she stepped inside. She left the door open, as she had been trained not to hide herself from her master's eyes. He watched unabashed as she emptied her bladder in a noisy stream into the hole, her tiny bell jingling.

He brought her to the small fountain and told her to pump water into the bucket. When it was half full, he indicated she should wash the dust and dirt off her body. He stepped back and admired the way she moved, the shine of her hair when wet, the shimmering curves that winked in the sun. When she was done, he stood nearby, studying her until the sun dried her skin.

Rydah led her inside. She squinted in the dim light of the room, illuminated only by the bay window in front and a smaller window in the kitchen. If she disapproved of his humble home, she made no sign. The girl simply looked around, taking in the small kitchen, the living room that contained only a battered old couch and the desk. Her eyes traveled to the stairs, then away, as if she didn't want to be caught looking somewhere she wasn't supposed to.

"That's the loft," Rydah said quickly. "It's just my bed and clothes. You can sleep down here. I'll go out tomorrow and buy you a cot. The couch, I'm afraid, isn't too comfortable for sleeping."

Jenya nodded, waiting. She expected to be bred right away and the thought both terrified and fascinated her. Growing up in the slave pens, she'd seen the couplings between the house breeders and the hand-picked donors. It was all part of their education. The Merchants or Craftsmen brought in were often gentle, but Warriors were universally cruel and brutal.

She'd never seen how a Damon made babies, but if she could believe the whispers of the other virgins, some were just as brutish as Warriors.

"Jenya." She startled at the sound of her name. "Are you thirsty?"

She hesitated, then nodded, wondering if this was some sort of test. From a water bucket on the kitchen counter, he gave her a ladleful to drink. She was careful not to spill a drop. She'd heard that many masters were very strict about following their rules and she didn't want to anger her new master.

"More?"

She nodded.

Another ladle of water disappeared. Lord Rydah liked to watch her swallow, the way her throat moved in the soft light. He could imagine kissing that neck. He shook the image away. She was not his wife, merely a breeder. He might yet marry, if a Noblewoman with the right combination of status and means came along. It was socially acceptable to marry only within his station. And, it would be difficult to achieve a higher station, even if he chose to.

Marriage, of course, would have no bearing on Jenya. She would continue to bear his children if he took a Noble wife. If his wife also had children, they would have a higher status than his slave-born children, although those distinctions tended to disappear with age. Some of the brightest, most successful Damon children came from breeders.

It was possible for a breeder to achieve some social status, but it took many *rynes*. For example, Lord Fyrad, his father, had stayed with his breeder—Rydah's mother—for thirty *rynes*, and by now she was accepted as if she were practically a Damon. She even donned clothes, although not many. She still wore her collar, of course. As long as she was careful not to trade on her borrowed status, she would maintain an unofficial "honorary" title that was not quite slave, yet not nearly Noble.

Only Noblewomen were called Ladies. Fyrad had never found a suitable Noblewoman—or perhaps he found no one better than his slave, Saranya.

Rydah realized Jenya had returned her gaze to the ground while he had been lost in his reverie. She stood with her feet slightly apart, as she had been trained, her hands clasped behind her back, the chain hanging between her beautiful young breasts.

“Are you hungry?” Again, she hesitated. “Look, Jenya, you’re going to have to talk to me sometime. I promise I won’t beat you if you tell me you’re hungry.”

Just the faintest wisp of a smile touched the corner of her mouth. “Y-yes, master.” Her voice was low-pitched and velvety smooth. He had to strain to hear her.

“Good. I’ve got some fruit and a half-loaf of bread. Please fix us both something to eat.” He went to the far end of the living room and sat down at his desk. Too late, he realized he hadn’t chained her to the slave ring in the kitchen. He decided not to correct his mistake, to see how she might react. It would be good to know if his new purchase had thoughts of escape.

As he bent to his task, he heard the girl rummaging through the kitchen, trying to find utensils and cups. He smiled in quiet relief. In a few *lapars*, she came to him, chain clanking, carrying a plate for him. She bent over and placed it on the desk, being careful not to get it near the priceless scrolls he was copying.

He breathed in her scent: sweetness and musk. She straightened up and started to move away in her jingling gait he already was becoming accustomed to.

“Wait,” he said.

She froze.

With a wave, Rydah drew her closer. Reaching up, he found the small lock that connected the chain to her narrow metal collar. He didn’t have the key—the slave pen representative would bring it when he came with the branding equipment. The sellers did not encourage new buyers to trust their slaves too soon, so they didn’t provide the key right away. If they did, there might be many more runaway slaves to capture.

Rydah sighed. “I can’t very well have this chain in your way all the time, now can I?”

Jenya was startled. She’d heard from the other virgins that new owners liked nothing more than to chain up new breeders and have sex with them several times a sun. The worst situation was for a breeder to be brought into a family where the master already had grown sons. Then they’d all take turns at her, and the master would accept



the babies that were produced no matter who the father might be. They could nearly wear a breeder out.

Yet her new master seemed worried about her chain. It certainly didn't bother her — she'd been chained in one way or another since she was ten and had moved into the virgin slave quarters with the other girls.

To be unchained — well, it would be like being undressed. She might be naked, yes, but the chain somehow gave her dignity. To explain that to someone who had never worn a chain would be impossible, she knew.

Jenya took a step back, confused.

Lord Rydah, sensing he'd said something wrong, decided not to talk about removing it. "How about we wrap it around your waist like this, okay?" He used the small hook at the end to fasten it in a loop around her waist. The girl looked relieved.

*Odd*, he thought.

He knew he had much to learn from his breeder. Jenya bowed and moved away. Sighing, Rydah returned to his work.

Jenya stood in the living room, watching her new master. He wasn't at all what she had expected. He seemed in no hurry to make babies with her. She admired the way his work seemed so important to him. That he wasn't a rich Damon meant little to her. Later, it might grate. Right now, she was happy to be owned by a member of the ruling caste.

Her job was to have his babies, as many as he demanded — or could afford. From the looks of his surroundings, one might be all she'd be having.

Jenya felt her nipples harden as she thought about Lord Rydah making love to her. Well, hardly love, more like a mechanical pumping to lodge a baby within her. She had been trained not to become too emotionally involved, but how could she not? The whispered conversations among the virgins about love were far more interesting than the dull lectures on duty and obligation that the mistresses subjected them to.

The other virgins told her that some masters actually fell in love with their slaves. Could it be possible? Was Lord Rydah capable of such emotion?

Watching him hunched over this books, Jenya decided, no, he probably wasn't. With her luck, he'd be a cold fish that only purchased a breeder out of familial obligation.

Her nipples shriveled. She stood, legs slightly apart, arms behind her, and waited, like a dutiful slave should.

## Chapter Two

As Jenya waited for her master's orders, she allowed her mind to drift back to the first time she had ever seen him. She had doubted he had been interested in her at all. He was among a dozen Damon who had come out to examine the newest crop of virgins.

She was just ten rynes old. It was her first Selection...

*Being naked in front of these strange men did not embarrass her or the other girls. They had been taught at an early age that clothes were not necessary for breeders. When older, they would have to be accessible to their masters at all times.*

*They were all very proud to have been selected for the Damon caste. Other, less desirable girls had been sorted out into lower castes by the pen owner. The most wretched of those would be bred to Warriors or Laborers. Jenya shuddered at the thought of their fate.*

*She walked into Selection with forty of the girls, all ages ten to thirteen, their thin chains clinking noisily. The older girls were nervous, for they hadn't been selected yet. If a breeder hadn't been chosen by a Damon by the time she was fourteen, she'd be considered rejected, and either sent down to the lower castes or shipped off to another region where she might have a second chance at a Damon lifestyle.*

*Jenya knew she was small for her age, with undeveloped breasts and no growth between her legs. Lord Syminton had hesitated putting her up for Selection – there would have been no shame in holding her back a few months until she grew. But he had made the decision just this morning, seeing something in her that might attract a sharp-eyed Damon. Syminton had been in this business for many rynes, and he could spot a beauty in the making. He told Jenya he suspected she had those characteristics.*

*So Jenya had been included in the group that marched out proudly, looking down as they had been taught, but glancing up surreptitiously to see the type of men who might breed them in a few rynes.*

*By high lord law, no breeder could be touched until she had turned eighteen, but that left a lot of room for study, training, selection and preparation. Already, Jenya's arm itched with the*

*small “V” that had been branded into her upper left arm just last dal, the mark certifying to all she remained a virgin – and would until she was delivered to her new master. It was part of the Syminton guarantee.*

*Jenya glanced up and tried to memorize the faces around her. She had seen many fine cloaks as she walked the circuit. But the faces were hard to discern during her brief peeks. Some were stern and foreboding, while others seemed open and friendly.*

*She and the girls were in a shallow round pit, about two capeks below the level of the Damons who stood in a large circle around them. This served two purposes, her teachers had told them. First, it established in the girls’ minds that they were the underclass. In the slave pens, they knew they were the most desirable breeders and that feeling naturally went to their heads. By placing them below the level of their future owners, it brought home to them their true position. Second, it allowed the Damons an excellent vantage point to see them, while not actually being close enough to touch them. Touching them was prohibited, although some Damon tended to think they were above such laws. But this way, only by jumping down into the pit could they approach them and strict social customs would prevent anyone from attempting it.*

*“Slaves, you may look up,” Syminton intoned and as one, forty faces, including her own, tipped up toward the men. Immediately, they each broke into big smiles designed to attract a rich Damon.*

*By some chance, Jenya was standing right below the man she would come to know as Lord Rydah when she heard the command and found herself looking right into his piercing brown eyes. She blushed and glanced down again, fearful she might annoy him somehow. The lord’s expression did not change, so she risked another look as the slaves began walking their circuit again.. She turned her head over her shoulder to catch his eye again.*

*\* \* \* \* \**

*Lord Rydah, still bent over this scrolls, rubbed his eyes and cast a glance back at Jenya. She was standing still, her eyes closed, swaying slightly on her feet. She looked so inviting.*

For eight long *rynes*, he'd been waiting. He remembered the sun he first saw her like it was just a *dal* ago. She had been with many other girls, but when she looked up and smiled, it was as if she suddenly had been the only one in the pen.

*Seeing this young girl, so shy and yet so curious, touched him. His eyes roamed over the other girls, but kept coming back to this small, fair-haired girl. His mind gave conflicting point-counterpoints as he studied her. She hardly seemed the breeder type. Her legs were rather thin, although her hipbones seemed adequately wide. She had no breasts for nursing, although she was quite young yet. And she seemed to be intelligent, although it could be just the way she smiled at him.*

*He looked around at the other lords and saw them pointing out girls for closer inspection, yet none chose the little blonde. They seemed to prefer the ones with fuller hips, more developed breasts and a slightly saucy gait or flirtatious look. Oh, these older breeders knew all the tricks!*

*But not this girl. He thought maybe she had been paraded out too soon. She seemed unsure of herself, as if puberty was too far away to give her a hint of what she might become. He started to select another girl for a one-on-one examination, an older girl who had nice wide hips and budding breasts that promised to be well-able to nourish a Damon child, but he couldn't bring himself to point.*

*His eyes roamed over the circling line of girls, coming back again and again to the girl he would come to know as Jenya. He knew that only if he selected her for Inspection would he learn more about her. Inspecting her didn't mean she was "the one". Many Damons carefully studied many girls before selecting their breeder.*

*Rydah realized that he was reluctant to choose her because of what the other lords might think. Perhaps they'd surmise that he chose this thin one because he preferred boys, or because he couldn't afford a full-figured breeder.*

*He laughed at himself when it became clear that this girl was the one that most interested him, and he was only rejecting her because of his shaky social standing. Here he was, surrounded by Damons of much higher social order, and he was deferring to them without even being aware of it. Though he swore such things did not matter to him, here was evidence that they did.*

*He shook off his embarrassment and caught the elder Syminton's eye. "That one," he said, pointing to the thin blonde. "I'd like to hold her for Inspection."*

*He purposefully did not look at the other Damons, though he could feel their stares.*

## Chapter Three

Lord Rydah came out of his daydream and was surprised to see the light fading outside. He rubbed his eyes. Just a few more pages and he'd be finished. He scratched a match and lit the two candles on his desk, then returned to his task. His eyes swam in and out of focus.

Rydah checked his timepiece—the courier would be by in less than an *hura*.

He turned, suddenly aware that he'd been ignoring Jenya for a while now. She stood impassively in the living room, her chain still hooked around her waist. For just a moment, he admired her body again. He longed to take her into his arms and slide his hard cock deep within her. He could imagine her warm wetness, her rapid breathing, her small arms encircling him.

He found himself breathing shallowly in anticipation. "Jenya," he said.

She opened her eyes, startled.

"Come here."

She came to him quickly in her jingling stride. He directed her to stand next to his desk. "I've got just a few more pages to do. I know I've been ignoring you. But I have to finish this work tonight. It would help encourage me to work quickly if you would stand here by my side. I want to feel your presence."

She nodded and stepped close. Rydah inhaled her scent again. Her hair smelled like fresh rain. Her skin had a natural, sweet perfume. He closed his eyes and drank in the delicious odors.

His cock grew hard. He glanced over to see her firm young breasts at eye level. His eyes drifted down to the downy fur at the triangle of her legs and the hint of the pleasures below. "Spread your legs apart," he ordered. She obeyed instantly.

In spite of his efforts to finish his task, he allowed his hand to reach out and flick the bell, causing it to bounce against her clit. He noticed the muscles of her upper thighs twitched in response. He watched, fascinated, as her labia parted and swelled. Her clit peeked a shy greeting from behind its hood.

*That was a stupid idea, he told himself. I'll never be able to finish my work now. All I want to do is breed her.*

Jenya was no fool. She could see the impact she had on her lord. She resisted a smile. The man was human after all. She could see the bulge in his breeches. Jenya felt a sense of pride and power for the first time.

Now she knew why the bell had been such an important adornment to her body. She could remember dreading the moment her clit-hood would be pierced, yet knew she would not be presentable to her lord until it was done, so she had gone to the clinic with determination...

*The other girls had told her that it hurt, yes, but only for short time. The way they held themselves with self-assurance and satisfaction made Jenya wonder if they suddenly thought of themselves as holy.*

*Lady Margeld, the Noblewoman of Lord Syminton, escorted her, naked, down the corridors until they reached the right cubicle where the two nurses awaited. "This won't hurt much," she assured Jenya. "You know why we do this, don't you?"*

*"To stimulate my reproductive organs so that I might be more receptive to my master," Jenya said by rote.*

*"Yes, but do you know exactly what that means?"*

*Jenya grew embarrassed. "Um, it's to rub against my clitoris and make me want to breed all the time."*

*Margeld's face broke into a broad smile. "That's right! All the Damon breeders have them. You want to be ready for your master at all times. Only then will you be a successful breeder. Now, I'll leave you to the nurses." She turned and left the room, leaving Jenya at their mercy.*

*A nurse with a hooked nose directed Jenya to sit up on the padded bench that was raised at one end. She fastened her legs with straps to both sides, pulling her thighs far apart.*

*"Here, drink this," the second nurse said, thrusting a cup into her hands. Jenya looked at it questioningly until she responded. "Don't worry, it's just something to relax you, so it won't hurt." She gave her a kindly smile. "I'm Agthar, this is Tumira." She pointed at the hooked-nosed woman.*



*Jenya swallowed the contents of the cup gratefully. The liquid burned going down and brought tears to her eyes.*

*Agthar made her lay back on the slanted table until she was resting comfortably.*

*Tumira immediately dove between her legs and began pinching the fold of flesh above her clit. Jenya, though not embarrassed, felt uneasy at the familiarity the nurse showed with her virgin parts.*

*"Right here," the nurse said softly, more to herself than to Jenya.*

*Agthar tried to distract Jenya by holding out the tiny bell that would soon be permanently attached to her. "Isn't it lovely?"*

*Jenya, reaching out to touch it with her fingertips, had to admit it was. The bell was no more than a calabon in length – maybe even a little shorter. The delicate jewelry was hand-crafted in mindira, the rare, yellow-white metal mined in the Pincarn region. A narrow ring made with a sturdier mindira alloy allowed the bell to swing freely. Jenya held it up and listened to its soft but clear tinkle.*

*"It's beautiful," Jenya breathed. She began to relax a little, possibly from the drink or the knowledge that this exquisite piece of jewelry would soon be hers.*

*Agthar took the tiny bell from her fingers and jingled it once again, and Jenya watched, fascinated.*

*"Ow!" A sudden pain startled her. Jenya tried to jump up, but the straps held her down.*

*"There, it's nearly done," Tumira announced.*

*Jenya looked down between her legs to see a needle poking through both sides of the flesh above her clitoris. In a flash, Tumira removed it and replaced it with the bell that Agthar handed her, threading the ring through the flesh and locking the tiny pin home.*

*"All done." The nurses stood back.*

*Jenya, amazed at how quickly they had worked, stared at her new jewelry. There was very little pain now. Tentatively, she reached down and flicked the bell and noticed right away how the delicate rim of the bell bounced against her skin, just below her clit. For a moment, she thought the nurses placed it too low, then was startled to see her clit peek its little head out from underneath its hood.*

*She flicked the bell again, and now the rim just touched her expanding clit. The sensations, though subtle, aroused her.*

*Now she knew why those other girls had looked so satisfied. It had taken a few days for the soreness to dissipate, but the pleasure the bell gave her had been worth it.*

Jenya smiled at the memory as she stood next to Rydah's desk. She moved her hips, letting the bell bounce softly against her clit. Her nether lips parted in anticipation, although she remained a little nervous. Jenya watched as her lord copied the remaining few pages quickly. His penmanship was neat and although she couldn't read the writing, she believed the documents were important.

Rydah came to the last page and finished it hurriedly, not even starting over when he made a slight error. He simply covered it up with a bolder stroke of his pen and moved on. It would be good enough for the priests of Zandir, he decided.

Sighing, he put down his pen and checked the time. Just ten *lapars* before the courier would arrive. He debated mating with Jenya first. Ten *lapars* would be plenty of time to plant his seed. Still, it seemed rushed, even for him. He decided to wait.

But that didn't mean he couldn't fondle her.

He wrapped up the pages for transport, then slipped them into a bluta-skin bag.

"Slave, come with me." He led her to the couch, then sat, bringing her between his knees. She stood stiffly, clearly apprehensive.

"Relax," he said gently. "I'm waiting for a courier. I just want to touch you until he arrives."

She nodded and looked down at his hands. Her skin seemed hot to his touch. Was she in breeding mode now? Most Damons who took breeders simply mated with them daily to ensure they became pregnant.

He touched her skin, amazed that this young breeder was now his. She inhaled slightly and he felt her breasts swell to his soft touch. By Rand, they felt good to him! As he watched, stroking her gently, her nipples became erect, stretching out a good *calabon* for him.

He so wanted to touch her slit, feel the wetness there. He could certainly smell her desire now, but he had to hold off for a few more *lapars*.

*Where was that damned courier!*

He ran his hands down along her sides, letting her rib bones slip under the pads of his fingers. The smoothness of her stomach as it flowed into her hips fascinated him. He stroked his fingers up and down between her bottom rib and the wide flaring of her hip bones. He could imagine her stomach swollen with his child. His cock threatened to rip open his breeches at the thought. Uncomfortable, he adjusted the fit of the cloth around his straining cock.

Rydah looked up and saw that Jenya had closed her eyes, and her head had tipped slightly to one side. Her soft breaths caught in her throat. As his hands continued to trace her outline, down along her hips to the thighs, enjoying the smoothness there, her tiny bell tinkled in anticipation.

The scent of her sex overpowered him. In another *lapar*, he would have to have her, and the hell with the courier! He reached behind her and ran his fingers over the firm globes of her ass. It, like the rest of her, was perfect. His fingers traced the small numbers up high, near her waist and he smiled inwardly. She belonged to him now. He could hardly believe his good fortune.

He leaned in and opened his mouth slightly, just letting his lips brush against her nipples. They were fully extended now, he could tell. He could imagine his child suckling on these proud nipples, growing healthy and strong.

He wondered if he could draw out any milk from her now. He flicked his tongue at the hard nubbins and sucked greedily for a moment.

A sudden knocking at the door disturbed him. Finally! He leaned in and rested his forehead against her stomach, just below her breasts, collecting his wits about him. He breathed in deeply, taking in the odor of her sexual heat one more time.

Sighing, he released her and stood up. His cock had to be coaxed to lie against his stomach, out of the way. It throbbed with need—a need that would soon be satisfied.

Rydah picked up the soft leather case and went to the door.

"Lord Rydah?" The courier was just a boy, no more than sixteen. He bowed, but not before he caught sight of Jenya, standing naked just a few *capeks* behind Rydah. His eyes widened, then he looked down.

"I-I have come for the package for Zandir. Is it ready, sire?"

"Yes. Here it is. See that it is delivered safely into the hands of Priest Jenar."

"Yes, m'lord." He bowed again and allowed himself one more glance at Jenya. Rydah thought he caught just a glimpse of an erection pressing the boy's breeches before he turned and fled.

Smiling, Rydah closed the door. He turned and took in Jenya's beauty one more time. She was all his. She would do anything he asked of her. The training at the slave pens was thorough, although she had yet to breed. No doubt she had observed many other slaves pleasuring men in many different ways. He wondered if the girls had to take notes, or if they were quizzed on techniques. The idea amused him.

He rubbed his tired eyes. "Do you require anything? Hungry, thirsty?"

"Only if m'lord is having something," she murmured. By Rand, her voice made him hard! How did a breeder do that so easily?

He nodded, realizing how long it had been since he had eaten. There wasn't much left in the larder. Tomorrow he'd have to go to the market. The thought of him walking along the market stalls, trailed by his new breeder made him swell with pride.

"Yes, you may fix us dinner." He watched her turn and move into the kitchen. He admired the swell of her ass, the heaviness of her upper thighs. She would be a good breeder, he told himself again.

\* \* \* \* \*

She brought bread and cheese and waited for him to give her permission to eat before she downed a bite.

"Come," he said when they were finished. "We shall retire upstairs for the night. Tomorrow you will have your own bed."

Jenya nodded, secretly pleased to be invited upstairs. It wasn't what she had expected. Her slave mistress told her of breeders being kept chained in kitchens, in basements, or, in the warm season, outside near the back door. Rarely did one sleep in a Damon bed!

Upstairs, Jenya observed the simple sleeping mat, a blanket tossed carelessly over it, two pillows at one end. A wooden box contained some clothes. Two small candles were the only other furnishings in the narrow room. Because of the steep pitch of the roof, only the center portion could be utilized. Still, it was both cozy and breezy—windows at both ends of the gabled roof were open, letting cooler air in.

"Are you ready to do your duty?" His voice sounded stiff and forced to her. He seemed ill at ease.

Jenya turned, eyes downcast, the obedient breeder. "Yes, master." Her nerves were like tight wires. All her training had prepared her for this moment, yet she worried she'd do something wrong somehow.

"Good. Lie on the bed on your back and prepare yourself."

## Chapter Four

Intellectually, Jenya knew just what to do. She had seen the house breeders many times from the Virgin Corridor. As part of their training, the virgins were led into a row of narrow boxes that were twelve *capeks* off the floor of the breeding chamber. Barred windows allowed the girls to see what transpired, while keeping them safe from the men below.

She clearly recalled her first Observation of the breeding act. She had been eleven—a little young, yes, but she had already been selected, so it was deemed proper.

This rite, normally reserved for virgins aged twelve and older, served as education in all matters of sex for the young girls. They had begun by observing the gentle and pleasurable tactics of the Craftsmen.

Lady Margeld had taken charge of the girls...

*"Come, little virgins, let's go," Margeld clapped her hands. "Now remember what we discussed. There's nothing to be afraid of, no one is being hurt, despite what you might hear. The act of sex with your master can be quite pleasurable."*

*She herded all twenty-two of them into the Observation corridor. Jenya whispered nervously to her friend Magda, asking if she was ready for the experience. Lady Margeld allowed this, as it helped calm them down. Jenya knew that some girls, seeing sex for the first time, had even fainted. And this in spite of the many lectures the Lady had given them!*

*Jenya took her seat with the other girls on the narrow benches and peered through the windows. She counted fourteen breeders below, sitting on mats, talking. Some looked up when they heard them shuffle in and waved. Most ignored them.*

*The girls had been cautioned not to try to talk to the breeders, so they just sat and waited. It didn't take long.*

*The door at the far end opened and fourteen young to middle-aged men, all dressed in Craftsmen's robes, entered. There was a brief dash as those in front ran to the most attractive women, while those in back seemed resigned to accept whoever was left.*

*When everyone had been partnered up, they sat nervously, waiting for Syminton or his son to come in and check the pairings. Each man and woman had their characteristics carefully charted. While a certain amount of random breeding was allowed, even encouraged, Jenya had been taught that it would not do to have a Craftsman, for example, with poor number skills, mate with a breeder who had exhibited similarly weak skills.*

*Mirdar checked their character sheets as he walked among them and occasionally made a switch, much to the disappointment of one man or another. To the breeders, it seemed to make little difference. All of the women were in prime breeding age, between nineteen and twenty-six, and all were currently ovulating. According to what Jenya had been taught, they also hadn't been allowed to pleasure themselves for several suns.*

*In other words, she thought with a giggle, they were ready for the men's hard cocks.*

*Jenya pressed her face between the bars and took in the scene. She had heard about what went on here and now waited expectantly to see it. She felt funny inside and didn't know why.*

*Her eyes roamed over the pairs, finally settling on one couple in particular. The Craftsman had a kind face and the woman was pretty. She called them Allnal and Ceptar, after the names she had given her dolls when she had been younger.*

*"You may begin," Mirdar said and left the room.*

*"No talking," Lady Margeld whispered to her charges. The girls didn't need to be told – as one, they focused their attention on the action below.*

*The men all began removing their tunics. A few of the girls gasped when their turgid cocks sprang free from their breeches. Some of the Craftsmen looked up and smiled briefly at the girls. Jenya smiled back; other girls hid their faces. The men otherwise ignored them – it was bad form to pay too much attention to the young virgins.*

*The breeders all sank back on their mats and spread their legs wide, knees up. Jenya watched as if this technique was something rare to behold, something passed down from generation to generation. Later she would learn that it was simply the most convenient method of reproduction.*

*Some of the men jumped right in between the women's legs and began thrusting themselves into them. Others, Jenya saw – the handsome couple included – took their time. Allnal, the*

*breeder she'd named, lay back, but reached down between her knees to stroke the man's chest. Ceptar, in return, leaned over to kiss and play with her breasts.*

*By Rand, this was odd! Why spend time with her milk sacs when she wasn't nursing? Did he not know? Jenya stared. Watching him kiss her made her stomach tingle again.*

*He continued to kiss her breasts, and now Jenya could see his hand drift down to touch the downy slit between her legs. He moved his fingers there. Jenya looked closely and remembered something the Lady had said during a lecture: Breeders who weren't belled often needed to get wet there to make it easier for their master's cocks to enter. Then she showed them a few techniques to accomplish this quickly and they had practiced it on themselves.*

*Yes, on themselves – but never had they allowed another person to touch them like that! Yet the woman seemed to be enjoying it. It had felt good, Jenya remembered. Maybe it felt better if you could just lie back and let someone else do all the work!*

*Ceptar alternated between Allnal's breasts and then moved up to her face. Now what? Then she noticed that the position allowed his cock to swing closer to her breeding entrance. Then Ceptar kissed the Allnal on the lips. Lady Margeld had told the girls about this, but had cautioned them that Damon would probably not kiss them in the same way they'd kiss Noblewomen.*

*"The breeding occurs here," she had said, pointing to the vee between Jelar's legs. The girl had "volunteered" to stand before the class as a living display. No doubt, Jenya remembered thinking, because she had the biggest breasts among the young virgins. "Your master may kiss you here and here," she had continued, using the pointer to tap Jelar's breasts, "but he's mainly interested in your breeding passage. Keep that in mind."*

*Margeld had also warned them about some of the strange habits of Damon. "For example," she told them, "sometimes a Damon lord will elect to use your mouth or your rear passage, rather than your breeding channel, just for variety's sake."*

*The girls had all giggled at the thought of wasted seed.*

*"Or," she had continued, "a lord may 'loan' a slave to a higher-ranking Damon or priest for breeding. This could be an attempt to bring favor on his house by raising a more desirable child or it could simply be the repayment of some debt."*



*Margeld's instructions echoed in her head as Jenya had watched the lovers below. Ceptar reached down with one hand and steered his large cock into Allnal. The breeder, surprisingly, reached down and helped him. Their hands touched around his member. He smiled and moved his hips. Jenya could see the head of his cock disappear into her.*

*Jenya squeezed her legs again, but what she really wanted to do was touch herself— "Down There". No, she thought giggling, Lady Margeld had insisted they call it certain names, names the lords like to hear. Cunt, yes, that was one. Pussy. And she encouraged them to use the really naughty word, Fuck. She had made them say it. "Fuck, Fuck," and the entire class dissolved into giggles as they repeated it with her.*

*She watched, fascinated, as Ceptar's cock slipped in and out of Allnal's pussy. Cunt. Fuck. She held her fingers to her lips to stifle her laughter. Allnal's face had an expectant expression, as if Ceptar was about to tell her something important. Her eyes were open wide. Her hands rested on his shoulders. Her legs remained spread wide, her knees up.*

*She made noises in her throat. Noises that Jenya could hardly hear over the others in similar throes. In fact, looking around the room, she observed many hips in blurred motion, many expectant faces. There seemed to be a lot of similarity in this breeding experience.*

*Jenya heard a shout, then another one. Her eyes tracked from one climaxing couple to another one before returning to Ceptar and Allnal, still riding strong. She could see the muscles in his arms cording, his neck flaring. How much longer could he press into her — no, fuck her — like that?*

*Suddenly, with a roar, Ceptar drew up tight against Allnal and held still. Only the muscles around his ass seemed to twitch. Jenya wasn't sure what had happened, but she suspected it was what the Lady had told them about. "When a man launches his seed into a breeder, he often pushes in hard and squirts in a small amount of fluid that makes the babies."*

*When the men were done and the breeders lay back, exhausted, Lady Margeld led them out. "On the morrow, we'll talk about what we observed this sun," she said, looking a little flushed. "Now it's time for bed."*

*That night, Jenya heard many of the girls making almost inaudible groans. The girl next to her had her jaws clamped onto her pillow as her sheets wiggled near her waist. Jenya suspected what they were doing, but did not attempt it herself. She was confused by what she had seen.*

Since that sun, she had come to know just how fortunate she was. To be selected by a Damon! She must be valuable indeed! The plainest, strongest women were kept to breed Warriors, and more refined were saved for Craftsmen and Merchants. Only the cream of the crop were reserved for Damons.

From age ten on, she had risen to the top of the hierarchy in the slave community. Now she was here and determined to fulfill her duty. She wanted this man to be successful and have many fine babies.

She lay back and opened herself to her new master. Her legs shook with anticipation.

Lord Rydah stared at her nubile body, so full of promise, and began to remove his clothes. His cock already strained against his breeches.

He quickly freed it and delighted in seeing her eyes widen at the sight. She licked her lips nervously. That reminded Rydah that Damon slaves were trained in all kinds of pleasure. He would have to partake in that pleasure later—tonight he only wanted to take her, quickly and deeply.

He straddled her. Her eyes flitted from his face to his hard cock. He knew she was scared. He heard her chain rattle and her bell jingle as she shook.

She spoke suddenly. “D-do you want to chain me, master?”

Her question startled him. He knew breeders remained chained in the pens so they would be used to constraints—many Damon thrilled at having a woman chained up, ready for them, helpless. It furthered their total subjugation.

“No. I don’t.”

“Very well, m’lord.” She lay back. He saw her trembling. She reached down and flipped the tiny bell up out of the way. The jingle seemed loud in the sudden silence of the room.

He tried to make her feel more at ease. “This it not supposed to hurt.” However, he worried that taking her virginity might indeed hurt. Should he go fast or slow here? He didn’t know.

After all, he was a virgin too. Not that he would ever share that news with a mere slave!

Rydah placed the tip of his cock at her entrance. Her wetness quickly coated the mushroom head. That pleased him. She had been well trained. Buying from the best had such advantages.

He pressed in slowly. Her eyes widened, her mouth opened slightly. The more he pressed, the wider her mouth opened, he noticed. He pulled back and nearly smiled when her mouth narrowed. In, open; out, closed.

Her fluids had lubricated her passage completely. She was ready.

He pushed in one more time, right up to the thin wall of her virginity, satisfying himself that she was, indeed, intact as promised. Then he pulled back and plunged deep into her. Her eyes opened fully and she gasped. He saw the beginnings of tears.

He barely moved, just enough to press the shaft of his cock against her clit. She felt hot and wet and tight around his cock. He loved this sensation—and the power he felt over his slave. *No wonder Damons brag about their breeders!*

Rydah rocked against her, relishing the stimulation in his erect member. Her tiny bell was muffled by the press of their flesh together. A new expression came over Jenya. Her mouth fell open again. She began to rock with him. He felt her hips move under his.

She was beginning to enjoy this!

Her pleasure drove him onward. Rydah pumped faster, letting his cock dictate his need. Jenya's eyes fluttered closed, and she started to make noises in her throat.

"Oh, oh, oh." Then, "Oh Rand, oh Rand."

Jenya had never imagined it would be like this! The pain quickly faded, replaced by a feeling that spread throughout her body. Without thinking, she reached around and grasped the roundness of his ass and pulled him to her. When she realized what she was doing, she let go as if her hands had been burned.

Rydah wanted to tell her to continue, but thought maybe it wouldn't be Damon-like. He wanted to lose himself in this girl, yet he felt he must keep a certain distance.

They rocked back and forth, trying to learn each other's rhythms. Rydah allowed himself to be swept away by the sensations. The hardness of his cock, the tightness of her breeding passage, the wet sounds of their lovemaking.

*No – breeding, right?*

He looked down at Jenya and caught her looking right back at him before she lowered her eyes demurely. He wanted to tell her it was all right, but he said nothing. He watched as a rivulet of sweat coursed down her neck to pool in the hollow of her collarbone.

*She's so beautiful and now she's mine*, he thought. *Mine*. He thrust harder into her. Her lips parted. He wanted to kiss them, but didn't.

Rydah, who had been waiting for this sun for many *rynes*, felt the moment approach. His seed rose up in him. Drops of sweat flung down onto Jenya's naked body. He closed his eyes and felt his cock throb. He sensed she was nearing the peak of her pleasure as well. With a sudden roar, he pushed hard into her, his ball-sack slapping the apex of her legs. He released his precious seed into her and she grabbed him hard by the shoulders, wrapping her legs around him. The chain rattled as she shook with desire.

"Oh, Master! Master!" she cried out. Her hips continued to twitch for several seconds as their pleasure ebbed. Finally, Rydah pulled free, breathing hard.

"You are now a true breeder. Congratulations," he said awkwardly.

She stared at him, then looked away. Inside, her emotions were in turmoil. The breeding had been everything she had been taught, yet her master seemed a little distant, even cold. She hoped she had performed adequately – she had even achieved an orgasm. Wasn't that all right? Perhaps she should try harder next time.

Rydah rolled over and immediately went to sleep. He had forgotten to chain her. It didn't matter – Jenya had absolutely no desire to run. Despite his aloofness, she believed this man had the potential to be a good master, she decided. Then sleep overtook her and she drifted off, a contented smile on her face.

## Chapter Five

Jenya awoke first and was delighted to see her master snoring peacefully next to her. This was unheard of! To share the master's bed the first night!

She knew she would be relegated to the downstairs as soon as he bought the cot, but she enjoyed her temporary high status nonetheless.

Slipping out of the bedcovers, she padded downstairs, holding one hand on her chain and the fingers of her other hand to her bell to keep them both quiet.

Her breeding passage felt strange. It leaked fluids, which made her want to press her thighs together. She looked down between her legs and made a face at the sticky fluids, tinged with blood. She went outside to relieve herself in the privy. Later, as she washed up, it occurred to her that she had not been chained at all since she arrived.

*He trusts me already?*

The feeling gave her a warm glow. She had no desire to run from this lord. Besides, when she had been twelve, she had seen what happened when a breeder ran away.

She remembered the girl clearly. Glynda had been brought back after running away from a second-tier Damon. Before they punished her, they allowed her to stay a sun with the other girls, so she could tell her story and they could judge for themselves the folly of running—slaves had to learn to accept their fates and make the most of their roles.

Glynda had been purchased by a second-tier Damon who had recently lost his breeder in childbirth. He needed someone to take over caring for the baby...

*"The baby was an ugly little brat," she said, tearfully, as she awaited word on her punishment. "It cried all the time. I had no milk, so every sun, I had to milk goats to feed it. My master wanted me to care for the baby, keep the house clean, fix all his meals – and be ready for him whenever he wanted to breed, which was often!"*

*Tears ran down her cheeks. "I tried to keep up. I really did! I'd be in the middle of cleaning or feeding the baby, and he'd be right there, demanding his rights to my pussy! I did everything he asked, but within two moons, I was so tired I could barely stand up."*

*"He grew angry at my exhaustion, so he'd beat me. I'd be crying, the baby would be crying and he'd be standing there with his crop in one hand and his big cock in the other, ready to breed with me again as soon as he finished beating me!"*

*The girls clucked in sympathy. Jenya thought Glynda sounded a little spoiled, but she made no comment. She wondered if her lord would want to mate all the time. The thought made her nerves spark.*

*"Finally, I just snapped. He went out for the sun and left me unchained – usually he had me on a long chain so I could tend the baby. I took the baby to a neighbor's house and left it with the slave there, telling her I had to run to the market. Then I ran away. I hoped I could reach Zandir, but I was picked up within a dal."*

*The girls murmured and told her how unfortunate she had been. Jenya could see a few cast looks at Glynda that indicated they too thought she had given up too soon. The baby, according to her, was almost a ryne old, and would soon be walking and talking. Just a few more moons and the baby might become a delightful little child. And Glynda would have grown heavy with child herself, so the toddler would have a playmate eventually.*

*Instead, she was back in the pens, a failure at age nineteen, ready to be sent down the castes to be mated with a Merchant or worse.*

*Lady Margeld came for her later, leading her out by her chain, not saying a single word to her. She had a look of disappointment on her face that Jenya had never seen before. Glynda's failure was Syminton's failure, Jenya supposed.*

*A hura later, they gathered the girls into the boxes overlooking the breeding pens. It was a tight fit, as all forty young virgins were present.*

*Below, the punishment pole had been erected in the empty room. Glynda was facing the pole, with her hands tied above her head and her ankles fastened to the bottom. The girls could hear her whimpering already.*

*Syminton's son Mirdar had come in carrying the large lash. He walked all the way around the pole, swishing it and seeing the effect it had on her.*

*Mirdar spoke loudly enough for everyone to hear. "Glynda, you are guilty of running away from your master, a master who selected you at age twelve and paid for you over a period of six*

*rynes. Yet just two moons after delivery, you ran away. You have brought shame on the house of Syminton & Son."*

*Glynda's shoulders shook.*

*"For your punishment, you will receive fifteen strokes of the lash. After you recover, you will become a house breeder for the Laborer caste."*

*There was an audible gasp from the girls. Laborers! Only being named a Warrior breeder could have been worse!*

*Glynda began to sob. Jenya doubted she even felt the first stroke, so devastating was her demotion. She was sure if Glynda could have another chance, she'd endure her life at the Damon's house with a lot more grace. But it was too late. The lawyer had already chosen another breeder, as was his privilege. Syminton guaranteed their breeding slaves.*

*Glynda cried out as the second blow fell. Jenya could see thin lines of blood in the welts that were left on her skin. She knew from her lessons that the wounds were not deep, but might leave scarring. Not that it mattered. Laborer breeders didn't have to look pretty.*

*For several long laps, the blows fell. Glynda passed out near the end and simply hung from her arms, her knees bent on both sides of the pole as the final two strikes marked her. Mirdar got a bucket from the corner and splashed water on her, causing Glynda to come to and gasp in pain and shock.*

*She was left there while the girls filed out silently, their pale faces reflecting the brutality of the beating. Each of them vowed never to run away, no matter how bad it got.*

*The punishment had had the desired effect.*

Jenya had seen Glynda only once after that. It was nearly a *ryne* later when she was returning from her exercises outside their living quarters. She spotted Glynda getting some sun, her belly swollen with the seed of a Laborer. She looked miserable. Jenya, out of deference to her, did not acknowledge her presence.

Jenya shuddered at the memory and hurried into the kitchen. She looked over her new master's meager larder. Only a hard crust of bread and some cheese remained. Sighing, she fixed a meal for her master, then started up the stairs to the loft.

She hesitated. Would it be better to stay downstairs and not to assume that she would be allowed upstairs except for breedings? Would he grow angry at seeing her? It was hard to know! She decided to risk it—he might enjoy having breakfast brought to him.

Jenya sat on her heels by his bed for another twenty *lapars* until her lord awakened. When he saw her, he smiled, lightening her heart considerably.

“Thank you, slave.” He took the bread, covered in cheese and took a bite. “I don’t have any *renda* left, do I? It helps me wake up.”

“No, master, I didn’t see any. Perhaps I should look again?” She half rose.

“No, no. I think I used the last of it two suns ago. We need to go to the market.”

Jenya was secretly pleased to hear that. Not only would they get some much-needed supplies, but she could be shown off as the slave of a Damon! The other slaves, owned by mere Craftsmen and Merchants, would be so jealous!

After he ate, he took Jenya outside with him while he visited the privy. When he used it, he shut the door, of course. She waited patiently nearby, eager to prove herself worthy of his trust.

“Come,” he said, as he washed up in the small fountain. “We must go to the market while the best produce is available.”

He took the end of her chain and fastened it to his belt. There was a small loop there that he could hook the chain to. Some used padlocks, but Lord Rydah didn’t sense that Jenya wanted to escape. She seemed happy to be here with him.

He led the way, Jenya behind to carry his baskets. He looked proudly about as they approached the market, catching the envious glances of other Damons as he led his beautiful new slave. Some of them, he remembered, had urged him to sell her contract and make a small profit. Now he saw envy in their eyes and it thrilled him.

Jenya, padding along behind, felt similar pride. She altered her gait so the tiny bell between her legs would jingle as loudly as possible, though it was still barely audible. When it bounced against her clit, the rim stimulated her, causing her fluids to seep out along her slit.



Along the way, she recognized a few breeders who had been sold before her. One in particular, Lyrda, had always acted so superior to Jenya. She had convinced herself that only the most powerful Damon would buy her.

Yet when Lyrda's fourteenth birthday approached and she began to face the very real possibility she might not be selected, the haughty girl lost much of her arrogance.

Jenya had grown tired of Lyrda's putdowns, which didn't make any sense because Jenya had been selected, not Lyrda. If anything, it should be she who looked down on Lyrda. But that was not Jenya's style...

*During the last six months of her stay in the Damon slave quarters, Lyrda began to get desperate. She was put up for Selection three more times before the end, and each time, the other girls told Jenya that she had flirted shamelessly with the Damon buyers.*

*Syminton did not punish her, for he knew she was worried. As she should be. Everyone could see the flaws that the Damons saw but had hoped they might be overlooked. She was pretty enough. Her biggest problem was her rather narrow hips. She might not have any problems in birth, but many Damons did not want to take the risk. They liked the wide-hipped girls with the sturdy legs, like Jenya. True breeders.*

*A month before her fourteenth birthday, Lyrda came to Jenya to ask if there was something she should be doing differently. Jenya didn't know what to say. After rynes of acting superior, now she came for advice?*

*"I don't know," she said softly, trying not to hurt the girl's feelings. What could she say – make your hips wider? "You have one more Display, I think you'll be selected."*

*The sun of her final Selection, Lyrda was beside herself. She bathed carefully and used too much perfume. She brushed her hair until Jenya was worried it would be pulled from her scalp. She even took the drastic step of shaving the hair between her legs, in an effort to appear younger and more desirable to the Damons.*

*Nothing worked. When she came back from the Selection, unselected yet again, her despair was total. Tears flowed freely down her cheeks. No one dared approach her. She had become a pariah, as if by speaking to her, her bad luck might rub off on another.*

*Jenya felt sorry for Lyrda, despite the girl's former arrogance. When Syminton called her into his office, she went with shoulders slumped, totally defeated. She returned less than a hura later, in a black mood. Whispers soon followed: "Lyrda's demoted to the Craftsman caste. She goes up for auction in a month."*

In retrospect, Jenya thought she got off easy. Craftsmen had talent and value, even if they weren't rulers. Lyrda could have become a house breeder or been sent to the hill regions, where Damons weren't as fussy, but living conditions were much harsher.

If Jenya hadn't been selected by a Damon, she could have found honor in bearing the children of a Craftsman, she believed. Still, she mused as she fingered the number etched into the skin of her upper bottom, *I am one lucky girl.*

Jenya smiled at Lyrda as she walked by and secretly delighted in the downward cast of the young slave's head as her eyes evaded hers. The deference was demanded by her lower caste.

\* \* \* \* \*

At the market, Lord Rydah seemed as if he wanted a little of everything. He placed fruits and bread and meat in her baskets, a *gabon* of freshly ground *renda*, then followed with pastas and vegetables. Within a *hura*, she was loaded down with goods.

He must have some money, she decided. How else could he afford all this and a slave too? For a moment, her thoughts were tinged with jealousy as she contemplated that he might purchase other slaves, casting her down in the hierarchy as newer, younger girls came into the household. It wasn't something that the Ladies taught at the pens, but the girls knew it happened all too frequently.

She determined that she would do everything possible to please her new master.

Her next opportunity came a few *lapars* later, when they passed the breeding fence. She watched as Lord Rydah paused, taking in the sight of two slave girls who had been bent over the railing by their masters. Ostensibly, the fence had been erected for masters who needed to keep breeding their slaves and didn't want to interrupt their marketing to take them home, but most people recognized it as a place for masters to show off.

As Rydah stopped to watch, Jenya felt her loins contract, then expand. New fluid began to fill her slit and run down the insides of her legs. She watched as the two young slaves—hunched over the low, padded fence, the round globes of their asses held high—accepted their master’s cocks, their faces imbued with lust and pride, their little bells jangling mightily. Jenya stole a glimpse at master’s breeches and saw his cock stirring there. She ached to line up next to the other slaves, to take her master proudly as they did. She had to wait, however, for her lord to decide. Perhaps he was too reserved for such a public display. Unconsciously, she stamped one foot, causing her tiny bell to jingle anew.

Rydah had just started to pull her away, then stopped to stare at her. Jenya knew she presented quite a sight: her nipples were hard, her face flushed, and her pussy swollen.

He couldn’t resist her. He nodded and tipped his head toward the fence. Jenya hurried over to take her place next to the other slaves, eager to prove herself. She bent over and gripped the handles on the other side. This position felt strange to her, the way her heavy breasts hung low, her soft white ass raised up to meet him. She looked back to see him free his cock from his pants.

For a moment, she felt a twinge of embarrassment at her position. She noticed several shoppers had paused to take in the scene. Jenya, bent over the fence as she was, knew they had a clear view of the intimate folds of her flesh, the wetness there, and her master’s cock poised at the entrance.

Time seemed to stop as she waited there. She heard her bell tinkle as she shook with sexual tension. Then she felt his cock at her entrance and she rolled her hips to meet him.

She gasped as he thrust hard at her, causing her bell to jingle loudly as it swung back and forth. Jenya gripped the fence tightly, fearful that he might break it, he was pushing so hard. The feeling was quite different from breeding in his bed—she could really feel his cock reach deep within her. There was a little pain, but she bore it stoically, proud to be on display.

She felt every inch of his cock in her, moving back and forth. Because of the angle, her clitoris wasn't being stimulated and she resisted the desire to touch herself. She was a slave, her feelings didn't matter.

In just a few moments, Rydah released his seed. Jenya cried with joy as his essence filled her.

She waited, bent over, while her master held tight against her. The other two slave girls left, yet Rydah remained inside her. She knew this would better plant his seed within her and she thrilled at the spectacle they made. Finally, he pulled away and refastened his clothing.

Straightening up, Jenya turned to see Lyrda suddenly avert her eyes, embarrassed to be caught staring. The corner of Jenya's mouth turned up as she followed her master out of the market, their mingled juices dripping down her legs. Her joy at being taken by her master in public was tempered by the wasted seed. She would have preferred to lie on her back until his seed had a chance to impregnate her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Back home, she began sorting out the food, trying to find the best places for everything. She asked her master if he wanted her to put things in a certain order and he just waved his hand. "Put them wherever you want, Jenya—you'll be making the meals."

His words pleased her—her presence seemed welcomed. She knew some breeders had been sent back to the pens for various reasons and they endured great shame whenever it happened.

Jenya didn't want Lord Rydah to reject her. She considered herself fortunate to have been selected by him. She carefully washed herself, for she knew masters wanted their slaves to be clean and sweet-smelling. Her breeding passage ached a little, a dull pain that she bore proudly. She was fulfilling her duty. She wanted to rub her clit to bring an end to the tension she felt, yet she did not. She would wait for her master's touch.

They had an excellent meal that night. As part of her training, Jenya knew how to cook many delicious dishes, using whatever ingredients the master might prefer. Her lord had no unusual tastes, so it was easy for her to cook. She used the small oven outside, next to the fountain.

He complimented her on her dishes as she hovered nearby, ready to refill his wine or bring him more food. Slaves, of course, didn't eat with their masters unless specifically invited. She would eat in the kitchen later, after he had been taken care of and the table cleared.

After dinner, he relaxed on the couch, his belly full. She sat at his feet, savoring his touch upon her arm and shoulder.

She wanted to feel his touch all over her body. She wanted to break through his cool exterior, to hear his praise of her behavior so far. She remembered last night, when he took her into his bed. She had been frightened, but he made her feel at ease. When he bred with her, it felt so right, no matter where they were. She couldn't wait to do it again.

*Did he feel the same way? What did he think of his new slave?*

After another *hura*, Rydah rose and stretched. "It's getting late, slave. Let's go to bed."

She stood and nodded, her head down. "I can make up a bed on the couch, if that pleases m'lord." She waited breathlessly for his answer.

"I know I forgot to get a cot this sun. And this couch will hurt your back. Why don't you sleep with me again tonight? I want to breed again, anyway."

He said it so casually—he didn't seem to notice the effect it had on Jenya. Her chest swelled with pride, and her pussy became damp. Her knees grew weak. "Y-yes, master."

She followed him up the stairs, her chain jingling along with her nerves. Rydah stepped aside at the head of the stairs and Jenya took her cue. She slipped past him and lay on the bed.

Jenya felt more at ease this time as she spread herself for her master. When he lay between her legs, she sensed he was more comfortable as well. Their arms encircled each other, naturally, as if they had been breeding for many moons. She felt his hard cock on her stomach as he nuzzled her neck and brushed his fingers over her erect nipples.

Jenya, her knees raised, waited impatiently for her owner to fill her. After just one sun, she found she needed him inside her. Her training hadn't prepared her for all the emotions she felt. They taught her how to accept her duty, how to serve her master, yes. But she longed for acceptance, for an emotional link between them. Certainly, Rydah was a decent man, a good Lord. He treated her well, so far. Yet her heart wanted more recognition, more feedback. Did it dare even ask for love?

Finally, he moved down to align his cock with her hot, wet pussy. It went in smoothly, as if it was meant to be there. She sucked in her breath and lay her head back on the pillow. Her hands rested gently on his biceps.

He began to thrust. Jenya marveled at his quiet power. She watched his face as he watched hers. Their eyes carried on an entire conversation. Hers told him how happy she was to be here and his eyes let her know he'd made the right choice, all those *rynes* ago.

Already, she was becoming used to the size of his cock, the way he thrust himself into her, that expectant expression on his face. She wanted his child badly. She hoped she would be a productive breeder for him. When he emptied himself into her, she cried with joy and release.

## Chapter Six

Her master fell at once into a deep sleep. Jenya was too keyed up with emotions to slumber, yet she didn't want to rise and risk awakening her lord. She stared at the ceiling in the dim light from the moon and let her mind drift back to the moment when she knew Rydah would be her master. It was during her very first Inspection...

*Jenya stood with the other chosen girls, feeling like a baby compared to them. They had breasts! And hair "down there"! Still, she was proud. She had been chosen for Inspection! Out of forty girls, only eleven had been selected for this honor. Jenya couldn't believe that a Damon had expressed interest in her on her very first time on Display.*

*She noticed that the other girls looked at her strangely, like they couldn't believe it either. Especially the older ones, the thirteen-ryne-olds. They had gone on Selection many times, only to be rejected each time until this sun. Seeing her, a little wisp of a girl, chosen right away had to be what made their eyes burn with jealousy.*

*Jenya couldn't help but stand a little taller. She wished she had breasts she could thrust out, like the others. She could only hope that the Damon would recognize her potential as a breeder.*

*She waited to be called.*

*One at a time, the girls were escorted into a private chamber to meet with the mysterious Damon who had selected them. It was hard for all of them not to get their hopes up. The Damons must've seen something in them, so it could very well lead to purchase. Of course, they knew that many girls who had been chosen for this honor ended up disappointed when the lord found some flaw, some reason not to put down a deposit.*

*If they were not purchased, the girls would be returned to the slave pens, fearful that no one would ever want them and they'd end up in the general breeding pool.*

*Jenya watched as Lepnal, a pretty twelve-ryne-old, was summoned. Syminton or one of his close associates always accompanied the slave into the private chambers to ensure nothing happened to his property. Jenya knew they would stand guard while the hands-off Inspection was performed, answering questions about the girl. Lepnal almost bounced from her spot in line to follow behind Mirdar, Syminton's son. Then they disappeared into a room.*

*Lapars later, Jenya was summoned by Syminton himself. She cast a quick glance over her shoulder at the girls behind her as she fell in line behind the lord and couldn't resist wiggling her hips a little as they headed for a private room. She thought she heard a giggle behind her.*

*The door opened. Syminton stood aside and let her enter first. Her fine chain shook along with her nerves. Inside, several fire poles illuminated the room. A man stood near the far wall, his back to her, as was the custom. She strode to the center, where a small circle had been painted and placed her feet inside.*

*"She is ready, m'lord," Syminton said.*

*The man turned. Jenya caught her first close-up look at the man she would come to know as Lord Rydah.*

*He did not introduce himself. She would not, in fact, learn his name for two more rynes. It was she who must impress him, not the other way around. Jenya stood as tall as she could, barely five capeks. Again, she wished she had breasts. Suddenly, she felt a twinge of anxiety.*

*How could this lord want her as a breeder?*

*He approached. His face revealed nothing about him, yet she did not fear him. Perhaps that came from the softness in his eyes. She could only look at him in glances, as she had been taught to stare straight ahead, keeping her shoulders square and her arms at her sides. He walked around her twice. Syminton stood nearby, waiting for questions.*

*"She's scrawny, isn't she?" the lord finally said.*

*Jenya's heart sank. She blinked back tears.*

*"She is merely young, m'lord," the slave master said, using the formal term, though he was a lord himself. Jenya knew that was good for business. "I debated putting her up for Selection so soon after she turned ten, but I believed her to have a certain charm that a discerning Damon might spot."*

*Rydah turned. "And you think I'm that person?"*

*"I don't know, sire. You did ask for her. There must've been something you saw. I suspect it's the same thing I did."*

*"And what did you see?"*



*Syminton turned to her. "I see a future beauty. An excellent breeder. Look at how her hips are already widening. True, she's quite young. It's hard to tell at this early age. Give her a few rynes, however, and I believe she'll bring a high price."*

*Jenya trembled. She feared she might wet herself with fear or pride, she wasn't sure which.*

*"What price do you put on this scrawny girl this sun?"*

*Syminton paused. Jenya knew he had to be careful. If he picked too high a price, the Damon might be offended and walk away. And Syminton could be stuck with that price even if she did not develop as he suspected she would. While he could raise a price at any time, it was considered unfair to early bidders to lower the price later if the breeder didn't sell. That was why so many excellent breeders ended up in lower castes – it represented the only way a reputable breeding farm could cut the price of a slave.*

*"Well, since she's so young, I'll give you a fair price," Syminton said. "Say four hundred remars. No doubt in later rynes I could get twice that amount. But since you've expressed interest in her first, I have to pay respects to your keen sense of breeding flesh."*

*Jenya held her breath and watched the lord's calm face. Was that price acceptable? She had no idea what kind of master he might be, but somehow, she felt drawn to him. She tried to will him to select her.*

*"Very well," he had said at last. "I'll put a deposit on her. Brand her for me."*

*Jenya had swelled with pride – and a little fear. The branding, she knew, would be more painful than the brand she'd already received. Instead of one small symbol on her upper arm, she'd receive five or six numbers on the upper portion of her buttocks. The other girls said it stung for two suns. And yet, having those numbers meant she'd been selected. Her future was set. She would one sun walk the streets next to a Damon, and live in his house!*

*"You won't be disappointed, m'lord," Syminton said.*

*She remembered those words now as she lay there in the dark next to her new master. Jenya hoped that he felt Syminton had been right. She knew she would do everything to make sure that she never gave him cause to regret his decision.*

## Chapter Seven

About mid-morning, two suns later, a man knocked on the door, just as Rydah was settling down to work on a new set of pages. Jenya ran to the door and opened it. He overheard them exchange greetings.

"Master," she said, coming toward the desk.

"Yes, what is it?"

"The man from the slave pens is here."

"Oh!" He jumped up. He'd been looking forward to this. That damn chain was constantly in his way – now he could have it removed.

The man wore a Craftsman's cloak. "Rand's greetings, sire. My name is Pentel, from Syminton & Son." He shifted his bag of equipment to his left hand so he could greet the lord with the proper salute – right hand to left shoulder.

"Of course! I've been waiting for you." Rydah returned the greeting.

"I hope your breeder has proven to be satisfactory? You've tried her out sufficiently? You have a *dal* to decide, you know."

"Oh, I'm very satisfied, yes. Excellent merchandise."

Jenya blushed and stared at the floor.

"Good! That's good. Well, I won't take much of your time. I just need to take her outside to finish the brand, and unlock the chain. That is, unless you're concerned she might run away."

"No. She's very obedient. I think she's happy here."

Jenya wanted to nod in agreement, but she knew they weren't paying any attention to her.

"Now I have to urge some caution...sometimes these slaves pretend to be happy, only to run off the first chance they get. We've had to chase down a few like that over the *rynes*."

"I'm sure about her. You can remove it."

"Very well." He turned to Jenya. "Slave, I need some charcoal. Go fetch it for me." She bowed and went to the kitchen.

"I won't take you from your work any longer, sire," Pentel said. "We'll just be out back for a bit. It takes a little while for the charcoal to heat up the brand."

"Hmm. Actually, I'd like to watch you brand her. Would you call me when you're ready?"

"Of course, sire." He went to the back door and motioned for Jenya to follow him.

Rydah returned to his duties. Like before, when he had been waiting for his breeder to be delivered, he found it hard to concentrate. He shuffled the pages, studying the words of the high priest, letting his mind wander.

About a half-*hura* later, Pentel called from the rear doorway. "We're ready, sire."

The lord rose and hurried to the back yard. He found Jenya, chained to the slave ring, shivering and clearly afraid, as Pentel heated up a small brand in the brazier. The charcoal glowed gray, the tip of the brand, red.

Rydah felt sorry for his slave. He hated to see her be branded again, yet he knew it was necessary. She wouldn't officially be his until the "X" brand was completed.

"Would you like me to hold her?"

"Would you, sire? It would make the brand go on more cleanly."

Rydah approached Jenya and held her by the arms, just above her elbows. She seemed happy to have him near, for she stopped shivering and gazed into his eyes.

"If you would, please, sire, just turn her and have her lean against the wall, so her left shoulder is exposed. There, that's it. Now, slave, don't move or it will just hurt worse."

Jenya never took her eyes off her master's face as Pentel aimed the small, red-hot brand just below the "V" on her shoulder. He pressed it in quickly, then jerked it away. The brand hissed on her skin, causing her to yelp involuntarily.

"There. That wasn't so bad, was it?"

Actually, it was bad, but at the same time, Jenya felt inordinate pride at having the X marked on her. Now the world would know, she thought. She was no longer a virgin, but a full-fledged breeder. Tears came to her eyes.

Pentel unlocked her chain from her collar and handed it and the key to Lord Rydah, in the event he ever wanted them. The chain could be clipped on at any time. Then he packed up his equipment, except for the hot brand, which he carried in his free hand. He nodded his departure and left, no doubt on to some other Damon's home.

"Are you all right?" Rydah asked.

His concern touched her. Here she was, a mere slave, and he was worried about *her*. It did hurt a lot, but she didn't want to admit it.

"It's okay, m'lord. I can put some butter on it."

He took her arm gently and examined the angry mark. It had been well done, he had to admit. The small X was shallow, but clearly visible. He felt an elation borne of possessiveness.

Rydah led her inside, and left her to tend her burn while he returned to his desk. He tried to decipher this priest's handwriting and lamented most priests' lack of training in the written word. They claimed to be too imbued with the grace of Rand to be concerned about spelling and penmanship. Oh, well, he reflected, if they were better writers, he'd be out of a job.

He worked another *hura* before he decided to take a break for lunch. He hoped Jenya could serve him with her injured arm.

"Jenya!"

She appeared at once. "Yes, master?"

"I'm hungry. Are you well enough to fix us some lunch?"

She nodded and disappeared. Within *lapars*, she returned with a plate full of bread, cheese and fruit.

Jenya placed it on a small table next to the couch. She waited while he dug in. Jenya felt a little strange without her chain. She almost wanted to cover herself. She stood there, trying not to twitch, watching her master eat.

He looked up suddenly. "Hey, I don't want to eat alone. Please join me."

Another surprise! First, this man invited her into his bed, then he refused to keep her chain on, and now he was inviting her to eat with him? What would be next?

"Yes, sire," she said, unsure how to proceed. She leaned down briefly and took a small square of cheese, then rose again to put it in her mouth, feeling guilty all the while.

Rydah sighed. "Not like that," he said. "Here." He guided her by her uninjured shoulder to sit on the couch next to him. She was stunned, but she obeyed. "Now eat," he said, and returned to his meal.

Jenya ate. What else could she do? Her master had ordered it. They ate in silence for a short time.

A sudden knock at the door disturbed them.

"Who could that be now?" he asked. With a nod of his head, he indicated she should answer it.

She rose at once and opened the door to find a young messenger outside. His eyes widened at the sight of the beautiful, young, naked slave. "M-m-m-message for Lord R-r-rydah," he stammered, staring at her breasts.

Jenya laughed inwardly and accepted the sealed message. When she turned, Rydah was standing behind her, his curiosity evident on his face. She handed the message over and closed the door on the young lad, nearly trapping his eyeballs in the door.

He examined the seal and realized at once that it was from his older brother, Farda. This was unusual. Farda was ten *rynes* older than Rydah, which meant they hadn't grown up as close as brothers might be. His father, Lord Fyrad, and his slave Saranya had five children—three girls had been born in a row after Farda, the oldest. Rydah, though he hated to admit it, was the baby of the family.

Farda, like Rydah, had been born a Damon, but when he was nineteen, he fell in love with a Craftswoman, Memma, who was not only six *rynes* older, but had a young daughter as well. Love proved to be blind, and Farda gave up his higher-ranking caste to be with his true love. He became a woodcarver and in the *rynes* since had turned out

many fine pieces for Damon homes, including fireplace mantles, ornate doors and small statues. He carved many woods, but his favorite was the dark, rich memingo trees that grew on the steppes of the Pestrid range east of Blethryn.

In the last ten *rynes*, Rydah guessed Farda had written to him just twice and they'd seen each other at their father's house on three other occasions.

*Why would he be writing to me now?* he wondered.

Jenya watched as her lord ripped open the envelope and scanned the writing within. She couldn't read, of course, but she could tell by his expression that the news wasn't good.

He frowned, then took the note to his desk and sat down. He stared out the window onto the street. Jenya didn't know if she should go to him or leave him alone. So she just stood where she was and waited.

Finally, he rose and began to pace.

"Master, are you all right?" The words tumbled out of her.

He looked up, distracted. "Um? Oh, yes, Jenya. I mean, no. Well, I'm fine, it's my brother in Gordax. He's got some trouble. I don't know why he wrote to me."

Jenya wanted to ask what kind of trouble, but decided to keep quiet. If it should be her business, he would tell her.

He stopped and came over to her. "You see, Farda — my brother — isn't a Nobleman any more. He married a Craftswoman and gave up his rank."

Jenya tried not to show her surprise. She knew people often tried to move up in status, especially among the Damon, but it was rare for a Nobleman to elect to join a lower caste. It must've scandalized the family, she realized.

"He has a daughter. It's not his daughter, but he married her mother, so she's his step-daughter. Her real father died, you see." Rydah didn't know why he was explaining so much. It just felt good to talk out this problem that had been dumped on him.

"It turns out, his step-daughter, Symal — she's seventeen *rynes* now — caught the eye of Lord Acolyte Lepdar. You know of him?"

Jenya nodded. Everyone knew the brother of the heir to the throne! She remembered hearing about his older brother's wedding just two *rynes* ago, in the warm season. Lord Acolyte Raparn had married Princess Tymir from the priestdom to the west in order to cement relations between the two high lords, a common practice.

"Well, the Lord Acolyte is supposed to marry Princess Wenelle, from Farzan. Last I heard, he wasn't too happy about it, but that's nothing unusual. Now he's fallen for Symal—Rand knows how they met!—and they seem to have disappeared. Together. You can imagine what an uproar this has caused."

What really amazed Rydah was that he hadn't heard any of this before. News like this usually spread like the plague through a community. *It must've just happened*, he mused.

"So the high lord has his troops out searching for them, and Farda is afraid Symal will be blamed somehow. She could be, of course. She may wind up in prison over this—or worse."

He approached Jenya, worry etched on his face. "He's asking me if I can help! Why would he do that? I can't be drawn into this mess! This could ruin my career."

"I can see that you're worried about your brother, though," Jenya said, choosing her words carefully.

"Yes, yes of course. He's my brother! But what can I do?"

"He's probably calling out for help wherever he can get it, master," she said. She ached to help him, but felt powerless.

"Yes, of course. He has others he can rely on. My father, for instance. That's who he should be writing to, not me."

"Can your father help him?"

"I don't know. My father isn't exactly on personal terms with High Lord Bandar. You can probably tell from my humble house that my father's ranking is not high among the Damon. I can't see him being able to assist, either. Something like this could only bring us trouble."

“Perhaps your brother just wants you to help search for them, m’lord. If he found them first, he might be able to figure out a way to save his daughter.”

Rydah nodded as he began pacing again. “That’s probably it. I just don’t know if I should get involved.”

Jenya thought for a moment. Her limited existence in the pens didn’t prepare her for such political intrigue, but she did have a woman’s intuition about love. “This other woman, the princess—does she want to marry the Lord Acolyte?”

“I don’t know,” he responded, still distracted. “It’s all arranged. Usually, they would learn to love each other later, like Lord Acolyte Raparn and Tymir.”

Rydah stopped and cocked his head, as if listening to something.

Jenya started to speak, then held her tongue. Her lord appeared to be deep in thought. No doubt he was trying to figure out a solution.

He straightened up and shook his head. “I don’t know,” he whispered to himself.

“Pardon, m’lord?”

He looked up. “Oh, nothing, Jenya. Nothing. There was just something, a fleeting thought in the back of my mind that I can’t recall.”

“A thought? About how to help?”

“Yeah. No. I don’t know. I can’t pin it down.” He stopped pacing. “By Rand I wish I knew what to do!” He turned to Jenya. “What would you do, if you were me?”

Jenya bit her lip, wondering why he asked her. “M’lord, I am only a slave. I know not the ways of Damons...”

He began to pace again, dismissing her.

“However, sire...” she continued. He stopped again and stared.

“Yes?” His expression made it clear he doubted that she, a mere slave, might have an answer.

“You are concerned about getting involved and failing to help,” she said, trying to organize her thoughts and worried that she might say something to offend him. “What if you looked at it from the other side...what would happen if you succeeded?”



Rydah pursed his lips. "I don't know how to do that, but if I did, Farda would be grateful, of course." He paused to think about the possibility. "I'm not sure how the Acolyte or High Lord Bandar would feel. It would depend on the solution. If there is one."

He shook his head. "But if my brother just wants me to help find them, well, finding them doesn't solve the problem."

He turned to face Jenya, her sexual allure completely forgotten for the moment. "What will probably happen is, High Lord Bandar will find the Acolyte and order Symal to be imprisoned. He'll probably have his henchman, Kendam, do it. He'll threaten to execute her if the Acolyte doesn't marry Princess Wenelle. So they'll get married, and Symal might then be executed or simply left to rot in prison. The Acolyte can only do so much. He can't defy his father."

"But say you helped the Acolyte and Symal and did not anger High Lord Bandar. What would happen then?"

"Helped the Acolyte? Me? Well," he shrugged, "if I did, I'd be a hero, I guess." His mind took that thought and ran with it. It would do wonders for his career. He might be able to move up in social circles – not that he cared. But he could afford a larger home.

A larger home, more fitting of a Damon who now owned a slave. And would soon have many offspring to fill it with. Was it possible?

He caught Jenya's eye and smiled. "From the mouths of slaves. You're right, Jenya. I shouldn't dwell on the negative. I should think about the positive. And if my brother is writing to me, he must really need my help." He stood still, his mind made up. "I'll go see him. I can do at least that much."

He frowned. "You'll have to stay here, though. This might be dangerous. I can't have you wandering around getting underfoot. Will you be all right here alone?"

Jenya looked around, thinking fast. She didn't want to be left behind. "I don't know, master. Being a new slave, I might wander off or get lost. You'd be taking a risk. Someone could even claim me as abandoned."

He studied her face. Deep down, he knew she wanted to be with him, despite the danger. He sighed. He didn't want to leave her here, either. He had just bought her! If she traveled with him, he could continue breeding.

"Very well, if you're not to be trusted, you'd better come along. We'll leave in the morning—if I can finish my work in time."

## Chapter Eight

Lord Rydah, having no transport of his own, had to rent a small carriage for the journey east. In deference to fair-skinned Jenya, he rented one with a top to protect her against the harsh rays of the Cyrus sun.

They packed enough fruit, bread and dried meats for several suns. While they were not traveling far—only about fifteen leagues—Rydah did not wish to impose on his brother's hospitality. Guests did not assume they were to be fed and housed by their hosts, as times often were hard for those of certain castes. Sometimes, they barely had enough food for themselves.

They set out in the morning, heading east toward the farming hamlet of Gordax. Rydah had never visited his brother's home before. The scandal of giving up his Damon status to marry a commoner cast a pall over the Fyrad family. To visit him might offer support for his actions.

Fortunately, such *scandals* tended to evaporate with time. After eleven *rynes*, few would remember Farda had once been a Nobleman. Rydah could have visited him anytime in the last several *rynes*, but never had. Idly, he wondered if he was still ashamed.

The journey east was pleasant. The horse appeared to be a plodder, but Rydah was not really in a hurry, despite his brother's urgent plea for help. He thought he might be going to his doom—why had he listened to his slave?

She sat next to him in silence, chained to the carriage rail. He did not feel the need to secure her, but for appearance's sake, it was best.

They saw only the occasional carriage—most travelers were on foot. Few of the high lord's horsemen seemed to be out, which was strange. Usually, they rode up and down the roads, patrolling, or collecting taxes.

At the slow pace of their carriage, it took several *huras* to reach the outskirts of Gordax. They passed farm fields, rich with the bounty of the earth. Grains and maize

destined for the cities. Farm slaves could be seen here and there, toiling under the hot sun, their backs bent over their labors.

Jenya watched, fascinated. She had never seen the world beyond her slave compound until she had been sold. Now, in just a few short suns, she had experienced the city of Blethryn and the world beyond. For some reason, being here under the protection of her master gave her a sense of security, of belonging.

She wished, for a fleeting moment, that he'd stop in the shade of a tree and take her, hard, ignoring the polite smiles of passing travelers. Her pussy called for his cock. Could he tell?

Rydah wasn't stupid. He could hear her shallow breathing, smell her heat. She wanted to breed again! And so soon! He was enormously pleased.

An idea occurred to him, something he remembered from Jenya's training. He looked around to make certain they were alone. While he wasn't embarrassed to breed with his slave, he had something else in mind.

"Jenya," he said, a catch in his voice. "Tell me about your training."

"My training, m'lord?" She didn't follow him.

"Yes. In ways of breeding. Or of pleasing your master." Rydah felt a little foolish.

"Oh!" she gasped in sudden realization. Lady Margeld's words came back to her now. *Sometimes, a master will want to use your mouth or your rear passage.* "Yes, of course, m'lord. What can I do to please you?"

Rydah squirmed in his seat, his cock pressing hard against his breeches. "Free my cock," he ordered.

Nodding, she bent to her task. Soon, his pole stood up proudly, swelling in the humid air.

Without another word, Jenya opened her mouth wide and surrounded the little head. She could still taste a bit of herself from earlier that sun. She let her tongue wet him and was pleased when he groaned in response.

She remembered Margeld's lessons. While the virgins were not allowed to practice on men, they did learn basic techniques using wooden cocks that had been expertly

carved by Craftsmen. Jenya used her tongue to pleasure her master, then swallowed him as best she could into her throat.

Moving up and down on his turgid shaft, Jenya was pleased to discover how much more pliant his cock was than the wooden models they had used. If only they could have practiced on men, they would have enjoyed their training so much more!

Rydah let the reins slip from his hands and the horse plodded on, oblivious. He leaned back against the seat, feeling the eyes roll up in his head. "Oh, Rand, that's nice," he murmured.

Jenya kept up the pressure on his cock, not knowing if she really was performing her duties correctly. The wooden cocks, of course, would only stand like statues, forcing the girls to practice until they were exhausted. Margeld told them their masters wouldn't last as long, but there was no way to tell. Better that the girls learned endurance early.

Suddenly, Rydah grabbed Jenya's hair with one hand, and for a moment, she thought she had done something wrong. Then a blast of his seed flooded her throat, causing her to choke briefly. Recovering quickly, she inhaled through her nose and swallowed the precious fluid. She didn't want to risk insulting her master by spitting out his essence.

His cock softened in her mouth. She waited until she was sure he was spent, then allowed it to slip free. "Was that acceptable, master?" she asked, looking up at his blissful face.

"Oh, my yes, my slave. That was excellent. You've been trained well. I'll have to compliment your teachers." Rydah bent down to pick up the reins. "Now, I'd better concentrate on the road or we'll never get there!"

Smiling, she straightened up, pleased that she had done well. She noticed that the activity had aroused her as well, making her nipples hard and her pussy wet. She wondered how long she'd have to wait until her master wanted to breed again.

Jenya sat, knees slightly apart, smiling to herself, as Rydah slapped the horse's rump with the reins and the carriage jolted forward. The more she learned about her

Lord, the more secure she felt with him. She wondered what other little preferences he enjoyed.

As they approached Gordax, Lord Rydah realized why he'd seen so few of the High Lord's men earlier. They were here instead. Groups of riders thundered past on their way hither and yon. Twice they were stopped and questioned. Rydah made no mention that he was Farda's brother, only that he was traveling to visit "relatives." Each time, he was allowed to pass.

His anxiety grew with each league. Clearly, the High Lord's men were out searching for his step-niece. Farda and Memma must be frantic with worry.

The main road passed directly through the heart of the village. Squads of High Lord's men, armed with swords and shields walked the streets, looking grim. Villagers gave them a wide berth.

When he turned down a side street to his brother's house, he was stopped once again and questioned. This time, he told them he was here to visit Farda. The soldiers made him wait while Farda was brought forward to vouch for him.

Jenya, who kept her head down, received particular attention, although none of the men touched her. That would violate the Damon's property rights, a serious offense. Still, they could gaze upon the naked slave. A few of the soldiers grinned mischievously when they thought Rydah wasn't looking.

Farda saluted him formally, then grasped Rydah's arm firmly in greeting, rare tears in his eyes. "Thank you for coming, brother," he said softly. He appeared to be tired and pale. Rydah was shocked to see how much he had aged in the last few *rynes*. His chest had thickened, and his hair was going gray, although his *rynes* totaled just thirty and eight.

Farda walked with them back to his house. Rydah got down off the carriage and walked beside him, leading the horse by a loose rein. They didn't speak, for two of Bandar's men walked with them.

His brother's house, Rydah saw, was no bigger than his own, yet his brother had three children: Symal, Memma's daughter, and two of their own, Rapkin and Galena.

Rapkin, a boy about nine, and Galena, a girl aged seven, were standing on the porch, on either side of Memma when they arrived.

Rydah had met Memma just twice, but he hardly recognized her now. She had been an outgoing, smiling, pretty girl when he'd seen her last at his father's house four *rynes* ago. Now she, like Farda, seemed pale and drawn, worry lines etched on her face and streaks of gray in her black hair. She wore a shapeless dress that hid her once curvy and alluring body.

Rydah remembered how his older brother talked of her before he ran off to marry her so many *rynes* ago.

"She's beautiful, Rydah," he'd said. "When she walks into a room, people stop talking and look up, even Damons! She makes the most wonderful tiles, full of color and detail. She's got orders she can't fill because no one wants her to farm out the work. They all want Memma originals."

Rydah, who'd been nine at the time, hadn't understood how hard his brother had fallen for this woman. When Farda ran off that summer, his father had been shocked, but Rydah was devastated. He looked up to Farda. He had counted on him to be there for him, to help him grow up. But this woman had come in and stolen him away. And a Craftswoman at that!

It had taken *rynes* for their father to forgive Farda. Rydah wasn't sure if he had ever fully forgiven Farda himself, given their scant contact. Now, standing on the dusty street, looking up at Memma, scared and forlorn, Rydah felt shame that he hadn't come under better circumstances.

"Rand's greetings, Memma," he said softly.

She smiled and for a brief moment, Farda's words came back to him. She did light up her surroundings. But the smile faded all too quickly.

"Come," Farda said. "Let's go in."

"Your slave is welcome too," Memma said as she herded the youngsters inside.

Rydah nodded, unlocked Jenya and allowed her to come in out of the heat. The trip had been hot and dusty. Sweat ran in rivulets along the hollows of her collarbones and

down between her upthrust breasts, coating her chain that hung down to her knees. She made no complaint, however. She followed, silent except for the jingling of her chain and bell.

Inside, the house was neatly organized. It had the same main room and kitchen arrangement as Rydah's, but it had two front windows on either side of the door. Two tables dominated the room. One held wood carvings and tools, the other tiles and molds. The only other furniture was a ratty couch. Stairs led to the loft upstairs, where Rydah assumed they all slept. It would be crowded, he was sure.

"Forgive me for bringing my slave," Rydah said, not sure why he felt compelled to apologize. "I just purchased her a few suns ago and I wasn't sure I could leave her alone yet."

"No need to explain," Memma said. "Let me get you both some water."

"Thank you," he said, following her to the kitchen. He startled when he saw an officer, dressed in the red garb of the high lord sitting on a chair in the corner.

Farda, seeing his brother's reaction, introduced him. "Lord Rydah," using his Damon title, "this is Apnar, liege of High Lord Bandar's guard." The liege, hearing Rydah's title and seeing his cloak, came to his feet and bowed.

"Rand's greetings, m'lord."

"Rand's greetings," he said automatically in return. Taking advantage of the guard's deference, Rydah decided to press him. "Why are you in my brother's house?"

The liege looked up sharply. "I was given direct orders from High Priest Kendam to stay in Farda's house until the Acolyte was located."

Rydah nodded, realizing that he had just been outranked. Kendam was Bandar's second-in-command and was known as a ruthless taskmaster. Many who dared to challenge him wound up dead, in prison, or simply disappeared. His ruthlessness allowed Bandar to appear benign, although Rydah knew all of Kendam's orders came from the top.



Rydah kept nodding, and before he could think of the right response, Memma, bless her, appeared with a ladle of water. Rydah occupied himself with the drink, taking the first ladleful as was the custom before allowing Jenya to drink.

"Do you think Symal is here?" he finally asked the guard, trying to keep up his bravado.

"No," the liege replied, "but the high priest said it is important that I hear anything that might lead to my Acolyte's whereabouts."

Rydah kept his face a mask. He knew his brother would not be able to talk freely with Apnar nearby. When he set out this morning, Rydah had pictured sitting down with his brother and Memma and talking about places the couple might go. Then he and Farda would head out to search. In his mind, it had been so easy. Now Rydah knew just how high the stakes were in this game.

It was obvious that Bandar was deadly serious about locating his wayward son quickly, probably before word leaked out to the High Lord Syran of Farzan. No doubt it would be perceived as a rejection of Princess Wenelle and that insult might not be overlooked. Instead of uniting the priestdoms, as the marriage had been intended to do, it could tip the balance the other way, with potentially disastrous consequences.

Rydah sent Jenya to bring in his stores of food and offered to share them with his brother's family. Naturally, they refused and offered theirs instead. They went back and forth a few times before reaching a compromise to share all the food.

Apnar sat on a chair in a corner throughout the meal, making no effort to join in or to leave them alone. A soldier brought him in some bread, and he ate, chewing noisily, listening to every word spoken. Farda's two younger children hovered near their mother and watched the adults with trepidation.

Rydah, embarrassed that he knew so little of his brother's life, asked how Symal had met the Acolyte—they didn't exactly travel in the same social circles.

"At a Blethryn crafts show," he said. "Memma and I had gone to your city in the growing season and the Acolyte stopped by our booth to admire our artwork. When he caught sight of Symal, he admired her as well."

RyDAH vaguely remembered the fair. Why hadn't his brother contacted him while he'd been in town? He already knew the answer to that question—FARDA had believed, perhaps correctly, that he might shame his brother. The fallen DAMON visiting his DAMON brother. What would the neighbors have thought?

FARDA's sacrifice troubled RyDAH because it hit close to home. How could he be so concerned about his social status? He hadn't grown up that way. It seemed he'd begun to fall victim to social climbing, despite his pledge to himself that he'd never do such a thing.

After catching him up on current family news, FARDA began reminiscing. This seemed odd to RyDAH—given his brother's concern over his step-daughter's whereabouts. He wondered why FARDA was wasting time with memories.

"Remember that dog you found? You wanted to keep it, but dad said no. You hid it under the house for a *dal*!" He laughed as if it were a funny memory.

RyDAH remembered the incident painfully because once the dog was discovered, his father drove it off.

"What was his name, anyway? Didn't you call it Burko?"

"No," RyDAH said with more heat than he meant to. "He was Barlo." FARDA should remember the name—he had suggested it!

FARDA paid no attention to his brother's pain and went on to another story. "What about that time you got caught peeking into the windows at the slave girl down the road? Boy, I thought dad would whip you for sure!"

"I wasn't peeking! I was looking for you! I had seen you sneaking around there, so I followed, then I lost you. Then I looked into the window to see if you had gone in. That's all. Why bring that up now?"

Suddenly, RyDAH felt like the little brother again and he was embarrassed in front of his breeder.

"Sorry, little brother, but I thought I should tell you the truth after all these *rynes*. I *had* been looking in the windows at that slave—remember her name? When I heard a noise, I ran away. Only later did I find out it was you I'd heard approaching! And that

you'd been caught doing what I had been doing! Only you weren't doing it!" He laughed out loud.

Rydah burned. That slave, Ganari, *had* been beautiful. Not as beautiful as Jenya, but she did have larger breasts, he remembered. That didn't matter to a nine-*ryne*-old, however. He had wanted to find his brother.

His father didn't beat him. He thought it meant Rydah was growing up. There had been some serious teasing by his brother, but otherwise it wasn't an issue. Boys could see naked slaves outside every sun. Rydah wondered why his brother was making a big deal out of such a thin memory now?

"I wish you didn't have to get back on the morrow, little brother," Farda said, his voice dropping in pitch. "But I know you have that big project for High Lord Bandar to complete."

His gaze pinned Rydah just as he had been about to deny it. Suddenly, Rydah knew, Farda's comment had been for Apnar's benefit. Farda would have no idea what he was working on and furthermore, he had begged him to come out to help search—why would he send him home again so soon?

It was obvious. Wherever Rydah would go, he'd be followed by soldiers. Unless the soldiers thought he was simply returning home.

"You were always terrible at directions," Farda continued. "I have a map of the region, if you'd like to get your bearings for your return trip."

More cryptic talk. Farda knew as well as Rydah that the road led almost straight back to Blethryn, with few turns. A drunken monk could hardly get lost.

Farda was trying to tell him something, but what?

"Yes," he said, playing for time. "Some of those intersections make me dizzy. I'm not sure which way to turn sometimes."

"Here, little brother." He rose and went to his worktable. He pulled a map from a wooden box and spread it out.

Looking at it, Rydah could see the road leading west. Smaller villages were dotted here and there off side roads. Because this was a farming region, most families were scattered all over. The villages were small, but key to communication and commerce.

Apnar came over as Farda showed Rydah the route. "Look, it's almost a straight line. You need to make a left turn here and another left here." He traced it with a stubby forefinger. Rydah paid little attention to it—he was looking over the other villages, trying to understand what his brother was saying.

Apnar looked bored.

"Sure, I see. It was this intersection here that confused me," he pointed. Meanwhile, he was reading the names of small towns. Perhaps there was something there...

Pelgron, Dashedstep, Mantaro—none of these names seemed unusual.

Rydah's mind raced. *What was Farda trying to tell me?*

"Just aim your wagon at the rising sun tomorrow and you shouldn't have difficulty," Farda said.

Then Rydah noticed his brother's little finger, tapping lightly well below where his forefinger was pointing. The tiny dots nearest it were Lapron and Balgari.

He almost gasped when it hit him.

Of course! The incidents Farda had mentioned! Barlo was the dog and Ganari had been the sexy slave girl. Put them together and Farda had just told him where he thought his daughter and the Acolyte might be: Balgari.

Looking quickly, while pretending to follow the map, Rydah found a turnoff about five leagues west that wound its way down past Mantaro to the tiny village of Balgari. No doubt the soldiers had been there already. How would he find the Acolyte and Symal if they hadn't?

There was no way to ask his brother. Already, Farda was folding the map up and putting it away. "You need to develop a better sense of direction—"

"No need to concern yourself, m'lord," Apnar interrupted smoothly. "My men will accompany you home."

Rydah froze. "Oh, there's no need of that, Apnar. I'm sure your men are needed in the search."

"Not at all," he said, steel in his voice. "I must send messages back anyway, so I have two riders heading to Blethryn on the morrow."

"Good," Rydah said hollowly, realizing he was trapped. "I would feel safer with the High Lord's men."

For the briefest of moments, Rydah and Farda read each other's expressions. "Of course, you'll stay here tonight," Farda said, recovering quickly. "The guard has been sleeping on the couch, but I think we can fit you in upstairs. Your slave can be chained up outside."

Rydah had been about to accept, thinking that during the night, his brother could whisper where he thinks Symal is hiding when Apnar again moved in.

"I wouldn't think of taking a sleeping spot away from a Damon," he said, his eyes glinting. "Please take my couch. I would be pleased to sleep on the floor."

His meaning was clear—he would not allow the two brothers to be together so they could pass secret messages.

Except he didn't know that, for the most part, they already had.

## Chapter Nine

The next morning, Rydah was beside himself. He didn't know how to get away from the soldiers, and even if he could get away, he had no idea how to search the area around Balgari to find the Acolyte and Symal. He hadn't been able to speak to his brother privately all night.

And even if he found them, it still didn't solve the problem of how to help them.

Rydah tried not to let his dejection show on his face as he stepped into the carriage. The two soldiers waited nearby on horseback. Rydah observed Apnar hand the older one of them an envelope, probably meant for Kendam—or perhaps Bandar himself. He ached to find out what was in it. Was there news of the Acolyte?

Apnar came over to him. "M'lord, I'm sending Robnak and Mardor along with you. They will see you safely to Blethryn."

Rydah thanked him. What else could he do?

"Did you sleep well, m'lord?" Jenya asked as she climbed into the carriage.

"Oh, yes, fine," he said distractedly, seeing Apnar's cold blue eyes on him. Automatically, he began to chain her to the iron railing at the front of the carriage, more for Apnar's benefit than his. "And you?"

"Yes, m'lord. Madam Memma even came out to make sure I was comfortable before going to bed. She gave me a pillow!"

Rydah paused. Memma gave her a pillow? That was an unheard-of kindness to a slave. Slaves were used to sleeping outside at night during the hot season. And Jenya has probably never used a pillow in her life before—

His heart lurched. Where they alone for a few moments? Did Memma pass on a message?

He looked at Jenya, trying to catch her eye. Jenya, seeing Apnar, simply stared at the railing in front of her and said nothing.

Rydah climbed in and they started off, the two soldiers riding ahead a few paces. He tried to come up with a solution, but every one met with failure and arrest.

If he tried to run, they'd know he knew something. He'd be arrested and made to talk. Rydah couldn't kill the guards—it wasn't in him to do violence like a Warrior. Besides, a killing would not untangle the thorny knots of love, it would only make them worse. The only solution that occurred to him was to return to Blethryn, and once the soldiers left him, ride east again to the turnoff and try to find where the Acolyte and Symal might be hiding.

He feared much of this sun would be wasted.

The soldiers seemed to be in no hurry to get back. That letter Apnar gave the soldiers must not be very important. He wanted to shake the guards and tell them the High Lord needed the message right away and they'd better ride ahead. That would never fool anyone, of course. It would only raise suspicion. He was sure Apnar had told the men to watch the lord carefully.

They traveled east for four leagues without speaking, a soldier riding along either side of the carriage, making it impossible for Rydah to talk to Jenya. She seemed nervous.

"Did you see that, m'lord?" Jenya said suddenly. Robnak turned to her, his eyebrow a question mark.

"What? No. What was it?" Rydah asked.

"A biter beetle! It swooped down toward the horses!" A biter beetle, also called a *kalachar*, was known for sucking the blood of beasts and men. They could grow large in the hot season—up to the size of one's thumb—and became quite tenacious as the wet season approached.

Both Robnak and Mardor pulled away and looked around. If a *kalachar* bit one of the horses, it could bolt and might upset the carriage. These insects were not to be ignored.

Rydah hadn't seen anything. He'd been lost in thought. "Well, I shouldn't worry—" he started to say.

With a shriek, Jenya wrenched herself from her seat, swatting wildly in the air. Rydah could still see nothing. His eyes darted, looking for the *kalachar*. Jenya, her arms

waving, pitched over the side of the carriage and was dragged along by her chain before Rydah could yank the horse to a stop.

"Guards! Help me!" he ordered as he jumped out. The soldiers reined their steeds and hopped down, rushing to help free the injured breeder.

"She may already be carrying my child!" He shouted, running around the carriage to her side. He crouched down and unlocked the chain, allowing her to slip down to the road.

"A biter beetle, m'lord," she gasped. "I fear them so. I know I shouldn't. I'm sorry, m'lord."

"It's all right," he said, checking her wounds. With the help of the two soldiers, they lifted her up into the shaded carriage, careful not to jar her in case she had broken bones.

Rydah saw her right leg and buttock were scraped raw and oozing blood. "Did you break anything?" he asked anxiously.

"I'm not sure, sire. My leg hurts. My side."

"Do you know where a doctor might be around here?" He asked the older guard, Robnak.

"Yes, sire. There's a doctor in Mantaro, about two leagues south of here."

"All right, I'm heading that way."

The two guards looked at each other, confused. This hadn't been in their orders. "Sire, we're supposed to accompany you to Blethryn," Robnak said.

"I must get help! Accompany us to the doctor's, if you must!" He climbed into the carriage and eased under Jenya's head, letting her rest it in his lap. He picked up the reins.

"But, sire, I have an important message to deliver!"

"Then deliver it!" He snapped the reins and the horse jerked ahead, leaving the guards standing there, mouths agape.



Rydah did not care what they did. His only concern was to his new breeder. To have her in jeopardy like this just a *dal* after he'd finally taken possession of her was unthinkable!

When he turned toward Mantaro, he observed Robnak continuing west, while the younger one, Mardor, followed the carriage. A simple solution to their problem. Idly, he wondered if he'd be able to slip past this remaining guard.

*By Rand! Can it be?* he thought. *Did Jenya fall from the carriage on purpose?*

"Jenya," he whispered, making sure the guard was still too far away to hear his voice.

"Yes, master," she said softly, pain in her voice.

"There was no *kalachar*, was there?"

"No, master."

"You did that on purpose, just so we'd head in the right direction, didn't you?"

"Yes, m'lord."

"Did Memma tell you something when she brought you a pillow?"

"Yes, master."

Rydah marveled at this plucky slave. At that moment, Mardor came alongside, preventing him from asking her anything else.

Rydah was stunned. Farda couldn't get to him, so he had his wife go to Jenya. Very clever.

But to pull it off, Jenya had to fall from the carriage and injure herself. Her sacrifice showed how much she believed in Rydah to solve this dilemma. Her trust weighed on him.

What could he do? He was a mere scribe...

## Interlude

*Houston, Texas, September 2035*

"She's so brave! She must really love him." Joyce put her empty glass on the coffee table.

"Are those tears in your eyes?"

"No, of course not," she said, turning aside.

"Maybe you've heard enough for tonight," Jack said, reaching up to pull her chin back to face him.

"Oh, no you don't! You have to tell me what happens!"

"I wouldn't want to upset you..."

"This?" She waved at her bleary eyes. "This is a good cry. Like when I'm watching a chick flick, you know."

"Oh," he nodded. "So you like our plucky little heroine?"

"Yes, very much." She looked down at her naked breast, peeking out of her robe, and tried to imagine being naked all the time. "I pretend I'm her. You know, just a little."

"Uh huh," he said, smiling, imaging Joyce as Jenya.

"But you can't fool me."

"What do you mean?"

"The part about getting sucked off while they were driving—that was sooo American, I can't even tell you."

Jack laughed. "That transparent, huh? Hey, it could've happened!"

"Well, I forgive you—you're making Jenya out to be such a clever slave, after all."

"Hey, a lot of her personality came through on the tapes. I'm just filling in the blanks, you know."

"I'm certainly enjoying it."

Jack pulled aside the other side of her robe and peeked at her erect nipples. "Yes, I can see that," he said dryly. He leaned in and gently licked her pale flesh. Joyce closed her eyes.

He licked her like a cat, using the broad flatness of his tongue on her breasts. The slight rasp of it on her skin only increased her lust. "God, what you do to me," she moaned. She began to squirm on his lap. He moved down and sucked a nipple into his mouth. Her heightened libido jumped another notch. She wanted to grip him between her thighs. Joyce very nearly came, right then. She reached out and held onto his arms, thankful she had found a man who knew how to love her.

Jack licked her and licked her, moving from breast to breast, nipple to nipple. She thought she could just stay like that forever, on the verge of an orgasm without reaching it. It was a delicious dilemma.

"God, Jack..." She gasped and squeezed his arms. She ached for release.

He paused, talking around one of her nipples. She could hear his voice vibrate through her breast. "You know what you're going to have to do to hear the rest, aren't you?"

"Yes," she said. She was more than ready. But first he was going to have to stop licking her breasts. She hung on, poised between pleasures—the story that turned her on emotionally, and the foreplay that excited her physically. Which was better? Right now, it was a toss up. Later, she knew only the physical would suffice.

Finally, Jack pulled away. He nodded and she climbed off his lap, suddenly aware of how shaky her knees were. She stood in front of him, feeling a little exposed. She was half-dressed while he remained fully clothed. She was becoming Jenya, in a way.

He just stared. No, ogled.

It had been a long time since she'd been ogled by a man. Perhaps when she was coy and slim and sassy in her twenties, men looked at her as Jack did now. Back then, she took it for granted. Now it was a special honor, coming from a rare man. This man knew the secret to her heart, she decided: he realized that whatever he gave her would be returned threefold. She would do just about anything for Jack.

She didn't know if she could wait. She wanted to feel his hard cock in her. Joyce could imagine the sensation: the wet stroke of him, the sounds of their love-making, the little cries she'd make. The heat in her pussy increased.

Joyce debated: sex or story? She wanted both. But the story was flowing now. If they made love, Jack might lose his train of thought. *Okay, she thought, let's keep his brain alert, yet not ignore his cock.* She gave him a little tease. She straightened up and made a show of easing the shoulder of her robe down, like a stripper. Jack smiled.

She let the garment fall away to her feet, leaving her naked once again.

She was certain he could smell her lust easily now. She glanced down to see the fluids seeping out of her pussy and glistening through the red-brown hairs. God, was she ever ready for his hard cock! *Breed with me, master,* she thought.

"Come here," he said, his voice hoarse. She approached him, wondering how she was going to sit in his lap without ruining his pants.

"What about your pants?" she asked timidly.

"What about them? Come here." He took her into his arms as she sat down, feeling her lubrication leaking onto his khaki trousers. If he didn't care, she didn't care. All she wanted right now was to hear the rest of the story. She knew she'd get fucked soon.

He stroked her breasts again and ran the other hand over her back, down along her naked ass. He liked the full curves of her, he'd told her many times. She wasn't plump to him, just exactly right, he'd said. She could tell he meant it.

"You'd better finish the story before my head explodes," she said.

"Or maybe some other part."

"Um. We wouldn't want that, would we? Okay, let's see. We left our hero shortly after our heroine had injured herself in an effort to distract the guards, right?"

"Right," she said, letting her eyes fall on the bulge in his pants.

## Chapter Ten

They found the doctor's office with Mardor's help and he aided Rydah in carrying Jenya inside. Nerat, a second-tier Damon, was ancient, Rydah noted. He thought the old man smelled like a rotting forest log. He hoped the doctor knew what he was doing.

Nerat washed the blood away and dabbed Jenya's wounds with tantra root to speed the healing, then wrapped her with gauze from her knee to her hips. No sooner had the bandages been applied then spots of blood began to seep through them.

"It's just a bad scrape, Lord Rydah," he said. "Nothing was broken, thank Rand."

Jenya gritted her teeth but made no complaints.

"Can you give her something for the pain?"

The doctor nodded and brewed a tea. Jenya drank it and drifted off to sleep. "She'll need at least a full sun's rest. Maybe two. I'll have to change her bandages on the morrow, to make sure she doesn't develop an infection."

"Do what you have to, doctor. She must get well!"

Rydah went outside. The soldier waited by the carriage. "How is she, m'lord?"

"Not good," he said truthfully. "She needs at least a sun of rest, maybe more. The doctor's is worried about infection."

Mardor nodded. "Um, my lord..."

"Yes?"

"My orders were to accompany you here, but my liege didn't say anything about staying."

"Well, that's not my concern. You can stay or go. But I'm staying until she recovers, then I have to get back to Blethryn to complete an important project for High Lord Bandar."

He had dropped the name on purpose. It seemed to have the desired effect.

"You work for High Lord Bandar?" Mardor said, awed.

"Of course. I'm his scribe." *Well, one of his scribes*, he thought. The guard didn't have to know that there were about fifty others. "I help spread His Word to other cities by editing church documents."

"And he is waiting for you now to complete a project?"

"Yes, he is," Rydah lied. He had just completed a project and had no idea when more material might come his way.

"Yet you stay with your slave?" The guard clearly thought Lord Rydah risked much.

"If she carries my Damon seed, you had better believe I'm staying. High Lord Bandar will understand as well." He paused. "I only hope he'll understand why you're late returning to Blethryn."

Mardor blanched. "I was given orders to accompany you to the doctor's!"

"Yes, and you have. I plan to stay until my breeder gets well. What you do is your business. I am not your commander."

He left him then, and went to the carriage to remove his belongings. The doctor had told him of a home in the village that sometimes took in strangers for the night. Though it was not even mid-sun, he wouldn't be going anywhere without Jenya.

He walked down the street to the house he'd been told about. On the way, he passed another squad of soldiers. They paid him no attention. A heavy-set old woman opened the door to his knock and her eyes widened when she recognized the cloak of a Damon.

"M'lord! Please, come in out of the hot sun!"

He entered to a small room. A cold fireplace took up most of one wall. "I was told you take in travelers," he said.

"Oh, yes, m'lord. It would be my pleasure! We don't get many visitors to Mantaro. Please, come this way." She waddled down a short corridor and stepped aside to present a well-furnished room with a single bed.

"I'm sure you're used to finer accommodations, m'lord. I hope this will be acceptable for your needs."

"This will be fine." He held out a coin—more than the room was worth, he was sure.

She took it quickly and tucked it into her large bosom before he could change his mind.

Once he had stowed his gear, he became restless. He returned to the doctor's office to see if he could sit next to Jenya's bed. When he walked by the carriage, Mardor was still there.

"Sire?"

"Yes, soldier?"

"Um, if you're going to stay here a couple of suns, I think I should head toward Blethryn and report in. But I'll tell them about you and perhaps they'll send you a new escort."

"That's kind of you, but I'll probably have left by the time a new escort arrives. I can find my own way back."

"Very well, sire. If you're sure." He seemed anxious to leave. Rydah wasn't about to discourage him.

"I'm sure."

Mardor saluted and Rydah nodded in return. Only Warriors saluted each other. Damon leaders just nodded.

He watched as the soldier mounted up and rode out quickly. Rydah sighed with relief when he was out of sight.

He entered the doctor's office once again. "Is she still sleeping?"

"Yes," he said. "She'll probably sleep for another *hura* or more. Sleep is the best way for her to heal."

Rand's curse on that! He needed to find out what she knew and get to the Acolyte before more soldiers came—soldiers who knew he was Symal's uncle.

Once Apnar heard that Mardor rode off and left him alone, he'd probably lose his head.

## Chapter Eleven

Jenya dozed fitfully, her wounds disturbing her sleep. She woke up several times, her body aching. She felt like she'd been assaulted, only she had done it to herself. When she awoke mid-sun, she was amazed to see her master, sitting by the bedside, cooling her forehead with a damp rag.

"M-master?"

"It's all right, Jenya. You needed your rest."

"Oh, no! We have no time!"

"Of course we do. You've been injured. I'm worried about you."

Jenya was touched. In the slave pens, she had learned of masters who would simply return their injured breeders and obtain another one—unless, of course, they were already carrying their child. They would let Syminton deal with the cost and time of recovery. Often, the rejected breeders would no longer be saleable, and instead would be sent down to the breeding pool.

She glanced around the room. She spotted the doctor, sitting in the corner observing them. Her eyes told Rydah all he needed to know.

He turned. "Will you excuse us, doctor? I need to examine my slave."

"Of course," Nerat said, rising. "I'll be outside."

When he was gone, Rydah turned to Jenya. "By Rand, you took an incredible risk! I ought to beat you with a strap! I bought you to have my children, not to jump from carriages!"

"I'm sorry, master, I didn't know what else to do! Memma told me how urgent the situation was. I thought if you could get to them first, you might be able to save Symal."

Rydah wanted to grab his slave and shake her—and hug her. That a slave would risk everything just to give her master a chance to slip the guards? It boggled the mind. How could she have so much faith in him when she'd only known him a handful of suns?

*And what was he going to do to justify her faith?*



"All right. We're alone. What did Memma tell you?"

"Symal has a relative that no one knows about. It's Memma's mother's illegitimate sister. She lives in Balgari. Her name is Athela. Memma thinks the Acolyte and Symal are there, but Farda can't go anywhere near there to check. She thought you might be able to get away. To prove that Farda sent you, Memma gave me a password." She looked embarrassed. "I'm only telling you what Memma said."

"Come on, out with it."

"Very well, m'lord. 'Princess Bluta.' That's what she told me."

Rydah had to laugh. A bluta was a large, placid, slow-moving beast that was cut up for meat that Damons considered a delicacy.

"All right. How can I find them?"

"Go to Balgari and seek a man called Darikani. He'll lead you."

"Good. You rest. I'll be back in a sun or two."

\* \* \* \* \*

Rydah passed several patrols on his way to Balgari. His Damon garb kept him from being questioned too closely. He told the guards he was traveling to scout rural crafts for Damon households. Deep down, he knew that when Apnar put together Mardor's report and the patrol sightings, he would soon zero in on Acolyte Lepdar's location.

Even as he came to help, he was increasing the danger for Symal.

He rode into Balgari and tied up the carriage to a post in the main square, outside the dining hall. There were patrols here as well, he noticed. They seemed bored, as if they felt they'd been assigned a backwater while the real action was happening somewhere else.

All it would take would be one suspicious guard. He cursed himself for not donning a disguise just before he entered the village.

Rydah strolled into the café. People turned to notice the Damon in their presence, an unusual sight in this farming community. He ordered a *pula*, the strong drink of

choice in the farmlands and sat at a small table and looked around at all the eyes on him.

Rand, he was such a terrible spy!

The waitress dropped off his drink and accepted his coin. "Excuse me," he said.

She stopped. "Yes, sire?"

"I'm looking for Darikani. Do you know where I can find him?"

"Who's asking?"

"A friend." He slipped her a few more coins.

She shrugged and looked around nervously. "Don't know him."

He cursed inwardly. What had he done wrong?

He sipped at his drink and watched the crowd for the High Lord's men. Fortunately, there were none at the moment. He pondered his next move. Should he ask somewhere else? Should he try to disguise himself now? Wouldn't that raise more suspicion? He felt lost.

"Damon?"

He turned. A middle-aged man stood before him. He wore a tunic of the Craftsman class.

"You are looking for someone?"

"Yes, Darikani. Are you he?" He pitched his voice low.

"Why do you seek him, m'lord?"

"A friend sent me."

"Oh? Who would that be?"

He sighed, anxious to end this circular conversation. He lowered his voice, "Princess Bluta."

The man's eyes widened. "You come from Memma?"

"Yes. And Farda. I'm his brother."

"Yes, I heard that he had a Damon brother." He looked around. "Come."

Rydah left his drink and followed Darikani out the rear door of the cafe.

He stopped by the stinking pile of trash that had gathered near the back door. "Forgive me, m'lord, but would you be willing to swap your Damon clock for something, umm, less conspicuous?"

"Yes, of course. I was foolish for not thinking of it myself."

Darikani nodded and escorted Rydah along the back of a few buildings until they came to a barn. The craftsman held up a hand, then slipped inside. He returned a moment later to wave Rydah inside.

"We should be safe from the prying eyes of the patrols here. They're everywhere. But they pay little attention to us, as long as we don't have strangers with us."

"They've already seen me."

"Yes. Damons travel through here occasionally, so your presence is not that unusual. But they'll want to know where you are at all times. Once they realize you've given them the slip, they will start looking for you in earnest."

They walked through the semi-darkened barn to a tack room, where Darikani found some old cloaks bearing the Craftsman design. Rydah immediately stripped off his Damon insignia and began putting on the outfit of the lower caste.

"You having come in wearing Damon clothes might actually work out better when it comes time to leave," Darikani told him. "We'll leave your carriage out front of the cafe. When you return from our visit, you can don your cloak again and stroll along the storefronts as if nothing was amiss. If you are challenged by guards, just explain you were looking for new crafts and lost track of time."

"Yes, that might work. I imagine it will help if I act indignant at being questioned."

He smiled. "The mark of a true Damon, m'lord."

Rydah wasn't sure if Darikani was insulting the Damon caste or trying to make a joke. Either way, they were in this together now and, if caught, might end up being hung side by side. Rydah thought that gave Darikani a lot of latitude to make jokes at Damon expense.

Darikani looked at Rydah's new outfit. "You look like a legitimate Craftsman," he said. "But I worry that guards might recognize you." He turned and rummaged

through a wooden box of old clothes and pulled out a shapeless hat. "Would you mind, sire? It would help cover your Damon hair."

"Not at all—if it means not being spotted." He donned it. There was no looking glass, but he imagined he looked silly. The brim of the hat hung down over his eyes, forcing him to rotate it until he could see. The Craftsman looked amused.

"Come on, I have two horses we can use." Darikani stopped, then turned back. "You *do* know how to ride, m'lord?"

"Yes," he said evenly. The Fyrads might be a third-class Damon, but they were still Damon. Riding lessons had been the norm growing up, although his father did not own any horses himself.

Darikani saddled up two horses and the men mounted them. "We can't act as if we're in a hurry," he said. "If we're stopped, let me do the talking. If worse comes to worst, and they discover you're the strange Damon who just rode into town, tell them you put on a disguise so you could negotiate a better price for their crafts."

Rydah nodded. Darikani thought far ahead, making him a much better spy, despite his lower rank. He gained new respect for his guide.

They clopped outside into the bright sun, letting the horses walk slow, heading east, away from the center of the village. They passed a small patrol of two guards, who let them ride by unchallenged.

They left the village behind and continued east along a narrow road. "How much farther?" Rydah asked after several *lapars* had passed.

"Quite a ways—we're going in the wrong direction, right now. I wanted to make sure we weren't followed."

Nervously, Rydah looked over his shoulder, seeing no one. "We have to turn around and go back?"

"Not that way. We'll have to go south."

They reached a junction with the overgrown ruts of a cart path, leading south. Darikani rode on for a few hundred *capeks*, then pulled off the road and dismounted.

He led the confused Rydah back along the edge of the road until they came to the cart path again.

"Here," Darikani said, pulling his horse to a stop. He looked around. The road was deserted. He began rummaging through the saddlebags.

Darikani pulled out four squares of rough leather and some ties of the same material. The Damon became even more confused. *What was he up to now?*

The craftsman began tying the leather to the hooves of his horse. Rydah suddenly understood.

"So the horse won't leave tracks, right?"

"Right," he said. "There should be some in your saddle bags as well."

Rydah got down and found them and soon both animals' hooves were tied up like holiday gifts.

"We only have to do this for about a half-league," Darikani said. "Just far enough so a passing patrol won't get curious as to why two horses were heading down an abandoned cart path. We have to walk them so their hooves won't dig into the soil. Stay inside the wheel rut if possible." He led the way down the right-hand rut.

Rydah followed along the left, putting his feet one in front of the other. "Where does this road go? Why was it abandoned?" Rydah asked.

"It led to the Harpton farm. They were killed last *ryne*."

Rydah covered his surprise. "What happened?"

"They were all hung by the High Lord's men for failure to pay tribute."

Rydah was shocked. He hadn't heard anything about this! He couldn't imagine High Lord Bandar having a family killed because they couldn't pay their taxes. Imprisoned, maybe, or having their farm seized, sure. But killed?

"How could this be? Did they riot? Spread sedition?"

“No. Harpton struck a guard when he arrested his oldest son, Barktar. They were going to imprison Barktar until Harpton could pay. When Harpton hit the guard, they hung the whole family, on the spot.”

Rydah had to ask, though he didn't really want to know. “H-how many were in the family?”

“Five. Harpton, his wife, his son, and two daughters.”

Rydah's mind reeled. “The High Lord's men killed two girls?”

Darikani swung his eyes toward the Damon, slyly pleased to observe Rydah's shocked expression. “Yes. The guards said they were acting on High Priest Kendam's orders. He felt they had to be taught a lesson. A lesson for all of us.”

They walked in silence for nearly a mile, Rydah's head filled with the news. He had thought Bandar was a benevolent leader. Surely he couldn't know what his men did out in the field, could he?

They came to a meadow overlooking a run-down farm. The main building had been burned, and the fields filled with old stubble.

The Harpton farm.

“We can remove the pads now. We're going to ride through the woods west until we are well past the village, then we'll be close.”

Rydah couldn't take his eyes off the farm, a question on his lips. “How old were the girls?”

Darikani let the question hang in the air as they observed the burned farm. “The older was thirteen, the younger, ten.”

Rydah felt the breath catch in his throat. How could the priests allow that? “The soldiers burned their house down as well?”

Darikani looked up as he removed the pads. “Yes. And seized the land. Although they haven't done anything with it. It's just hectares going to waste.”

Darikani finished before Rydah did and waited patiently astride his horse until the Damon stuffed the pads back into his saddlebags. He made no move to help the Nobleman. In other circumstances, that would be considered rude. But Rydah was too stunned by seeing the farm to notice.

## Chapter Twelve

They rode on, the sun beginning to fall low on the horizon. Just after sunset, when the light diffused through the darkening forest, making Rydah fear for wild beasts, Darikani stopped.

"We're just north of the farm," he spoke in low tones. "Soldiers have searched the farmhouse already and haven't found the Acolyte. But as we approach, we have to be very careful for there might be more patrols. If they spot us now, they'll know something is up."

Rydah followed along behind the man as he rode through the trees. He wondered how Darikani could see in the gloom, but apparently he had been this way many times. They came to the edge of the forest and looked out across a field of *paplet*, a grain used in bread-making. Ahead, Rydah could see a small farmhouse and a few outbuildings. Candlelight flickered from the windows.

"Stay here, Damon. I will ride up and make sure it's safe."

Rydah, fearful of being left alone at the edge of the dark woods, almost spoke up, then bit his tongue. This wasn't what he had expected when he decided to help his brother! Intrigue, disguises, murderous patrols—he was in way over his head.

He watched, trembling, as the Craftsman disappeared into the darkness ahead of him. His horse snorted, startling him. Rydah wanted to spur him forward, just to get away from the trees, where he imagined long arms of vicious creatures reaching out to him.

He waited five *lapars*, then dismounted and walked a short ways ahead, into the field, just to give him a little space from the trees. He stood there, going over in his mind some of the documents he'd edited for Bandar. They had always been uplifting words, full of hope and love—that the high priest could condone murder seemed



impossible. Bandar would be as shocked as Rydah had been to find out what his guards were doing. Perhaps he should be told...

Horse hooves alerted him of a rider's approach. He held still, fearful it was a passing patrol. Soon, Darikani rode up out of the gloom and dismounted.

"It's safe, m'lord, but we must hurry. The Acolyte doesn't want to stay any longer. He plans to confront his father."

Rydah mounted up and they rode toward the lights. A man came out to take their horses. They went in without knocking on the door.

Inside the small one-room hut were four people. A hunched woman that Rydah took to be Memma's illegitimate sister, Athela, and a short overweight man wearing the tunic of the Merchant class stood near the old fieldstone fireplace. But his eyes did not stay long on them. Acolyte Lepdar, wearing the magnificent cloak of the highest order of Damon, stood in the center of the room, tall and proud. His long wavy hair was tied back, as was the custom when riding. The Acolyte looked tired. Rydah wished he'd brought his Damon cloak with him. He worried he might be considered unworthy to be in the Acolyte's presence.

Sitting at the table was his step-niece, Symal, looking small. "Lord Rydah!" she exclaimed, putting a hand over her mouth.

Rydah hadn't seen her in two *rynes*, but she looked much the same: dark hair, beautiful face, wide-set eyes that men could lose themselves in. Only now, she had filled out into the full bloom of womanhood.

"Damon?" The Acolyte said, suspicious, taking in his garb.

"Yes, m'lord," Rydah said, bowing. "I am Lord Rydah, son of Fyrad, brother of Farda, at your service. Forgive my humble appearance."

Acolyte Lepdar relaxed slightly. "No need to apologize. I'm sorry you've come all this way. I solved no problems by running from my father. I've decided to return and tell him I will not marry Princess Wenelle. My heart belongs to your niece, Symal."

Rydah glanced at his niece and noticed she had been crying.

"I've come at my brother's request to see if we can't figure out some way to avoid trouble for everyone," he said, picking his words carefully. "I fear that Symal might fall out of favor with your father."

*If being thrown in prison and possibly beheaded is "falling out of favor," then yes, he thought.*

The Acolyte shook his head. "I will let nothing befall Symal. She is safe from reprisals."

Rydah thought of the Harpton's farmhouse, not far from here. Was she really safe from Bandar's anger? Or Kendam's?

"Sire, before you make your decision, could you tell me what it is that your father demands?"

Rydah knew most of the story, but perhaps there was something he was missing, some tidbit of information that might help him come up with a solution.

The Acolyte sighed, then nodded. "Sit down, Damon." He sat next to Symal, and took her hand. "I'll tell you what my father is trying to achieve by forcing me to marry that bluta." Rydah tried not to smile at the Acolyte's characterization of Princess Wenelle.

"As you may know, Blethryn vies with High Lord Narzdal of the Caspan region for the mining riches of Couldar, which lies between our two priestdoms. We're negotiating with them, but talks are going slow. Meanwhile, our spies tell us Narzdal is plotting behind the scenes to obtain an advantage.

"Narzdal's army isn't as large as my father's, so he would dare not attack us on his own. But Narzdal's cousin is none other than Wenelle's father, High Lord Syran, who controls the Garspar region to the north. So far, Syran has resisted his cousin's entreaties that they combine armies. While Narzdal tells him it would only be to help in the negotiations, Syran fears it could lead to an all-out war."

Rydah's mind raced as he absorbed the intrigue behind the thrones.

"Syran has no desire to take on my father," Lepdar continued. "In order not to offend Narzdal, he secretly contacted my father through intermediaries. Together they arranged the marriage between his daughter and me. Once the wedding takes place, Syran can truthfully tell his cousin that he could not go against his son-in-law's family and upset his daughter."

The Acolyte paused to stroke Symal's cheek. "Their plan is brilliant—except for one thing. No one asked *me* what I thought of marrying Wenelle. I've only met her once and I can't imagine being married to her. She is a simpering, giggling, shallow woman, certainly not worthy to share my portion of the priesthood, small though it may be."

The Acolyte turned back to Rydah. "When they presented their plan to me, I had been trying to figure out how to ask my father for permission to marry the daughter of a Craftsman, a delicate matter, to be sure." He smiled ruefully. "I thought I could eventually convince him of my true love for Symal." He nodded to Rydah. "And that her step-father used to be a Damon would work in her favor."

"I admit I panicked when my father told me I had to marry the princess for the good of the priesthood. I knew my brother had done that, but somehow I thought that I would be allowed to marry whomever I chose, since I was not heir. I remember stammering out a tepid response, then I fled at the earliest opportunity. I evaded the palace guards and rode straight to your brother's house to speak to Symal."

"I didn't realize what a stir my disappearance would cause. No sooner had I reached Symal, I heard that guards were out in force, looking for me. They gave me no time! I took Symal and ran." He looked embarrassed. "Not a very Noble action, to be sure. I just didn't know what else to do."

Rydah kept quiet, his mind racing. He didn't see any way out.

"I've come to realize I have to face my father and tell him I've found the girl I want to marry." He took Symal's hand. "I should've done this as soon as they told me about the arranged marriage. I'm sorry you've come all this way for nothing. In the morning, I will ride out alone to find a guardsman and tell him Symal and I need escort back to Blethryn."

Rydah could see the trap tightening around Symal. "Your father is very angry," he said. "He's worried about you. He might take out his anger on Symal."

"No, no. He wouldn't. I wouldn't allow it! Trust me, Symal will be safe."

"Do you think your father will allow the agreement with Syran to disappear? To let Syran join forces with Narzdal? To go to war over Couldar?" Rydah watched the Acolyte's face for clues.

"I don't know," Lepdar said. "They'll just have to think of another way."

Rydah again thought of the Harpton farm. Was the Acolyte's father capable of such iron resolve? Would he risk alienating his own son in order to secure the agreement with Syran?

Rydah's mind raced. In his mind's eye, he could see the pained expression of his slave, who sacrificed herself to give him time to solve this problem. He had no idea what to do.

"Lord Rydah." Rydah's head snapped up.

"Yes, my Acolyte."

"Why have you come? I know you are Farda's brother, but what do you think you can you do?"

"I'm not sure, my Acolyte. My brother thought that as a Damon, as he once was, I might offer some assistance."

"Can you?" He seemed genuinely interested. Or maybe just desperate.

"I'm not sure, sire. I need time to sort it all out."

He sighed. "Time, unfortunately, is something that is in short supply." He rose. "I'm sorry you've wasted your long journey." He turned to the smaller man. "Natrus, we'll be leaving in the morning. I'll make sure no harm comes to you for harboring me and Symal."

Rydah panicked. That he could come all this way and disappoint everyone seemed impossible to accept. "Sire!" he blurted.

The Acolyte stopped. "Yes?"

Something came to him, something he didn't quite understand. He remembered a question Jenya had asked. "Princess Wenelle," he said. "What does she think of the arranged marriage?"

Lepdar paused. "It's funny," he said. "But the bluta has a man she loves as well! She was no more interested in me than I was in her! Can you imagine? That she could prefer one of her slow-witted Farzan men over the High Acolyte of Blethryn?"

Rydah suddenly staggered with the threads of an idea. Something he read once came back to him. It was a wisp, a chimera. He wasn't sure of the details, far from it, but it was a start.

"Acolyte Lepdar," he begged. "Please...let me implore you. There may be something that can be done. But I need to do some research. I must return to Blethryn. I apologize for not thinking of it sooner. Please, can you stay here for two more suns until I can return?"

The Acolyte's face darkened. "No. I will not hide from my father like some wayward boy. The High Acolyte of Blethryn does not scurry from the light." He turned to Symal. Seeing the tears forming in her eyes, he stopped, then reached out to touch her face. Rydah could tell he truly loved her.

"I am concerned about Symal, of course," he admitted. He turned back to Rydah. "Tell me what you can of this research." He folded his arms across his chest, as if daring Rydah to convince him.

Rydah blanched. He had no good answer. "High Acolyte Lepdar, in good conscience I cannot. I deeply apologize. Anything I say might be in error. I recall reading something in some priestly documents that might help you. The memories are just too vague right now. Can you wait until I return?"

He sighed. "I'm not sure. I've been hiding for many suns now, and I'm embarrassed. My brother would never have hidden from his fate." He brushed away one of Symal's tears. "For Symal's sake, I will wait one more sun. But whatever you come up with, it better be worth the pride and honor that I'm losing by hiding another sun."

One sun! Rydah wasn't sure he could accomplish what he needed in one sun. He had to ride home, research his files, and return—all without being spotted by guards. And what of Jenya? He'd have to leave her with the doctor—she would be in no position to travel. Still, he didn't feel he had much choice.

“Very well, my Acolyte. I must leave immediately.” He turned to Darikani. “I don't have time to return for my carriage. I must ride back to Blethryn. Could you collect my carriage and keep my horse safe until I return?”

Darikani, who had been standing in the shadows, watching quietly as the Damons talked, nodded. “Yes, sire. Leave it to me.”

“Good. I shall return on the morrow.” With that, he turned and left, his mind a turmoil.

## Chapter Thirteen

Lord Rydah rode through the night, grateful the darkness protected him from patrols. He had no idea how he might return in the sunlight undetected.

The horse carried him at a gallop for three leagues, then Rydah had to let him rest. They trotted along for a few more leagues, as the lord tried to remember the document he sought. Could he find it in time? Did it even exist, or did he remember it incorrectly?

Dawn approached as he entered Blethryn. He urged the horse on until he reined up outside his house. Dismounting quickly, he tied the horse to a post and went inside, hoping no one noticed his Craftsman cloak. Along the wall next to his desk were old documents he had edited. Quickly he began to thumb through them, searching.

He lost track of time. Papers soon surrounded him, littering the floor. He had rummaged through half the bookcase before he found what he had been looking for. He sat, oblivious of his surroundings, as he read and reread the document.

He heard the horse snorting outside and realized he needed to give him water before he attempted to ride him back to Balgari. Rydah rose and found a shallow basin, then dipped it into the fountain in back. Rydah was startled to see the sun high in the sky. Rand! He must get back!

He came out onto the porch and placed the basin for the animal. He stood and watched it drink as his mind whirled with ideas. It just might work, he decided, especially if the plan came from the mouth of Acolyte Lepdar.

A shout distracted him. He looked up to see the town crier approaching, making his announcements. Crowds gathered.

"Acolyte Lepdar found!" the boy yelled. "Hiding with a Craftsman's daughter! Acolyte being returned to castle!"

*Rand's awful luck! I was so close!*

Rydah jumped forward, then stopped. He didn't know what to do, where to go. The chances of him getting near the Acolyte again were slim, he realized. Third-tier Damons just weren't invited to the palace, especially during such difficult times.

And what of Symal?

\* \* \* \* \*

High Lord Bandar paced. "Where is he now?" he demanded. His full head of white hair was edged with sweat.

The captain of the guard, Malfiseus, bowed for the third time. "He's just a few leagues away. He should be here within a *hura* or two."

"And what of the girl?"

"She's been taken on ahead, as you ordered. She will be here much sooner. The Acolyte put up a terrible fight about it. He's sworn to have the heads of the guards who carried out your orders, m'lord."

Bandar waved his hand. "Not to worry. The guards do what I tell them to do." He pointed at Malfiseus. "Have the girl brought to me as soon as she arrives."

Malfiseus bowed a final time and escaped.

Bandar turned to Kendam and sighed. "Aren't you glad you have no children, my priest? They bring you nothing but heartache."

Kendam nodded. He was a squat man, less than six *capeks*. His hair had long since thinned, so he wore a dark wig to give the appearance of full Damon hair. It rankled him, though he never mentioned it. He leaned in to the High Lord and whispered, "Never fear, m'lord. We will make sure the slut doesn't interfere with your plans. She'll be sorry she every turned the head of the Acolyte. I have riders speeding to Farzan right now with the message that the wedding will take place as scheduled."

"Good. What should we do with her?"

"Leave that to me, m'lord. The less you know of it, the better."

\* \* \* \* \*

Rydah rode hard east once again. His eyelids were heavy, sleep tugged at him. He'd been up for more than a full sun, yet he rode on, spurring the tired horse. He had to reach Jenya. He didn't know why exactly. Yes, he wanted to know how she was



doing, but there was something else. A need to share his idea with her. He might be able to save the Acolyte and Symal if he could just figure out how to break through the layers of sycophants and bureaucrats around the High Lord.

Balgari came into view in the late afternoon. The guards were absent—they had cleared out as soon as the Acolyte had been found. He reined the exhausted horse up at the stables and ducked inside. No doubt Darikani had seen to it that his horse was fed and watered. His carriage sat right outside. He retrieved his Damon cloak from the tack room and put it on.

He unsaddled the horse and made sure it had food and water, then took the carriage horse outside and fastened him in place. Doing chores usually reserved for a Laborer made him feel useful, which was comforting, as so far, he'd been worth nothing to Symal and Farda.

Climbing aboard, he snapped the reins and pointed the horse toward Mantaro. It took him another long *hura* to reach the tiny town. He reined up outside the doctor's office and went inside.

"Nerat?" Silence greeted him.

Alarmed, he strode into the back room and found Jenya sleeping on the cot. Rydah's heart leaped at seeing her safe and sound. He dropped to one knee at her side and touched her arm.

She came awake instantly and turned. When she saw him, she gave a small cry and started to open her arms, then stopped. Rydah surprised even himself when he forgot his station and hugged her instead. They froze in mid-embrace and separated awkwardly.

"M'lord. I'm happy to see you've returned safely from your adventure," she said formally.

"Yes. Sorry it took so long. I had to ride to Blethryn to find something."

"Blethryn! M'lord! You've only been gone a sun!"

"I know, it couldn't be helped. Are you all right?"

"Oh, yes, master. The doctor has taken good care of me. I believe I'm ready to travel whenever you want to go."

"Good," he said. "Did you hear about the Acolyte?"

She nodded. "Yes, the doctor told me. I'm sorry, sire. I had hoped you'd be able to help your poor niece."

"I may still be able to – unless it's already too late. The Acolyte is back at the castle by now and they'll never let a lowly third-tier Damon inside to see him."

Jenya studied her master's face, which seemed lined with worry. She wanted to reach out and touch his cheek, to assure him that she still believed in him.

Suddenly, she sat up. "Sire! I think I know of a way to get into the castle."

He raised an eyebrow. "Yes?" Inwardly, he wondered what a mere slave might come up with.

"You could offer to breed me to the High Priest! Isn't that a custom on occasion?"

"Well, yes, but I hardly think Bandar would have time..." he trailed off. He suddenly saw where she was going with this idea.

"Sure, he'd be too busy – that's why it might work!" Her face was flushed with excitement. "Maybe we could get past the guards that way and then find the Acolyte."

Rydah tried to keep the surprise from his expression. That a slave could come up with such a devious – and risky – plan! But it made a lot of sense. Many lower-tier lords would be honored to raise the offspring of Bandar or Kendam or one of the other leaders. While they had no official standing, word had a way of getting around. Rydah knew of several young men and women who had moved up from third tier to second because they had been high-born offspring.

Still, he resisted it. What if Bandar actually agreed to it? Could he allow her first-born to be another lord's child? "No! I forbid it! I've been waiting too many *rynes* for you!" Even as he protested, he could think of no other way. Time was running out for Symal.

Jenya didn't say anything. She let him come to the same realization she had. They had to act now, the morrow might be too late.

Rydah bit his lower lip. "I'm not sure, slave. It's risky. We could end up on the gallows. Besides, you are injured."

"I'm much better now, master."

He grunted. "Let me see you."

She rolled her legs out of bed and stood up. Rydah noticed she still wore a bandage, though it was smaller than before.

"It was only a scrape." She reached down and began unwinding the bandage. Rydah waited, expecting to see the bloody red mark that he remembered. When she pulled away the last of the cloth, he could see her wound had scabbed over nicely.

They heard the door open. "Oh, my lord! I'm sorry! I had to run out to help a patient!" Nerat bustled in, bag of medicine in hand.

"No harm, Lord Nerat," Rydah said. "I've been admiring what a great job you've done with my slave."

He beamed. "Thank you, sire. Just a few herbs and teas. Your slave has remarkable recovery powers."

"I take it she can be released?"

"Oh, yes, m'lord. Whenever you want."

Rydah pressed a few coins on the doctor and took some herbs to make teas for her in exchange. In a few more *lapars*, he was helping Jenya into the carriage. He noticed she still limped a bit. He didn't bother to chain her. "Come, we must hurry. I hope you're all right to ride."

"Yes, master."

He snapped the reins and the horse leaped ahead, pulling the cart after it.

## Chapter Fourteen

Symal stood in front of High Priest Kendam, feeling small and vulnerable, her eyes downcast. Guards flanked her, swords at the ready if she tried to bolt. The priest glared down at her from his raised chair.

"You've caused quite a bit of trouble, whore." The harsh word stung her, but she said nothing.

"You've turned the head of our Acolyte during a crucial time in our priesthood's history. Will future generations look back upon this sun as the time a Craftsman's slut brought down an entire priesthood?"

Still Symal held her tongue. She thought the high priest completely misunderstood. She hadn't planned to fall in love with the Acolyte, it had just happened. But she was far too terrified to stand up for herself.

"I should have you beheaded immediately," he said, obviously pleased to see her flinch at his statement. He stepped off his chair and approached her. Symal noticed at once that he was barely a *calabon* taller than she, though much fatter. "But that would displease High Lord Bandar." He paused. "At least, for now." His threat caused another ripple of fear to pass through her.

"If not for the Acolyte, I'd have you stripped naked and put in stocks on the main square." He leaned in. "I would enjoy seeing you humiliated in front of the townsfolk."

Tears began to flow down Symal's cheeks. "M'lord..."

"Silence!" He thundered, his hand slapping her hard across her cheek. "I did not give you permission to speak! You have nothing to say to me! You are a slut, a worm, a dirty little cunt that's gotten herself in trouble she can't even imagine."

Symal trembled as he walked around her. "I know what should be done with you. By using your feminine charms on the Acolyte, you acted just like a slave. So a slave you shall become." Kendam turned to the tallest guard. "Guard, this slave seems to be wearing clothes! Can you imagine?"

The guard stepped forward and ripped Symal's clothes from her body. She screamed and tried to cover up.

The guard glanced up at Kendam, who nodded, so the soldier swung his riding crop down on her back. Symal screamed again and dropped to one knee.

"I'll have the Acolyte on you!" she blurted out in anger and fear.

Without a word, Kendam grabbed the crop out of the guard's hand and began beating her himself. She fell to the ground, writhing and screaming under the blows. "Slaves don't threaten their masters," he said when he finally stopped, leaving her with several red welts on her back and legs.

He handed the crop back to the guard. "Take her to the slave pens of Goren. Tell the administrator to soften her up and put her into the breeding chambers. Let's see how the Acolyte likes her once she's heavy with Warrior child."

Symal looked up, horrified. "NOO!" she shouted as the guards dragged her away. Goren was more prison than slave pen. Women didn't go there to become mates for Damons, only to serve as the receptacle for the semen of Laborers and Warriors."

\* \* \* \* \*

Rydah couldn't contain his nervousness as he slowed the carriage outside the palace wall. His face remained etched with tiredness, although Jenya had helped him by taking the reins during their journey east, allowing him to catch a nap while sitting up in his seat.

The palace guard stopped him with an abrupt wave of his hand. The big, hard-looking Warrior towered over the lord. "Your business, m'lord?" he said without the slightest bit of courtesy.

"I have a breeder that High Lord Bandar is expecting," he said brightly, his face showing a smile he didn't feel.

The guard raised a bushy eyebrow. "This has been arranged?"

"Yes, of course. Here is my pass." He thrust a paper into his hands and held his breath. Having worked with Bandar's writing and signature for many *rynes* now,

Rydah believed he could copy it in his sleep. Still, he was petrified that the guard would somehow see through his deception.

From the way the guard studied the document, Rydah suspected he couldn't read. All the better. He hoped the Damon seal would impress him. "Wait here," the guard barked and took the document to a scribe waiting inside.

Long *lapars* passed. Just as he was beginning to panic, the guard returned abruptly, handed him the document, then waved him through.

Rydah slapped the reins quickly and the carriage leaped forward. He slowed it immediately, fearful his nervousness might give them away. He headed the carriage toward the main stables, where he would be expected to drop it off.

After securing a promise from the stableboy to feed and water his horse, Rydah took one end of Jenya's chain and walked toward the imposing stone palace.

"This had better work, or we'll both end up in prison—probably in a cell next to Symal," Rydah whispered out of the side of his mouth. He held the chain loosely, and only yanked on it when guards were present.

"I could think of no other way to get us close to the Acolyte, m'lord."

"I know. It is a good plan. I'm surprised a slave would think of it." Rydah couldn't help admire his prize. Not only did she promise to be an excellent breeder, she had intelligence as well!

He had tried to find flaw in Jenya's plan, but even as he did, he began to come up with answers to his own arguments. It was Rydah's idea to forge Bandar's handwriting, but he hadn't stopped there.

As they entered the castle, two more guards stopped them.

"Your business, m'lord?" The first guard asked. He wore the Warrior cloak, but with markings that put him at the highest tier of his caste. He was more deferential than the gate guard, probably because he assumed the Damon already had passed scrutiny.

"We're on our way to see Acolyte Lepdar to deliver my breeder for his seed," Rydah replied smoothly, handing the man his second forged document—one using Lepdar's name throughout instead of Bandar's.

Rydah had not seen the Acolyte's handwriting, so he simply copied Bandar's again. He hoped the son would have a similar writing style, including the signature. The guard studied it, his brow furrowed. Rydah was impressed — the guard could read.

"I don't understand, er, Lord Rydah. The Acolyte is, um, indisposed at the moment. He can't possibly see your breeder this sun."

Rydah put an edge into his voice. "Really? We made these plans a few moons ago. Has something come up that would prevent him from honoring our signed agreement?"

The guard fidgeted. "Um. I'm not able to say, m'lord. Perhaps if you could come again another sun..."

"But I've already driven many leagues to come here on the Acolyte's request," Rydah protested. "I should have been contacted."

"Yes, but —"

"My breeder is ready for seed this very sun! I insist that I at least be given a short audience with the Acolyte so that we may clear up this most distressing development." Rydah pulled himself up to this full height. He was a good two *calabons* taller than the guard. He glowered down at the Warrior, daring him to refuse a Damon.

Jenya stared at the ground, her chain rattling softly as she trembled. The guard glanced over, taking in her beauty. Rydah could see his mind working: What would the Acolyte say when he found out this guard sent away a breeder he had agreed to mate with? The guard hesitated. "Wait here, sire." He turned and spoke a few words to a second guard, then trotted off up the corridor carrying the document with him.

Rydah now could only hope that the Acolyte saw the document, not Bandar or Kendam, and if Lepdar did see it, he'd remember the name of the lord who had spoken to him at the old farmhouse. If he was too preoccupied to worry about a third-tier Damon, Rydah and Jenya would be in the dungeon within the next ten *lapars*, charged with attempted sedition and forgery.

The wait turned out to be fifteen agonizing *lapars*. Rydah was really beginning to lose his nerve again when the first guard returned.

“This way, m’lord.” He bowed.

Rydah felt a wave of relief wash through him. He glanced over at Jenya to see her eyes widen with relief. Rydah felt a new bond form between them. She had risked her life to stand by her master. His affection for her grew.

He tried to act nonchalant as they followed the Warrior through a series of corridors. The guard stopped outside a door. “The Acolyte will see you here.”



## Chapter Fifteen

Acolyte Lepdar stood by the window, looking out. He turned when he heard the door open and his face creased into a nervous smile that came and went quickly.

Rydah noticed they were alone. Thank Rand!

"What news do you bring? As you predicted, my father is holding Symal under house arrest. They won't let me see her. They say she's not in prison, but I fear she will be soon."

Rydah approached the Acolyte, bowing deeply. "Forgive my deception on getting into the palace, my Acolyte."

Lepdar waved his hand. "Yes, yes. Please. Tell me what news you bring."

Rydah reached into his bag. "As you know, my Acolyte, I'm a scribe. I've copied many documents from the high priests, including those of our ancestors. Many *rynes* ago, when breeders were first becoming accepted in our society, conflicts arose between Noblewomen and Lords. The Noblewomen objected to breeders, as they felt they infringed upon their rights, but the priests were adamant that they would solve the problems caused by weak offspring. A number of edicts were written in the past to smooth over these issues, most of which have fallen into disuse over the *rynes* as Noblewomen have seen the wisdom of having fresh breeders among our leaders."

Rydah stepped forward and handed Acolyte Lepdar a document, covered in spidery writing. "I came across this several *rynes* ago and only remembered it vaguely, that's why I couldn't speak accurately of it at the farmhouse. But if you read through this document written by High Priest Nidlet, I think it might give you the solution to your problem."

The Acolyte reacted to the name as he accepted the document. High Priest Nidlet was revered among the Avalonians. He had died more than seventy *rynes* ago, but his words live on in scrolls and sermons. Even Bandar had been known to quote him frequently.

The Acolyte read quickly, then looked up. "Is this right?"

Rydah nodded. "This document sets for the terms of a *Repall*—a marriage in name only. It was named after Acolyte Repall, who found himself in a similar situation to yours, except he was heir to the throne. He loved a Noblewoman, but his father had pledged him to a distant princess. The princess, like Wenelle, also had a man she loved, and she did not want to leave her priestdom to live here. The Noblewoman and the princess had many allies and they created problems for the high priests of both regions. So they agreed to marry the Acolyte to the princess in name and title, but allow them to live separately."

Rydah couldn't keep the excitement out of his voice. "It fits you perfectly, sire. You said the only reason for the marriage is to give Syran an excuse to tell his cousin he can't merge their armies, for it would go against his daughter's husband. So you marry in a formal ceremony, witnessed by many dignitaries, then you go your separate ways. You can take Symal as your consort and Princess Wenelle can stay with her lover and everyone will be happy."

The Acolyte's jaw dropped. "And this law is still on the books? It hasn't been repealed?"

"No, my Acolyte. It hasn't been used in more than sixty *ryne* and has been largely forgotten, but it's still on the books."

The Acolyte reached forward and gripped Rydah by his upper arm. "By Rand this is good news! I must go tell my father immediately. Please, stay here for the night, accept my hospitality. I may need you to explain this document to our own priests."

"As you wish, my lord." He bowed, his heart bursting.

At the door, the Acolyte paused. "Oh, and, I'll be back to breed with your slave later."

Rydah looked up, stricken. "Um, my Acolyte. That was just—"

The Acolyte laughed. "Oh, you should see your face! Never fear, my lord. I see you've got an excellent breeder there. Don't blame you for wanting to keep her to yourself!"

Rydah looked relieved.

“Oh and one more thing,” the Acolyte said, opening the door, “I may need a new scribe here soon – to take care of many of my fiefdom’s duties. Might you be available?”

Rydah’s face reddened and he suddenly felt weak in the knees. “Yes, my Acolyte. Whatever you desire.”

When the Acolyte left, Rydah turned to Jenya and clapped his hands. “Did you hear that, Jenya? He wants me as his scribe! We could live inside the palace walls!”

Jenya’s face broke into a big grin – bigger than the sun she’d found out she’d been selected by this Damon. Her instincts had been right. Her lord had turned out to be quite a catch.

“My lord! That’s wonderful news!” She wanted to hug him but kept her place. Instead, she was shocked when he grabbed her and swung her around, then planted her back on her feet and kissed her on the lips.

On the lips! A Damon!

It was just as Lady Margeld had told her it might happen, so many *rynes* ago. That’s why she had made sure the girls learned the correct technique...

*Not long after Jenya had turned fourteen, Margeld had announced in class, “This sun, girls, we learn how to kiss. Not that you should expect your master to kiss you – no, far from it. Most will not, for that signifies a much more personal relationship. No, we learn this simply on the rare chance that someone requests that you kiss him. You must obey and you certainly don’t want to disappoint.”*

*Jenya had known this sun was coming and she was more than ready. Already, she had experimented with Mavela, a fifteen-ryne-old, after lights had gone out at bedtime. The lessons hadn’t gone too far because they both suspected they were doing something wrong – they didn’t feel anything. Other girls had told them of a tingling in their stomachs or a funny feeling even lower, but they just felt a little foolish.*

*Now they were about to learn to kiss the right way. Jenya’s mind raced. Who would they bring in to volunteer? Craftsmen? Merchants? Wouldn’t that arouse them too much? Would the men try to mate with them, even though they were strictly off limits? Jenya wasn’t sure she would know how to behave.*

*Lady Margeld clapped her hands. "Now, girls, pay attention! I can see you sun-dreaming there! Now, we can't very well bring in a bunch of men to practice with, can we? So you're going to learn on each other."*

*There had been murmurings around the room. The twelve girls in the class looked at each other, eyes wide.*

*"I know, I know – it's not ideal. And it won't be the same as a master's kiss. But it will have to do. Now pick a partner."*

*The girls tentatively began to pair up. Jenya saw Mavela in the back talking to another girl, so she turned to her left and asked Palava, a cute dark-haired girl to be her partner. Palava blushed and nodded.*

*Margeld had them first just touch each other's faces and bodies and look into each other's eyes. Stroking Palava had an odd effect on Jenya. That tingling that hadn't occurred with Mavela was happening here, all right. No wonder they had felt nothing. They had jumped right into the kiss without any stroking. This felt very nice, Jenya decided, wanting to squeeze her legs together again.*

*Finally, Margeld told the girls to lean in and just brush their lips together gently. Jenya felt a little spark fly between their outstretched lips just before they touched. She giggled and so did Palava. Jenya inhaled her partner's sweet breath.*

*Jenya's loins tickled her fiercely. She pressed her thighs together hard.*

*"Now just touch your lips to each other, making sure you don't bump noses!"*

*Palava sighed softly and tipped her head so they could kiss a little more easily. The sensation rolled through Jenya from her lips to her breasts and down to her pussy. Her mind roiled. She wanted to breed all of a sudden. She wanted something in her to fill her aching need.*

*The girls in the class kissed and kissed as the teacher walked among them, giving them tips –*

*"Thank you, my slave for suggesting that I help!" Rydah said, snapping Jenya's attention back to the present. "I'd been ready to duck responsibility for fear of getting in trouble. I will never forget this."*

"Having your children will be thanks enough, my lord," she said, her mind awirl. The kiss had been very nice indeed. It hadn't been a quick peck, nor a lover's kiss, but somewhere in between. Still, it sent chills through her.

"Speaking of which, it's been a while since we've been able to breed, hasn't it?"

Jenya smiled. "Yes, my lord, what with my injuries and all."

"Do you think you might be healed enough to perform your duties?" There was a twinkle in his eye.

Jenya nodded eagerly. "Oh, yes, master!" She had hoped he might breed with her again – she had missed it so!

"Good. It is time I resumed my lordly duties," Rydah couldn't keep the smile from tugging at the corners of his mouth.

Jenya's face mimicked his. "Whatever you say, master."

Their chambers consisted of two rooms – the master's suite, complete with large four-poster bed – and the slave's quarters, which was essentially a large closet equipped with a cot.

Rydah noticed Jenya staring at the small room. He came close to her, putting his hands on her bare shoulders. "Normally, of course, you would be sleeping here," he said softly, leaning down toward her delicate ear. "But I may want to breed several times tonight. Therefore, I order you to sleep in my bed."

He felt a shiver run through his slave. Looking at the side of her face, Rydah saw the shy smile appear.

"Come, prepare yourself."

Jenya moved quickly toward the bed, then paused, as if seeking permission. He nodded and she crawled under the thin coverlet. Rydah shook his head: this would never do. He reached down and pulled the cover off his beauty. He enjoyed seeing her naked. As he watched, Jenya's nipples became hard points. Her pussy swelled, then opened like a flower. He could see her wetness within. If ever he had any doubts about Jenya's willingness to be his breeder, they evaporated in that moment.

This slave – this woman – wanted him. He would not disappoint.

Rydah climbed onto the bed next to her and let his fingers trace patterns on her skin. She shivered again. Her lips parted. He had a sudden urge to kiss them, and damn convention! No other Damon would know what went on in Rydah's chambers. He leaned in. Jenya's eyes grew wide, but she turned her face toward him. Their lips met.

They kissed, like lovers. He tasted the sweetness of her for a long time.

His hand roamed over her breast, exploring the turgid nipple. Then he moved it down along her hip to the beginning of her leg. He could feel goosebumps on her skin. His tumescent cock ached for release.

The hand returned, brushing the delicate hairs on her mound. The kisses became more passionate. When he finally touched her core, she was wet with desire.

Rydah moved over her. Jenya looked down at her lord's cock. He knew she didn't have a lot of experience with them, and appeared to be fascinated with it. Perhaps she wondered how they could start out so soft, yet grow so long and hard!

Rydah almost laughed as she stared at it. He watched her hand start to reach for it, then pull away. "Go on," he urged.

She looked up at him, then let her gaze return. She reached out and gently touched it with her fingertips. To Rydah, it was like the kiss of the *apalar*, a delicate insect with large wings that lived during the hot season.

"Put it in you," he breathed. Her touch made him want to spill his seed soon. It wouldn't do to waste it.

She looked startled for a moment, as if that was something that shouldn't be allowed. He just nodded. Then she smiled and grabbed his cock more firmly. She spread her legs wider and placed the tip against the entrance. For a *lapar*, she rubbed the tip between her labia, covering it with juices. She let it rise up to stroke her clit and soon found a rhythm there.

Rydah could tell she was pleasuring herself, something no slave would normally do. He watched, enthralled, trying to hold back his seed as Jenya began to rock her hips with the rhythm of her building orgasm. When he sensed she was about to achieve her

release, he pushed into her, letting the shaft of his hard cock press against her clit. He felt his seed erupt into her.

She gasped, grabbed him hard around his chest and exploded into a powerful release. "Oh Rand! Oh Rand! Oh Rand!" she shouted.

"Oh, my darling! You feel so good!" The words tore out of him. It was as if, for that moment, Jenya had become his equal.

## Chapter Sixteen

Symal's barred carriage carried her through the forbidding gates of Goren that afternoon. She gripped the bars with manacled hands and stared, mute, as tears flowed from her eyes. She doubted she'd ever see the Acolyte again and if she did, he would be repelled that she had been used so brutally. Would he take revenge on his father for her? She doubted it. He'd be angry, yes, but would soon learn to accept his princess. Before the *ryne* was out, she'd be a distant memory to him.

The carriage halted in front of the doors to the decrepit stone building that housed the slave pens. To Symal, it was a prison. Except what happened there would probably be worse.

Two guards stepped up and unlocked the rear door and motioned her out. She struggled out as best she could with her fetters, trying to cover her nakedness. They laughed at her. One reached in and stroked an exposed breast and laughed again when she tried to pull away. "Don't worry, little pet, soon you'll learn to love the touch of a mighty Warrior."

They hauled her inside. When the large wooden door closed behind her, it was as if her hope had been trapped on the other side.

Symal's feet barely touched the ground as they hurried her along the corridor, ignoring her whimpers. They came to a double-door and knocked.

"Enter," came a muffled voice and the guards took her inside.

Symal was dragged before a desk, where a troll-like man sat, dressed in dirty Damon robes. He looked more like a Laborer to her. His face seemed scrunched up as if he had been damaged at birth. His dark hair thinned at the top of his head, giving him a tangle of unruly locks.

"What have we here?" He asked the guards.

"Slave Symal, a gift from High Acolyte Kendam, Lord Dyman," intoned one of the guards, handing him a piece of parchment.



Dyman took it and read carefully, moving his lips. He looked up and smiled evilly at the trembling girl. "Well, it seems you've angered Kendam himself. Not wise, my child. Not wise at all."

"I didn't—"

"SHUT UP!" He thundered. "Slaves don't speak! At least, they learn not to if they want to avoid trouble. Do you want trouble?"

Symal miserably shook her head.

"Good! You can learn, then. Perhaps you'll make a good breeder after all."

"But I'm only seventeen!" she blurted, only to be silenced a moment later when Dyman slapped her hard across the face.

"You must be mistaking us for one of those other slave pens," he said. "We don't follow such rules here." He turned to the guards. "Take her away. There's a Warrior breeding coming up this very sun. Ten lashes should cure her of her insolence. Then put her among the breeders."

\* \* \* \* \*

Acolyte Lepdar paced the corridor outside Kendam's office, angry at being kept waiting. If he were Raparn the priest wouldn't keep him out here like a dog!

Finally, the door opened and the Acolyte was motioned inside by Mipola, one of Kendam's advisors.

"Well? Did you read it?" The Acolyte had no time for niceties.

Kendam stood, the old document in hand. "This is interesting, yes. But I'm not sure it applies here or if it's still in force. I'll have to ask High Lord Bandar about it."

"Not sure it applies!? It's a perfect match! And I'm assured it has not been repealed. I'm sure *my father* will approve," he said, stressing his lineage.

"Perhaps. But you must understand, these things have to be handled delicately. What if Syran doesn't agree? Or Princess Wenelle? We have to send messengers to Farzan—or better yet, diplomats, to make sure no one is offended." Even as he spoke,

Kendam knew that messengers were already on their way to assure the princess that the marriage would take place as planned.

"But Wenelle has a man she wants, just as I have a girl I want. This is a perfect solution! And it's written by High Priest Nidlet himself!"

"Yes, of course. And we'll pay close attention to it, never fear. I promise you, good sire, that we will send couriers to Farzan in the morrow," he lied. "Like I said, we must proceed cautiously."

"Fine. But in the meantime, I want to see Symal."

Kendam looked away, his lips pursed. "That's not possible right now, I'm afraid. She's being kept in a safe place until we can sort this all out."

"Where? Prison?"

"Oh, my no! She's being kept safe, you have my word," he smiled convincingly. "Your father felt it was best until we can figure out the proper course of action."

Lepdar couldn't stand to be in the same room with Kendam another moment. He felt he might explode and do something rash. "We'll see what my father has to say about this," he said, and stalked out.

\* \* \* \* \*

The high priest watched him go, then signaled the guard. "Did you deliver the slut?"

"Yes, my lord." The guard bowed.

"What did Dyman tell you about her fate?"

"That she was to be bred to a Warrior very soon."

Kendam smiled slowly, then closed his eyes, imagining the girl's terror. Soon she wouldn't be fit for an Acolyte or anyone else! When the Acolyte found out, he could just claim a miscommunication with the guards. Maybe one would have to be executed, just to be safe. Kendam opened his eyes and stared at the guard. *Perhaps this one.*

The Acolyte was the wild card. But how much protesting could he do? After all, she wouldn't be killed! Just slightly damaged. He laughed soundlessly. Let the Acolyte decide if he wanted his precious girl after she'd been with a Warrior!

Kendam held the paper to the candlelight and studied it, looking for a flaw in the argument. Finally, he shook his head, then held the dry parchment over the flame.

It burned quickly.

\* \* \* \* \*

High Priest Bandar scratched the dry pen on the parchment and winced. *Damn these quill pens!* He reinked it and started again, letting the pure thoughts of Rand flow through him and onto this paper.

A commotion outside broke his concentration. The door thunked open. His second son strode in, clearly angry, followed by a Cabal guard. The guard tried to apologize for the interruption, but Bandar waved him away.

"Father! You must tell me where Symal is! I have to see her! We've found a solution to our problem!" The Acolyte's words came out in a rush.

Bandar held up a reassuring hand. "Hold on, my young Acolyte." He spoke as if Lepdar was still a child. "Calm down. Now tell me why you felt it was necessary to interrupt my religious writings."

Bandar watched the flash of anger cross his son's face. "I must see Symal!" he cried out, his emotions bubbling over. "I'm worried about her! Where have you taken her?"

"I don't know. I let Kendam handle that. He thought it would be best if I stayed out of it."

"Stayed out of it! Why?"

"For appearance's sake. It wouldn't look right if the High Priest gave preferential treatment to a subject because she's involved with my son!"

"But where is she? I demand to see her! You must order Kendam to tell me where she is!"

"Why? We need time to sort this all out."

"I've found a solution already! My scribe uncovered a proclamation by High Priest Nidlet himself! It says the princess and I can be married in name only, and live separate lives!"

"What? What? I know nothing of this."

"It's old, father. More than seventy *rynes*!" Quickly, he explained it as best he could.

Bandar stared at the wall, considering what his son had told him. He recalled Raparn's similar protests about love versus duty before he married Princess Tymir. There had been nothing anyone could do—they had to make peace with the princess's father. Raparn had reluctantly agreed, but in the *rynes* since, he'd never completely forgiven his father.

Now Bandar had a chance to make it right with Lepdar. But what would Raparn say? He'd be angry he didn't have this opportunity. Would he claim it now? Would that ruin the pact? Still, Lepdar wasn't the heir. Perhaps it was not as critical he be married in the same way his brother had been.

Bandar shook his head. "I don't know, my son. I'd have to see this document and have my counsel study it."

Lepdar nodded eagerly. "I left it with Kendam. Come, father, I'll show it to you now!"

Bandar had to admit he was curious. He glanced back at his half-completed document. The glow of Rand had faded for the moment.

"Very well, Lepdar." He rose. "Let's see what your scribe has uncovered."

## Chapter Seventeen

Symal hung from the post, her hands tied above her, and tried to squirm away from the blows. The guard, a middle-aged warrior with a nasty battle scar on his cheek that ran through one eye, reared back and struck her again with the whip, causing her to cry out and writhe in pain.

"Please," she begged. "Please stop!"

The guard ignored her. He had been ordered to give this girl ten lashes and ten it was going to be. Personally, he thought she was getting off easy. He'd given recalcitrant breeders up to twenty-five lashes at a time. He struck her again, counting to himself: *That's seven...*

The guard heard the door open and turned, startled to see Dyson walk in. "My lord," he bowed slightly, then turned back to his task.

"Wait."

The word stopped the guard in his tracks. The slave pen owner approached the girl, eyeing her carefully.

Dyson, though he tried not to show it to the one-eyed guard, was worried. This girl had been placed in his care by High Priest Kendam himself. Kendam had ordered him to "soften up" the slut, then send her into the breeding chambers with the other Warrior slaves.

Now, seeing her sagging from her chains, her back marked with oozing red welts, Dyson thought this might have gone too far. Rarely was a breeder beaten, then sent immediately to the chambers. They usually need a sun or two to recover. Having this whore on her back while a foul-smelling Warrior rutted with her would be sufficient punishment for whatever she'd done to offend Kendam—it wouldn't do to have her faint from the pain of her wounds in the midst of the activity.

"That's enough. This girl is too soft," he said by way of explanation to the guard. "She's never felt the kiss of the lash before this sun. I fear if you give her the full measure, she might be too damaged to enjoy the breeding experience."

The guard shrugged and turned away. He did not appear to care one way or another.

Symal, only semi-conscious, felt enormous relief at this news. She almost wanted to thank this evil man for sparing her. Almost. Deeper in her mind, she wanted revenge. She wanted Lepdar to ride to her rescue and drive his sword into this fat bastard's stomach.

But where was her Acolyte? Had he abandoned her?

"Get her ready for the chambers," Dyson barked.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kendam wasn't worried when he saw the Acolyte and his father enter. Bandar had made his feelings clear on the issue and had left the details to him. Now they just had to assuage Lepdar, convince him to do what had to be done for the good of the priesthood. Lepdar would have to learn that lesson, sooner or later.

"Ah, my priest," he greeted his leader as one would an old friend. "I see you met with Acolyte Lepdar. I trust you were able to convince him of the wisdom of your decisions."

Bandar looked uncomfortable. "Um, yes, Priest Kendam, my son is aware of his duty. However, this ancient document he claims to have seen causes me some concern. Lepdar said it was scrolled by High Priest Nidlet himself! I thought I'd better have a look. As you know, I'm a student of his works."

Kendam blanched for a moment, then recovered. "Unfortunately, it was a forgery, my priest. It didn't seem like Nidlet's writing style at all. Nor do I believe that he would ever pen such a blasphemy."

He turned to the angry Acolyte. "Forgive me, my young priest. I didn't want to tell you until you talked to your father."

"No!" Lepdar said. "My scribe—the scribe—said it was real. He said he got it from High Priest Bandar himself!"

"And he didn't return it?" Kendam jumped on the attack. "That violates so many church edicts, I can't begin to tell you how much trouble this scribe is in. Who is he?"

Lepdar paled. "Um, he's, er..." He knew he was trapped. If the document *was* a forgery, or if Rydah was found guilty of hoarding church relics, the Acolyte had to distance himself from the scribe. "Lord Rydah," he blurted.

"Yes, I believe he's one of mine," Bandar admitted. "Third-tier, isn't he? Son of that ne'er-do-well, Fyrad."

"Ahh," said Kendam, smiling, as if that explained everything.

"Enough!" Lepdar shouted. He put his hand on his sword. "I demand to know where Symal is being held. I will take personal charge of her while we sort out the authenticity of this document."

Kendam looked at Bandar and raised an eyebrow as if to say, *You can't control your children?*

Bandar cleared his throat. "I'm familiar with Nidlet's writing. Let me see the document and we might be able to resolve this at once."

Kendam paled as his mind searched about for an answer. Finding no lie that would suffice, he was forced to tell his version of the truth. "My priest, having determined the document was blasphemous, I destroyed it."

"WHAT!?" Lepdar pulled his sword and placed the tip against Kendam's neck. "I'll kill you for this!"

Kendam's guards stepped forward, not sure what to do. Both hands reached for the hilts of their swords.

"YOU'LL DO NO SUCH THING!" Bandar roared, stepping in and grabbing his son's arm. "Put down your sword at once or I'll have the guards disarm you!"

Lepdar wouldn't budge. His eyes bored into Kendam's. "Go ahead, father. By the time they pull me off, Kendam's head will be off his shoulders—unless he tells me where she is!"

Kendam, quite at ease with political intrigue and double-dealing, was completely unfamiliar with sudden violence. "Goren," he squeaked, his round eyes focused on the tip of the sword. "She's at Goren."

With a move too quick to register, Lepdar stepped in close, placing his forearm hard against Kendam's throat, cutting off his oxygen. "You sent her to a slave pen?" He said with quiet incredulity.

Kendam's eyes cast wildly about for rescue. No one moved.

Lepdar's voiced deepened with menace. "Hear this, my priest: If she tells me she's been mistreated in any way, I'll be back for your head." He pushed himself away, leaving Kendam sucking air.

"Lepdar!" Bandar shouted, to no avail. The Acolyte had already swept out of the room.



## Chapter Eighteen

Symal, chained to the floor by her neck, jerked her head hard, hoping to find a weak link she might break. She had maybe a *capek*'s clearance, but it wasn't enough to allow her to move off the thin pad that protected her aching back from the cold stone floor. All she could do was pull helplessly on the chain and hope for a miracle.

She looked around desperately. There were just six other women in the room with her. None seemed as frantic as she did. Most lounged on their pads, talking to their nearest neighbor or lay back, thighs falling obscenely open, and simply waited.

Symal believed most were long-time breeders, as they had lost their shapes. Each of them outweighed her by dozens of *gabons*. Their breasts sagged like eggplants on their wide chests. Their tangled, greasy hair did not appear to have been washed in suns.

Her heart pounded in her chest. She'd heard about Warriors and what they did to women, whether in a conquered city or in the breeding chambers. They were ruthless, brutal and ignorant. A woman like herself would appear to be a rare flower to be trampled underfoot. They might kill her while trying to breed with her.

Her back throbbed, but it seemed the least of her worries now. The doctor had put a salve on the wounds, easing the sting somewhat. Lying down didn't help though. Having a giant rut with her would double the pain.

She heard a noise and startled. Symal squeezed her legs together, even as she knew it would not stop a Warrior.

The door! She could hear a key turning the lock. Her eyes were riveted on the coarse wood. The door swung inward and six Warriors streamed in.

All eyes swiveled to and fro, as if selecting the right mate. Immediately, their level gazes stopped when they spotted Symal, as if someone had grabbed each head and gripped it.

The Warriors made a mad scramble toward her. She screamed and tried to roll into a ball. She felt hands on her, pawing, feet thumping down beside her.

There came the sound of grunting, fists hitting flesh. She looked up through her fingers to see all six men fighting over her. This was not a polite jostling for the right breeder, no – this was a full-fledged battle for the rights to the tender maiden.

The fact that the Warriors were naked except for loincloths did not deter them in the least. It was hand-to-hand combat. Fingers gouged eyes, teeth clamped down on arms, elbows swung at heads. Several times, Symal felt a heavy foot stomp on her arm or leg as she writhed, trying to escape the melee.

A thud caused her to whip her head around to see a wounded Warrior, his face a bloody mask, crash to the floor then roll away. Another man went down, then a third.

As they crawled away, they didn't even try to mate with the other women. They simply sat in a circle around the remaining fighters, as if waiting for an opening so they could rejoin the battle.

The rejected women stared, mouths agape. They'd never seen Warriors act this way before.

A fourth man screamed and fell down, narrowly missing landing on Symal's legs. She pulled herself into a tighter ball and knew her time was approaching.

The two largest, toughest, meanest Warriors were clenched, jockeying for position, each trying to convince the other to quit. There wasn't much quit in them. Both had survived many battles and had the scars to prove it.

One Warrior with a nasty scar on his forehead was younger than the other, and that, finally, made all the difference. He pushed and pulled the older man until Symal could tell he was exhausted, then quickly kicked his legs out from under him. When the older Warrior crashed to the floor, he did not get up to challenge Scarface again.

Scarface stopped for a moment to stare at the other men in a circle around him, as if to dare them to try again. After a long *lapar*, the Warriors stood and moved to the other breeders. No one fought over any of them.

Grinning, the young Warrior approached his prize. He ripped off his loincloth, exposing his cock. Symal watched in disbelief as it grew in girth and length. She

glanced up at his face, silently pleading with him. She knew immediately there would be no mercy.

Scarface climbed over her. Symal kept her legs pinned tightly together, sobs wracking her body. With barely an effort, the giant yanked her legs apart, exposing her virgin pussy to his onslaught. She screamed and the Warrior simply backhanded her, splitting her lip and stunning her to silence.

He crawled up between her legs and aimed his hard cock at her entrance. Symal, afraid to speak, could only shake her head as he pressed the tip to her opening. She bit her lip, hard, and begged Rand to save her.

The door crashed open. Dyson stumbled in, pushed from behind by Acolyte Lepdar.

"STOP!" He shouted, seeing Symal cowering under the rock-hard body of the Warrior.

Scarface paid no attention at first. He pushed harder, and Symal felt the tip slip past her labia. The girl opened her mouth wide and started to inhale, ready to scream anew, when —

The Acolyte placed the tip of a very sharp sword against the Warrior's neck. "If that cock enters her, my sword will enter you," he said in an icy voice.

Scarface's cock deflated immediately. Breeding with this defenseless girl suddenly lost its appeal. He craned his head around and appeared startled to see Acolyte Lepdar himself standing over him.

The Warrior climbed off the girl and knelt to the side, his left foot flat on the floor, his left arm resting on the knee, his head bent as he had been taught.

"My Acolyte," he said, confused. "I did not know it was you." Emotions played over his features. He appeared confused at the sudden turn of events.

"Unfasten her," Lepdar barked to Dyson. The owner, clearly terrified, rushed to obey. "Give me your cloak." Dyson hesitated only a moment before stripping it off and holding it out.

The Acolyte reached down to help Symal up and caught sight of the whip marks on her naked back.

His head swiveled around like a snake's. "Who is responsible for this?" he said, turning Symal so Dyson could see her back for himself.

"Um, my Acolyte, I, er, was acting on orders," he whispered, ashen-faced. The cloak slipped from his trembling fingers and fell at their feet.

"Whose orders?"

"Uh, er," Dyson looked around wildly. He didn't know whom he was more afraid of, the Acolyte or Kendam. He decided the Acolyte was the more immediate threat. "It was High Priest Kendam himself, sire."

With a sudden roar, the Acolyte exploded, swinging his sword in an arc, severing Dyson's head from his neck. The head rolled backwards between his shoulder blades, bounced off his ass and thumped to the floor. His body lost coordination and slumped down to the stone paving stones, spurting blood from the neck wound.

The Warrior didn't move from his subordinate position, though he had been splashed with blood. His stillness indicated that he expected to be the next to fall.

Lepdar reached down and picked up the discarded cloak. He placed it carefully around Symal's shoulders. "Did this man succeed in breeding with you?" His eyes, full of death, bored a hole into Scarface.

The Warrior kept his eyes fixed on the floor.

Symal hesitated, then spoke in a halting voice. "No, my Acolyte. He did not."

Nodding, Lepdar put his arm around Symal and led her out. Scarface let his breath out in a slow release of tension.

Two guards, standing at the door, snapped to attention.

Lepdar noticed the insignia on one guard's shoulders. "You're the captain of the guard?"

"Y-yes, my Acolyte," he stuttered. "On this shift."

"You are now acting administrator. Clean up this mess and maintain order."

"Yes, sire." The guard nodded.

The Acolyte brushed past him, guiding a shaken Symal down the corridor.

## Chapter Nineteen

Lord Rydah was sitting with Jenya in a cool, open-air patio having a cup of *renda* when two guardsmen spotted them.

"We've been looking for you." The captain of the guard said curtly.

"Oh, really? How may I be of service?" He looked up, smiling. His smile faded when he saw the stern expressions on the guards' faces.

"I have orders to place you under arrest, Lord Rydah. Please come with me."

Rydah was thunderstruck. "Arrest?! On what charges?"

Had the scribe determined his passes were forgeries?

"That has yet to be determined," the captain responded. "I was only told to bring you before High Priest Kendam."

"What? What nonsense is this?"

Jenya's head jerked from her master's face to the captain's, not understanding what was happening. They had been so happy, just moments ago!

"High Priest Kendam will explain." The captain hauled Rydah to his feet and pushed him toward the door.

"What about my breeder? Who will watch her?"

"She will be well taken care of, for the time being," the guard said. Turning to Jenya, he told her she should remain in their quarters until further notice.

Jenya wanted to protest, to stay with Rydah, but she knew it was hopeless. Quaking, she headed down the corridor toward their rooms.

\* \* \* \* \*

Rydah was escorted to a large chamber, where Kendam and Bandar sat on a high dais. They looked down sternly as Rydah approached. It succeeded in intimidating the third-tier Damon.

"My priests—" he began, but was cut off with a wave of Kendam's hand.

"You have been charged with one of two serious offenses," Kendam said. "Both are blasphemies. We must decide which one is true."

Ryдах shook his head — what madness was this? "I don't understand —"

"Silence!" He bellowed. He leaned forward. "Is it not true that you brought to the Acolyte a document claiming to be written by High Priest Nidlet himself?"

"Yes, I was asked —"

"Stop! You will have an opportunity to explain later. What we're trying to determine is whether you are to be charged with forgery of a church document in order to give Acolyte Lepdar false hope, or theft of an original document from the church's own vaults."

Bandar leaned in close to Kendam and whispered. "I thought you had already determined it was a forgery?"

"I did, my priest. I am merely trying to discover if Ryдах will admit to one of the blasphemies."

Bandar nodded, but remained puzzled. Still, he was happy to let Kendam discipline this hapless fool before him.

Lord Ryдах stood there, mute.

"Well?" Kendam demanded. "Which is it — theft or forgery?"

"Neither charge is true."

Kendam rocked back in his chair. He had an urge to order the guard to whip this man where he stood. The impudent wretch! "You question the wisdom of the high court?" His voice dripped with malice.

"I can prove my innocence, my priests," he said, looking at Bandar, not Kendam. "With High Priest Bandar's approval and expertise."

Bandar was taken aback. "What? My expertise? How can that possibly help you?"

"Because my priest, I have been your scribe for eight *rynes*. In that time, I've learned that you are quite a scholar of High Priest Nidlet. I ask that the High Priest examine the document and determine for yourself if those are Nidlet's own words."

"That won't be possible at this time," Kendam jumped in smoothly. "You can save this court a lot of time by just confessing to one of the two charges against you."

"My priest, in all good conscience, I cannot lie before such an august tribunal. That in itself would be a blasphemy."

"Perhaps a taste of the lash would free your tongue!" Kendam barked.

"I don't understand, High Priest Bandar." Rydah turned partially away from the underling priest, knowing it would irritate him. "Why can't you be allowed to examine this document?"

"Because it's been destroyed!" Kendam blurted.

Rydah swayed in his stance, stunned. "You destroyed a church document?"

"It was a forgery!"

"How can you be sure?"

"Because if it had been authentic, I would not have destroyed it," Kendam crowed gleefully.

The room grew quiet.

Bandar turned toward his second-in-command. "Then there really is only one charge before this scribe, is there not?"

Kendam narrowed his eyes.

To Rydah, it was obvious the priest's ploy had failed.

"Very well," Kendam continued. "You are charged with forging a church document. You have Acolyte Lepdar in an uproar over his slut, er, his concubine. You gave him false hope. I'm sure there are some related charges in that regard we can come up with, perhaps lying to a member of the Cabal."

"I did not lie, my priest," Rydah said with more calm than he felt.

"I had the offending document in my very hand!" he thundered.

Rydah shrugged. "I can clear this up if the good priests will accompany me to the holy vault."

"You don't tell us —"



But Bandar already had placed his arm on his subordinate's arm. "Wait. I want to get to the bottom of this just as much as you do. Pray tell, Lord Rydah, why should we do this?"

"Begging your priest's forgiveness, I'd rather show you than tell you, if I may." He hoped to Rand that he could find what he needed.

"You may not—" Kendam sputtered.

"Very well," Bandar interrupted. "We will accompany you. But I warn you, scribe, this had better be good or your tenure as my employee will end at the blade of a sword."

Bandar rose and headed out of the room. The guards flanked Rydah as he followed. Fuming, Kendam jumped up and trailed behind.

\* \* \* \* \*

The holy vault filled a large arched room in the basement that extended into the first floor. It could be accessed from either level. Murals graced the high walls, depicting famous events in Damon history. The vault contained the writings of every High Priest for the last two hundred *rynes*. Monks worked fulltime to keep it organized, by priest, by date and by subject.

Bandar led the group into the first floor access, then turned to Rydah. "Upstairs or down?"

"Up. May I, my priest?"

Kendam looked stricken. "Surely, sire, you're not going to let this *criminal* root through our precious files."

Bandar halted for only a moment before nodding. He signaled a guard to accompany the scribe. Rydah walked around the catwalk, looking at the files with his head turned sideways until he came to the section he sought. His hands shook as he began pulling out some documents. For several long *lapars*, he looked at papers, careful to put back the ones he didn't need. His heart pounded. He knew Kendam would not give him much time.

*Just a few more lapars! It's got to be here!*

"Enough of this charade! He's stalling!" Kendam's voice startled Rydah. He turned, seeing the mottled face of the priest. Kendam seemed ready to throw Rydah off the catwalk himself.

Rydah noticed the dour expression of Bandar and knew time was running out. He felt the sweat form in his armpits as he worked quickly through Nidlet's writings. His greatest fear was that the document he sought would be misfiled, only to be discovered after his execution.

Bandar's voice cut the tension. "I'm afraid Priest Kendam is right, Rydah. We can't—"

Rydah's eyes raced over the rare documents, trying to focus. Suddenly, familiar writing jumped into his field of vision. "I found it!" He held up an old, brittle parchment, then handed it carefully to Bandar. The High Priest began to read.

Suddenly, Kendam looked nervous.

"It appears Rydah was telling the truth," Bandar said finally. "This lays out precisely what he had been saying all along—that a sham marriage was permitted more than seventy *rynes* ago to solve a political problem between priestdoms, just like we have presently. High Priest Nidlet himself drew up the ruling." He held it out to Kendam.

As Kendam reached for it, Bandar pulled it up for a moment. "Please don't burn this one." He smiled thinly.

Kendam took it, his hands shaking, and scanned the ancient writing. "But-but, this just proves what I was saying all along! That the scribe forged a church document."

"Not forged, copied," Rydah replied. "I needed a copy in order to complete my work for High Priest Bandar. What you burned was merely the scribblings of a lowly scribe."

"I agree," Bandar said. "What's more important is that we have proof that the scribe speaks the truth. If we can get Princess Wenelle to agree, I believe we can let my son marry whomever he wishes."

Kendam visibly paled. His eyes darted around nervously.

"Um. Has Lepdar returned yet from Goren?" Kendam asked.

"I haven't seen him. But he should be here shortly. I trust Symal was well taken care of?" Bandar looked pointedly at Kendam.

"B-but of course, my priest," he said, though his eyes gave him away. Rydah hoped Symal was all right.

Bandar took possession of the sacred document as everyone turned and filed out of the vault and into the corridor. Kendam, who had been the last into the vault, now led the way. They had walked just a few paces along the stone floor when they heard the approach of a small group of men.

Kendam visibly quailed when he saw who it was: Acolyte Lepdar, walking with two guardsmen. The Acolyte's face was a bleak mask. Kendam cast about for an escape.

Bandar called out to his son. "Lepdar! Did you find Symal?"

"Yes, my father. She is resting." His eyes never left Kendam, who faltered now and backed against the wall of the corridor.

With a swift movement, Lepdar strode forward and placed himself squarely in front of the cowering priest. "Father," he said evenly, his hand on the hilt of his sword. "Is your third-in-command available?"

"What? Why, yes, High Priest Tulan is nearby. Why? What happened?"

Lepdar slid the sword from its sheath and placed the point against Kendam's throat. "Because he's about to get a promotion."

"Wait! Wait! What is the meaning of this?"

"Your second here ordered Symal to be whipped, then bred to a Warrior."

Rydah's fears for his niece had been justified. His heart sank.

Bandar's head swiveled around to lock on Kendam. "Is this true?"

"Sire! You must understand! Lepdar had to marry Wenelle for the good of the priesthood! There was no other way. I mean, at that time, we knew of no other way."

"So you decided if Symal was sullied, my son would agree to marry Wenelle and live happily and well? Was that your brilliant plan?" He turned to Lepdar. "How is she?"

"She is being treated for her whip marks. Fortunately, I got there just in time, before she could be bred."

"Thank Rand for that!"

Rydah breathed easier. He couldn't imagine telling his brother that Symal been raped. Being whipped was bad enough.

Kendam looked relieved as well. "Yes, that's good news, my Acolyte. Now if you'll just—"

The sword didn't budge. If anything, it pressed harder into his throat. "I haven't decided if I'm just going to kill you now, or have you whipped first," Lepdar said.

Kendam's eyes beseeched Bandar. "My priest! You can't allow this! I was trying to solve a difficult problem in the best way I knew how!"

"He has a point, my son," Bandar said. "Had Rydah not found this document, you would have been forced to marry Wenelle, just like your brother married Princess Tymir. The priesthood demanded it."

Lepdar's eyes narrowed.

The priest was clearly terrified. A small stain appeared on the lower front of Kendam's robe, followed by an acrid whiff of urine.

Rydah almost smiled at the thought that of Kendam so terrified. He should be scared. He set up Symal to be beaten and raped.

"Father," Lepdar said evenly. "Will you arrest me if I kill this man?"

Bandar didn't want to make that decision. "Wait, my son." His eyebrows knitted together as he decided the priest's fate. "Kendam, how would you feel about a transfer?"

The priest's eyes shifted in his head toward Bandar, his neck still pinned by the sword. "Transfer?" he squeaked.

"Yes, I'm thinking, for health reasons, you might prefer a warmer climate? Yes?"

Kendam tried to nod. "Oh, yes, sire. Yes, I think I'm ready for a change."

"Good. There's an opening for a priest at Hobsdor." Kendam's eyes widened. Hobsdor, adjacent to the mines of Durok, was rife with thieves, bandits and corrupt officials. "It seems the last member of the Cabal that I sent ran off after losing most of the fingers of one hand in an unfortunate altercation with a miner."

Kendam's eyes watered. "Nooo! My Priest!"

Lepdar leaned in. "If you stay another *lapar*, I will take your head."

He stepped back, releasing the quaking priest. Kendam scurried off down the corridor.

## Chapter Twenty

That night High Priest Bandar hosted a triumphant celebratory meal with the Acolyte. Lepdar insisted that Lord Rydah sit with him “as befits my new scribe,” he had said. Rydah was honored, but he worried about Jenya. Slaves, of course, did not eat with Acolytes and priests, yet Rydah knew he would not be there if it weren’t for her.

Explaining that to the Acolyte would be awkward, so Rydah had to be satisfied to hear that she would be well-fed and protected in the kitchen with the other slaves. Still, he missed her. He’d only been with her a short time, and already he felt incomplete without her.

Symal sat next to the Acolyte, although she did not feel like eating. Her back still ached and she just wanted to go to bed. She agreed to attend to please Lepdar, and to show Bandar she meant to marry his son. She guessed that Kendam had not acted totally alone in sending her to Goren. Perhaps Bandar had not specifically ordered it, but he had to know she wasn’t being well treated. She wasn’t sure she could ever forgive him for that.

Acolyte Raparn had joined them with his princess. It was the first time Rydah had seen the heir to the throne close-up. Though just twenty-six, he already was growing into the role of High Priest. He looked a lot like his father, although his hair was dark and full while Bandar’s had thinned.

Rydah wondered what kind of leader he’d be, and whether he’d hire a henchman like Kendam to do his dirty work. He realized with his new access to the inner workings of government, he might make a difference. A small difference, to be sure, but his voice could be heard.

As he glanced over at Acolyte Lepdar, the image of the Harpton’s burned-out farm came to mind. Would there be other Harptons under Raparn’s leadership? For that matter, would Bandar employ another man like Kendam to keep the population cowed?

Later, when he felt comfortable in his new role, he might share the story of the Harptons with Lepdar. He wondered if the Acolyte would be as shocked as he had

been. He thought of Jenya, and how her encouragement caused him to look at the positive results, rather than dwell on the worst that could happen. Right then, he decided to be a voice of fairness and compassion in this administration, no matter how it was received.

It was after eleven when Rydah managed to slip away from the festivities. He was tired, yes, but he really wanted to check on Jenya. He missed her more than he thought possible for a master to miss a slave.

\* \* \* \* \*

When he entered the kitchen, she was helping the staff clean up the dishes. The other slaves spotted him first and stopped working, waiting for him to speak. Some dropped to one knee, heads bowed.

Jenya looked up, startled. When she caught sight of her lord, she smiled first, then dropped to her knees. That touched Rydah. He could tell in that first moment that she was genuinely glad to see him. He would have preferred that she not be so subservient, yet he knew that it was expected in public. More than anything, he wanted her to run into his arms.

He approached her and helped her back to her feet. "Jenya," he said, clearly aware of the many ears in the silent room. "It's time for you to do your duty."

He saw the corners of her mouth twitch as she fought a smile. "Yes, master," she said, her voice low.

The other slaves remained mute, though they watched intently as the lord escorted his naked slave from the room. Even before the door closed, Rydah could hear the murmur of respectful voices behind them.

"I've missed you," he whispered as they walked down the corridor.

"I missed you too, m'lord. Was the party pleasant?"

"Yes, but I wished you could have been there too."

"Oh, my! That would have been a scandal!" She laughed.

He laughed along with her. He could picture the expression on the High Priest's face if a naked slave had sat down to eat with them!

In their quarters, Lord Rydah and his breeder slipped quietly to bed. "We have much breeding to catch up on," he said slyly.

She looked down, trying to hide her pleasure. Breeding was a duty, after all. Still, she could sense their relationship changing, growing.

Rydah reached out and touched her jaw. She allowed her head to be brought up until her eyes met his. "Have I told you how pleased I am by your help in this matter?"

"Oh, I did nothing, master. You —"

"No. From the start, I didn't want to get involved. I wanted to hide from my responsibilities, let my brother fend for himself. You encouraged me to try. Now look at what we've accomplished in just a few short suns: I've saved Symal, I've become reacquainted with my brother, and I've been named scribe to Acolyte Lepdar."

Jenya felt tears coming to her eyes, tears of joy at having found this wonderful man. "I-I..." Words seemed inadequate now.

"It's all right, my slave. Thanks to you, we'll be moving into a larger home on the palace grounds. We can even afford a servant to help us."

He must've caught the look in her eyes, for he said, "No, not another breeder, silly. A servant. A Laborer."

"You are going to be my only breeder, Jenya. Now I understand why my father never married a Noblewoman. He found the right woman—the woman he loved—and never wanted any other. He didn't care that she was merely a breeder. And I don't care that you are, either."

He reached down and unhooked her chain. It slipped to the floor in a clinking heap. "From now on, you will sleep with me, in my bed. You will never be chained. You may wear clothes. I will treat you as a trusted advisor, not a slave."

Tears flowed freely down Jenya's cheeks as she listened to her lord. She remembered seeing him for the first time in the pens, during Inspection, and wondering if he would be a good master. Now she knew.



Rydah leaned down then, his fingers still lightly on her jaw. His lips parted and he kissed her, gently. She responded, feeling the heat flow through her. The kiss lasted a long time. Until Jenya was breathless with desire.

Finally, he pulled away. "Now, let's get into *our* bed, shall we?"

She nodded dreamily and climbed in.

"Oh, one more thing." She looked up, expectantly. "During the evening, when we're alone, I want to remove this." He took a small key and unlocked her slave collar. The skin underneath shone pink in contrast to her tanned neck.

"You can wear the collar outside—I know you don't feel right without it—but here, in our chambers, I'd like to have you without any slave adornments."

He climbed in after her and took her into his arms. He liked the way she fit against his body, the heat of her skin, the scent of her sex.

Jenya let herself become swept up in the moment. Her lord had given her a tremendous gift! She was nearly a Free woman. She hugged him closely, feeling tears of joy flood her eyes. She was a lucky slave, she knew for certain now.

She also felt his cock harden against her leg.

Rydah did not enter her right away, as she expected. Instead, they kissed and held each other for a long time. He stroked her breasts, then kissed her nipples, causing a shudder to rip through her. She had never felt like this during her training at the pens.

He moved up over her. She watched, wide-eyed, as he propped himself up on his arms and guided his cock to her pussy. She opened for him, ready—more than ready. She wanted this man. She wanted to have his child. A Damon child. Perhaps more than one.

He plunged into her. She gasped as her first small orgasm rocked her. Rydah began stroking, each time the shaft of his cock rubbed against her clit, she caught a wave of pleasure, each one building on the last. Her tiny bell rang, as if announcing her approaching climax.

"My Rand," she breathed. "Oh, my Rand."

Rydah's face glowed as he neared his release. He felt his testicles contract, then he exploded deep within her. Jenya shook with the force of his release, her own orgasm causing her to swoon.

In that moment, she knew a seed had been planted within her. She hoped it would be the first of many. She hugged him closely, shaking with joy and lust and love.

## Postlude

*Houston, Texas, September 2035*

"My god, that's a terrific story. If you don't write that down, I'm...I'm..."

"What? Never going to fuck me again?" Jack's voice was a little hoarse after his tale.

"Well, no. In fact, if you don't fuck me in the next ten minutes, I'm going to walk out of here naked and find a man who will."

"Pretty brave talk. Maybe I'd like to see that."

"Oh you would, would you?" Joyce didn't think she could be more turned on, but here he was, pushing her buttons again.

"Maybe not the part about you fucking another guy —"

"That's good to hear."

"—but the part about you walking down the street naked raises an exciting visual. Maybe if you had a collar with a chain attached, it'd even be better."

"You'd like that, wouldn't you? Your very own slave girl."

"Well, you are naked, sitting in my lap, leaking all over my pants. That's a start down the road to slave girl, don't you think?"

"I'll admit that I'd like to be Jenya right about now. I imagine her exploring the castle, having other slaves defer to her, then coming back to jump Rydah's bones with pent-up lust."

Jack touched her breast. "Speaking of pent-up lust..."

"I thought you'd never ask," she said, getting up. Her legs shook.

"Oh no!" Jack said.

"What?"

"My legs! They fell asleep! I can't get up! They're all tingly."

Joyce knelt down and unzipped his pants. "You need a distraction. Something to take your mind off of your legs." His hard cock sprung free.

"You'd make a good slave—you know to anticipate your master's needs."

In response, she took the head of his cock into her lipsticked mouth. As she licked him, she could imagine his cock thrusting into her, tickling her clit. If she had a tiny bell, like Jenya, it would be ringing like crazy. The thought drove her to press her mouth deeper around his cock, letting it reach her throat.

Jack groaned and sat back. "I've forgotten about my legs," he said.

Joyce moved up and down on his shaft. She wondered if she let him come now, whether he would have enough stamina to fuck her brains out later? There was no way she was going to let him fall asleep on her tonight!

She pulled back, giving his cockhead one last lick.

"Hey!" Jack sat up. "Why'dja stop?"

"You're not getting off that easy! I'm so horny I could fuck a Warrior! I'm counting on at least two orgasms tonight!"

"Oh, really?" Jack smiled. "Pretty brave talk for a slave girl."

She reached out and grabbed his hand. "Come on, we'll see who's master tonight!"

They stumbled into the bedroom, Jack trying to remove his clothes as they walked. Naked, they fell into bed. He touched her between her legs. "My goodness! How wet you are!"

"It's all your fault! That story made me so hot!"

"So glad I could help."

"You can help me again, right now!"

They rolled together. He ran his finger along her sopping wet slit and that was all it took. Joyce came immediately, all the dammed-up emotions bursting forth, her mind filled with slave girls, brutish Warriors, whippings and a handsome, caring Lord Rydah.

"OH MY GOD!" she shouted, startling Jack. "Oh, oh!"

He grinned. "You were really on edge, weren't you?"

She came down slowly, basking in the orgasm. "Yeah. That story. Being naked." Her voice came in gasps. "Now I'm ready for the real thing." She pulled him on top of her.

He dipped his fingers into her pussy and brought them to his lips. "Hmm," he said. "Tastes sweet."

"Fuck me, master," she whispered. She felt the head of his cock part her lips. She raised her hips to greet him. When he plunged in suddenly, he set off klaxons in her head. She came again, gripping him tightly to her.

"Oh, Jesus, Jesus!" she croaked, feeling the delicious spasms rock her. She had never been so quick to climax before. And she realized, Jack hadn't come yet. She opened her legs wider as he began to move over her. She relished the sensation. Another orgasm awaited her, she only had to hold on.

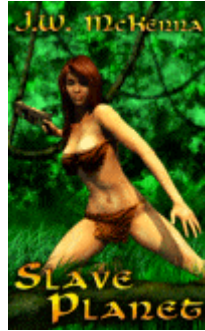
Jack thrust hard, imaging himself a Lord, breeding a slave. He wondered what it would be like on their world, living like that. He would love to travel there, to live as they did, just for a year or so. It sounded like a man's paradise.

He pretended he was Lord Rydah, and Joyce was Jenya. She lay under him, waiting for his seed, anticipating the moment. He realized suddenly that he was not wearing a condom and in the next moment, he didn't care. It was right that they were breeding like the Avalonians. Joyce should have his child. A wise and talented child. Maybe a future ruler.

With a bellow, Jack came hard within her. Joyce squeezed him close, feeling his sperm flood her womb. Tears ran from her eyes as another orgasm swept through her. She hoped she was pregnant. She wanted this man's child. This good man. Her man.

**The End**

## Also by JW McKenna



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